

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

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 One of Three



THE BATTERED SILICON DISPATCH BOX
2000

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Volume 1 (1925-1930)

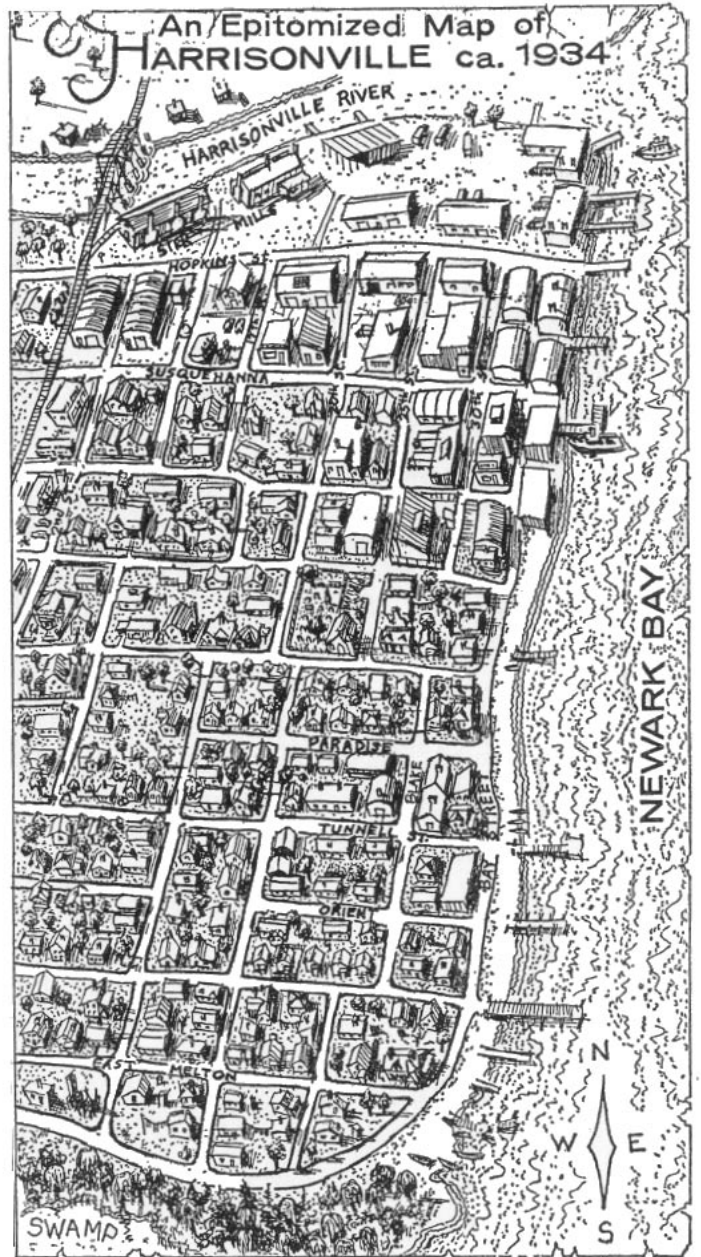
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HARRISONVILLE, New Jersey, ca. 1934

Seabury Quinn

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

I first knew Seabury Quinn by his stories, back in the mid-1920's when I was in college. Farnsworth Wright, editing *Weird Tales*, was notably careful about what he bought and printed; but almost every issue gave us another adventure of Jules de Grandin, spruce and assured and the right man in the right place. His duty was trailing and neutralizing the darkest night side of evil, in the dubious New Jersey town of Harrisonville. Quinn's de Grandin stories were solidly in *Weird Tales*, side by side with the works of H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, August Derleth, Frank Belknap Long and others of the circle I wanted to join.

By 1928, when I was working on a Kansas newspaper and selling a very few stories, Quinn was notable enough by name to have an impersonator. This was a plump, plausible haunter of drug stores and dog races, who once exhibited a fat check and said it was pay for a story. When I tried to ask about Jules de Grandin, he mumbled and flushed and changed the subject. At last he left town. He wasn't Quinn, of course, nor did he deserve to be.

Depressioned out of my job, I managed to write my way to New York. There I met Quinn at a party, along with Otis Adelbert Kline, John Campbell, Sprague de Camp, Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson. He and I sat down to drink and talk together. He burned with what he had begun to hope would be his finest single story, an offbeat but honest confession of faith. He had just left his desk where he had been at work on *Roads*, one of the great Christmas legends of all time; about a Teutonic centurion of a Roman legion who witnessed both the Nativity and Crucifixion, who spoke with devils and angels, who at last ventured away and away into unknown possibilities until he became Santa Claus forever. Quinn had dived fathoms deep into source materials on Roman times, Bible times, barbarian times, the geography of the Holy Land and the North Pole. He scolded himself about his story, certain it would be a good one but determined to make it a great one. More or less, eventually he succeeded.

That was the beginning of our close friendship that lasted until his death, which everyone thought came too soon.

Phil Stong, in an editorial note to his anthology *The Other Worlds*, complained that Seabury Quinn was "the worst fictional opportunist in the business," but confessed that he could not afford to leave out the "best known supernatural

detective in weird fiction." After all, said Stong, Sherlock Holmes was "quite as incredible as Jules de Grandin." If this was to suggest that de Grandin was a sort of Sherlock Holmes, that isn't quite right. He had the wrong physique, the wrong accent, the wrong bearing for that. He was more Seabury Quinn than anything — blond, compact, trim-mustached, impeccable without primness, beautifully mannered, profoundly versed in the whole fabric of supernatural wickedness and saying nay to all of it.

Quinn's education had been for the law. He was author of an erudite *Syllabus of Mortuary Jurisprudence*. Learnedly he lectured on the subject to schools and meetings of embalmers and morticians, not neglecting reference to beliefs about the dead which have influenced burial customs all the way back to the Stone Age. For years he was editor of a trade magazine for followers of that very necessary profession.

But mostly he was a writer.

He called himself a writer, not an author. "An author is a writer who wears spats and carries a walking stick," he liked to say. Let it be recognized that he took his writing seriously without taking himself seriously. It was good to hear him talk about it, but he never told anyone else what to write, and did not allow others to lecture him on the same subject. He used the words he knew about things he knew, from dedicated study of the trade and, mostly, the world of the occult. He wore out dictionary after dictionary, edition after edition of Roget's *Thesaurus*, to be as sure as possible of the right word. His was a happily scholarly nature. The thousands of volumes in his library included sections of works in various languages concerning history, law, foreign travel, folkways, esoteric religions, the classics, the poets and the arts, a number of highly material sciences. He was a compulsive taker and keeper of notes. His files included sheafs of cards, not only with germs for stories and scraps of characterization or scenic description, but the stuff of the stories themselves — sentences, paragraphs, whole sequences, to be fitted in when the time was ready.

As to de Grandin's Harrisonville, there happens to be an actual town of that name in New Jersey, on the bank of Oldman's Creek (who was that creek named after?) near the Delaware somewhat south of Camden and not unthinkably far across state from the pine barrens and groves where they have been talking of the Jersey Devil for a century and a

half, where sometimes they gather to hunt for it with dogs and guns and never quite catch up with it. But these Harrisonvilles are not the same town. The one where de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge live is nearer the Hudson, partakes in its way of New York suburbia. It also partakes, somewhat, of Lovecraft's Arkham. It is somehow a rallying point for terror, for enchanters and enchantresses, foreign practitioners of curses, vampires, werewolves, demons. In shadows along its streets may bob up things with different shapes, different eyes and mouths than honest citizens, perhaps with antlers, with wings. But terror can be met with rationalization, which makes it less than terrible.

Quinn wrote of other things. He was particularly good on themes of the Orient, the Near East, the Middle and the Far. Here, too, he did wide and intelligent research, elsewhere than in chop suey restaurants and Turkish coffee houses. *Alf Laylah Wah Laylah*, the Thousand Nights and a Night of Sheherazade as translated by Richard Francis Burton, was among his favorite readings. He wrote stories that could have been enchanted nights beyond those Thousand and One.

With all his serious attention to the supernatural, he was content to wonder about it. He said, "I will believe in ghosts, devils, vampires and werewolves at whatever time I have a convincing firsthand experience with any or all of them." I think he was instinctively religious, as most human beings seem to be in some way. That was enough of the super-

natural for him.

We saw each other whenever we could and between times we wrote to each other. When I began writing stories about Judge Pursuivant, the Judge and de Grandin seemed to become friends quite naturally. Neither of us brought the other's character on stage, but Pursuivant and de Grandin wrote or telephoned each other for special information and special rewarding companionship, in somewhat the way Quinn and I did.

He spent his last years near Washington. He kept on writing and he was unweariedly kind to young writers who came visiting. His home was a good, welcoming one. He loved his wife and was justly proud of the son who bears his name. Seabury Quinn — a good name, that one. Even the imposter I have mentioned must have loved it in his own sneaky way.

It is good to think and think again of Seabury Quinn, what he did and how he acted, this full-blooded, good-humored, hospitable, wise friend, whose taste in food and drink and reading and writing always seemed so admirable, who lived his long life to a rewarding full. He has gone to where things of evil are only diverting topics of conversation. I hope he knows that his book is being printed, that it is still happily baleful nighttime under the Harrisonville moon, that Jules de Grandin knows how to drive the hideous wickedness back to its unhallowed grave.

A Sherlock of the Supernatural

BY LIN CARTER

Who was the single most popular *Weird Tales* author?

Considering that the list of contributors to this greatest of all the fantastic fiction magazines of the Golden Age of the Pulp included Sax Rohmer, A. Merritt, William Hope Hodgson, Algernon Blackwood and Ambrose Bierce,¹ you might be hard put to make even an intelligent guess.

Many readers would opt for Clark Ashton Smith, whose ornate and lapidary style in such ironic fables as his tales of Zothique, Hyperborea and Averoigne won him many admirers among the discerning connoisseurs of well-carved prose.

Others would vote, most likely, for Robert E. Howard, the founder of *Sword & Sorcery*, and creator of those swashbuckling heroes, Solomon Kane, King Kull and the immortal Conan.

Probably, most of the *cognoscenti* would nominate the celebrated creator of the Cthulhu Mythos, H.P. Lovecraft, renowned today as perhaps the most gifted American master of the macabre since Poe.

However, they would be wrong!

The most popular *Weird Tales* contributor of all time was a gentleman named Seabury Quinn.

This can easily be demonstrated by a glance through the back files of “The Unique Magazine.” *Weird Tales* conducted a reader election in each issue, soliciting votes for the favorite story. The outcome of each poll was reported an issue or two later. And Seabury Quinn consistently took top honors.

His story “A Rival from the Grave,” for instance, which ran in the January 1936 issue, took first place over such memorable fictions as C.L. Moore’s Jirel of Joiry saga, “The Dark Land,” and also beat out the second installment of “The Hour of the Dragon,” Robert E. Howard’s only book-length Conan epic, not to mention a rerun of Lovecraft’s early eerie classic, “Dagon.”

In the September 1929 number, Quinn’s story “Trespassing Souls” nosed out such stiff competition as Howard’s

King Kull yarn, “The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune” and Lovecraft’s “The Hound,” which happens to be the first story to mention that blasphemous Bible of the Cthulhu cult, the shuddersome *Necronomicon* itself.

And even when up against the toughest possible contenders, Quinn generally at least tied for first place, as with his “The Jest of Warburg Tantavul” in the September 1934 issue, which tied with Howard’s “The People of the Black Circle,” and his “Hands of the Dead” in January 1935, which ran neck-and-neck with Smith’s exquisitely mordant gem, “The Dark Eidolon.”

Not only that, but Quinn stories invariably inspired the cover illustration, issue after issue after issue. In sorry contrast, *no* Lovecraft story was ever illustrated on the cover of the magazine in which most of his best work appeared.

And, as if that wasn’t enough, Quinn had more stories in *Weird Tales* than any other author in the half-century-long history of the magazine — no fewer than one hundred and forty-nine stories, not counting some thirteen articles.

Considering his immense popularity with the readership of *Weird Tales*, it is surprising to note how little of his work has been preserved between book-covers, either hardbound or paperback. Arkham House published his short novel, *Roads*, in 1948; Mycroft & Moran issued a slender collection of ten of the Jules de Grandin stories under the title of *The Phantom Fighter* in 1966; Jack Chalker printed a Quinn collection called *Is the Devil a Gentleman?* in 1970. Except for an occasional anthology selection, that is the extent of Quinn’s book appearances — which serves to explain my enthusiasm for this, the first in a series of popular mass-market paperbacks drawn from the extensive Quinnian *oeuvre*.

Seabury Grandin Quinn was born in Washington, D.C. in 1889 and lived most of his life in that city. He graduated from the law school of the National University in D.C. in 1910 (bet you didn’t even know we had a national university!) and was admitted to the bar of the District of Columbia.

After service with the U.S. Army in World War I, he returned to take up a new profession in journalism. In this capacity he was associated with several trade journals for which he wrote articles and sometimes acted as editor.

My favorite anecdote about Quinn concerns one of these

¹ To say nothing of Honoré de Balzac, Isaac Asimov, Tennessee Williams, Baudelaire, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur Machen, Fritz Leiber, Guy de Maupassant, the author of *Psycho* as well as the author of *The Phantom of the Opera*, Edgar Allan Poe, and Houdini.

editing jobs. It has always seemed to me singularly appropriate that an author whose name is primarily identified with tales of crawling horror, slithering doom, rotting corpses and hideous murders, moonlighted on the side as the editor of the morticians' journal, *Casket and Sunnyside*. What an ideal job for a *Weird Tales* contributor!

Quinn lived and worked in New York City for some time, where he taught medical jurisprudence and began turning out articles and stories. His first story was "The Stone Image," which appeared in the May 1, 1919 issue of *The Thrill Book*, Street & Smith's short-lived forerunner to *Weird Tales*.

Four years after this, Quinn made his first sale to Edwin Baird, the founding editor of *Weird Tales*, with a story called "The Phantom Farmhouse," which was printed in the issue for October 1923. After selling the magazine a series of articles on the Salem witchcraft hysteria, Quinn turned to fiction again. In the issue for October 1925 he introduced a spry, witty, brisk little spook-chasing, French medico named de Grandin (after his mother's maiden name) in a tale called "The Horror on the Links."

During this first appearance on the stage of history, Jules de Grandin is presented to us as "Professor de Grandin of the Paris police." It is explained that he happens to be "doin' some work for his department over here," as Sgt. Costello tells the narrator, Dr. Trowbridge, when the good doctor is called in to scrutinize a corpse. "Here," incidentally, is the fictitious town of Harrisonville, N.J., where Trowbridge lives and works as an old-fashioned country doctor.

De Grandin's professorship, as well as his connection with "the Paris police," are passed over in subsequent stories, as the author discreetly permits them to fade from the reader's memory. In "The Dead Hand," (1926) he is described as "Dr. de Grandin," a "French detective." Pooh-poohing this attempt to pigeonhole him, the debonair doctor retorts that he is only occasionally connected with the *Service de Sûreté*. By this time he has become "Dr. de Grandin of the Sorbonne," and "one of Europe's foremost criminologists and one of the world's greatest scientists." By 1928, in "Restless Souls," he has become an M.D. ("I was practising the treatment of angina pectoris when you were still unthought of," he says scoffingly to a young patient) as well as "an officer of the Paris secret police." From there on, the cover story is seldom mentioned. We never find out what mission it was which brought him to such an unlikely locale as Harrisonville, N.J., in the service of his government.

Most of the de Grandin stories take place in or near Harrisonville, which seems to be just about the most fiend-haunted, ghoulish, werewolf-plagued town this side of

Arkham, Massachusetts. Flawed and repetitive as they often are, the de Grandin stories epitomized the essence of *Weird Tales* in that they translated the elements of the traditional European supernatural story to modern small-town American milieux.

And they were undeniably popular with the readers. This popularity was reflected in the frequency of their appearance in the magazine. During the decade of the '20s, no fewer than thirty-two de Grandin stories appeared. During the '30s, forty-six more were printed. Fifteen others ran in the magazine during the '40s and the '50s. In all, I make out a total of ninety-three de Grandins in the entire run of *Weird Tales*.²

Where did the idea of Jules de Grandin originate, and what made these stories so popular that they could run in a popular magazine for a quarter of a century (the first appeared, as I have said, in 1925, the last in the September 1951 issue)?

The answer to both parts of this question is really quite easy. In the first place, it is perfectly obvious that in creating his famous team of Phantom-Fighters, Seabury Quinn was using for his model Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Jules de Grandin is a Gallicized, medicinated, latter-day Sherlock Holmes. The Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, of course, rather than the Holmes who pitted his matchless ratiocination against purely mundane villainy. Quinn gives it away through the simple expedient of having the adventures narrated in the first person by de Grandin's amanuensis, Dr. Trowbridge, just as Doyle had Holmes' adventures scribed by another doctor named Watson.

As for the secret of his popularity, well, Jules de Grandin is nothing more than the most recent example of an old tradition. The psychic detective, the occult investigator, the spook-buster, goes back to Algernon Blackwood's John Silence, to William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki the Ghost-Finder, to Sax Rohmer's Morris Klaw. It was an old and treasured tradition, and one to which Quinn brought little that was new (John Silence, for instance, is also an M.D.). But Quinn was directed toward that tradition from the very beginning of his career — that first story in *Thrill Book* concerned a Dr. Trowbridge of Harrisonville, N.J.

In 1937, Seabury Quinn returned to Washington as a lawyer representing a chain of trade magazines, having given up his editorship in the field — perhaps because he was earning more from his free-lance writing than such

² But Quinn himself wrote, in 1966, in his preface to *The Phantom Fighter*, that some "three hundred" de Grandins had by that time been written. I don't know what he's talking about, myself.

meagre jobs paid in those days.³

During the '40s he was a government lawyer, a position which he held until the end of World War II. In this period he was active in the formation of the Washington Science Fiction Association, an sf fan club which is still going strong and which, in fact, played host to the Annual World Science Fiction Convention in 1974.

A series of strokes forced him into semi-retirement during the 1950's, but he continued to the end as a tireless letter-writer and served as an advisor in legal affairs. His last known public appearance was at the World Science Fiction Convention in 1963. His last story, "Master Nicholas," was published in *Mirage*, a prestigious fan magazine devoted to the *Weird Tales*/Arkham House subculture, in 1964. His

literary career, therefore, spanned no less than forty-five years — a remarkable achievement.

Quinn died in 1969 at the age of eighty years, remaining active and alert to the end. He was survived by his wife and a son, Dr. Seabury Quinn, Jr.

With the appearance of this book, Jules de Grandin returns in a new, vigorous reincarnation. Even at its height, in the glorious '30s, fewer copies of *Weird Tales* were printed; distributed and sold, than there are copies of this book. The adventures of the debonair little French occult detective shall shortly be read by many times more people than ever thrilled to his spooky exploits in the pages of the pulps.

With the publication of these paperbacks, Jules de Grandin joins the immortals.

If Seabury Quinn is watching (from whatever shadowy but convivial Valhalla is reserved for the old-time *Weird Tales* crew), he will be as pleased as punch, and as proud.

I'm kind of happy about it, too.

So will you be, after reading this book, knowing there are more to come!

³ Most of his *Weird Tales* stories were of novelette-length, about ten thousand words. According to *Fantasy Magazine*, the leading fan magazine of the '30's, Quinn averaged \$300 for each story. That means he was paid at the rate of three cents a word, which is remarkable, considering *Weird Tales*' shaky financial history — yet another indication of the esteem in which the editor and publisher of the magazine held their most popular contributor.

Teller of Tales

BY ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES

Among the masterful tellers of tales who appeared in the pulp magazines in the 20's, 30's, and 40's, Seabury Grandin Quinn remains, for me, one of the finest. (He never used his middle name in his byline.) Since I have never seen any general definition of the phrase, "teller of tales," I'd better explain what that means to me: How do I distinguish between the teller of tales and the writer?

Both are writers, of course (aside from the story-teller whose output is entirely oral — a dying race); but I consider the "writer" of fiction as a person who carefully plots and plans his fiction out in advance, before resorting to a first draft either in pen or at typewriter. (I'm always astonished to learn that some writers still do work out first drafts in pen or pencil.) The writer will then resort to secondary elaboration when he or she sits down to write the story, and that process may alter the initial outline considerably. But the teller of tales starts out at once with nothing more than an idea, and sometimes not so much as that.

In his "By Way of Explanation," in the Arkham House collection of de Grandin stories, *The Phantom Fighter*, Quinn reveals that the tales of Jules de Grandin sprang entirely from inspiration: "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 that appears in this book." That story was *The Horror on the Links* (*Weird Tales*, October 1925); the word "horror" was changed to "terror" in the Arkham House edition for reasons apparently good to August Derleth and acceptable to the author, though obscure to me. And, Quinn continues, all the other 92 stories in the series were written in the same manner. "From the first to last Jules de Grandin has seemed to say, 'Friend Quinn, *je suis present*, write me!' Perhaps there's something to the Socratic theory of the daemon within, after all."

Perhaps indeed. There have been many writers who were tellers of tales in this sense, though all have not been of the same excellence. (I have no solid evidence, but I certainly suspect that much of Robert E. Howard's stories were done this way.) It depends upon the person and the variety of the person's conscious experience, as well as what lies in the subconscious to be picked up. When there has been a richness of experience, as in the case of Dr. David H. Keller

as well as Seabury Quinn, the material has shown that richness in plot, characters, backgrounds, and events; where the writer has had a good command of English and a distinctly personal style, we've seen stories where only occasionally has it appeared as if the tale had not been clear in the author's conscious mind before he or she started to write (For example, *The White Lady of the Orphanage* is one of the few de Grandin tales which might have benefitted from restructuring after the initial draft had been completed; the action comes to an end, and then we have some pages of necessary explanation. But as I've noted earlier, the same fault can be found with Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*. Neat structure, then, isn't everything; the Poe tale is a still-acknowledged masterpiece, and that particular de Grandin story can be read with enjoyment — but a beginning writer should still be warned against trying to make do with this method).

Seabury Quinn was by no means a beginner at the time he wrote that first de Grandin story; he was already among *Weird Tales*'s most popular contributors. The success of that first story led him to continue the series and there would be 62 more between 1925 and 1936 before we saw a non-de Grandin story in *Weird Tales* (aside from two earlier reprints).

One reason, perhaps, why the teller of tales can reach and hold so devoted an audience — particularly in short magazine fiction — is that his method positively requires him to put himself into his stories: his own experiences, thoughts, feelings, enthusiasms, dislikes, loves, hates, are going to come out to a far greater extent than in the case of the writer who carefully works out characters and plots, etc., in advance. The writer can put on many more masks and more successfully conceal who he is.

I think it goes without saying that the well-loved teller of tales is one who comes through as a warm, lovable person. Certainly this was the case with Seabury Quinn. One of my few regrets is that my acquaintanceship with him was not only brief, but also only through brief letters, starting in 1964 when I wanted to reprint *The Phantom Farmhouse* in *Magazine of Horror*. I would have loved to have met him and listened to him talk, for I'm sure he had the gift of conversation.

At that time, I also wanted to try some of the de Grandin stories to see if readers of the 1960's would be fascinated

with them. I had re-read them and found they still retained their appeal to me, after 30 years. But I could not help but notice that they did contain elements — such as ethnic dialects long out of fashion, a writing style which, to contemporary young readers, might seem more appropriate to the Edwardian era, and an underlying affirmation of patriotic and moral values which the younger generation were ridiculing when not angrily condemning. I determined, however, to try a few; and then continue unless a decided majority of the readers' letters indicated dissatisfaction or worse.

Surprise! There were some complaints along the lines I've indicated above, but even these were mixed — that is, the readers noticed these elements but said that they still enjoyed the stories; please give us more. Only a few wanted me to stop; and the majority loved the tales and wrote letters of praise very similar to those that Farnsworth Wright published in "The Eyrie" in *Weird Tales*.

Quinn's brief letters frequently gave me background material for my introductory blurbs. He was good-natured about an occasional error, such as my repeating the report that he had once been a mortician in my blurb for the final installments of *The Devil's Bride*. He wrote me, "... I have been many things but not a mortician. From 1918 to 1926,

I taught mortuary law at the Renouard School for Embalmers in New York; however that is my nearest approach to being a practitioner." And far from being touchy about editorial alterations in his tales (of which I made very few) he gave me carte-blanche to cut the novel or take out matters which made it sound too old-fashioned. I cut only a few things which, seemingly harmless to readers of the time, would have been needlessly offensive to readers of the 1960's; and I consistently introduced a date when I reprinted a story ("in 192- or 193-") so that the reader would know from the start that the tale is not contemporary.

His sprightly humor came through even in the last days, when a cerebral vascular accident severely afflicted him. "The doctors haven't given me much encouragement. CVA cases do not yield readily to treatment, I'm told, but as long as my blood pressure and general health hold up, I'm advised to live with it and try not to fall down too often. Doctors, it seems to me, are able to bear their patients' infirmities with a considerable degree of fortitude..."

He was indeed the last gentleman of the *Weird Tales* school, and it's heart-warming to see that his tales are being revived. Many of us old timers remember him with love; I predict that the revival of the de Grandin series will swell the number.

Afterword from *The Skeleton Closet*

BY ROBERT WEINBERG

Weird Tales was subtitled “The Unique Magazine.” In 1930, the magazine could have been called “the de Grandin magazine.” In ten of the twelve issues published during that year, the French detective was featured in a novèlette; only February and September did not have de Grandin adventures. Making this run even more astonishing was that in late 1929, de Grandin appeared in adventures in June, July, September, October, November, and December 1929. As the little Frenchman also appeared in the January and February 1931 issues, his total run during this span was phenomenal. In the course of twenty-one issues, de Grandin appeared in eighteen!

Nor was the occult sleuth only featured inside the issues — ten of those issues also featured cover illustrations for the de Grandin story within. No other *Weird Tales* author ever exhibited such a hold over the magazine during any period during its more than thirty year history.

1930 was an exceptional year for Quinn’s character. During his ten adventures, de Grandin, with help from the ever-present Dr. Trowbridge and Sergeant Jeremiah Costello, foiled all sorts of bizarre evils. This trio of crime fighters did travel to other locales during the course of the year, but a majority of their cases took place in Harrisonville, N.J.

The new year started off on a wild note as voodoo made itself felt in New Jersey through “The Drums of Damballah.” The climax of the story illustrates one of author Quinn’s strongest points: even though the evil Toinette was a voodoo priestess and responsible for the deaths of many, including several characters in the story, Quinn has her as human as any other woman crying over her dead son. And de Grandin, who kills the monstrous ape-man, understands and sympathizes with the evil priestess. The Frenchman was just, but never cruel.

Romance played a part in nearly all of the de Grandin adventures, and readers were rarely disappointed with a Quinn story in expecting a happy ending. Justice always triumphed and, just as important, lovers were reunited despite whatever evil had kept them apart. This was not to say that tragedy did not enter any of the stories; “The Brain-Thief” is a perfect example of Quinn’s expert handling of

tragedy and true love.

As in many of these stories, the villain of the tale is an Oriental — in this case, a mysterious Indian with incredible hypnotic powers (Quinn rarely had ethnic villains and avoided any sort of racial slurs; instead, most of his villains are foreigners, oftentimes men with legitimate grievances).

Tragedy entered the story with the story of Christopher Norton. Homer and Marjorie Abbot presented the two lovers who were being victimized by the monster — the Brain-Thief of the story. Jules de Grandin entered the story as the force of justice. In keeping with many of the other tales, justice is swift, sure and final. The little Frenchman did not believe in the judicial system in cases of the supernatural or the supernal. He rarely took the chance that an evil doer would escape with a long jail sentence. A firm believer in “an eye for an eye,” he carried out his brand of justice whenever the necessity of the situation called for it.

The course of true love is rarely a smooth road in any of the de Grandin stories, and the adventures in 1930 were no exception. “The Doom of the House of Phipps” and “The Bride of Dewer” both feature terrible curses that affect young men and which could only be fought by the intervention of the hero’s true love. In both cases, while it is de Grandin who is able to locate and isolate the supernatural element involved, it is the strength of character and determination of the young women involved that defeats each curse.

While women were usually treated well in the de Grandin stories, from time to time they also appeared as villains. “The Daughter of the Moonlight” contains a typical Quinn villainess. The title character is a beautiful young girl who was anything but ordinary. In many of the de Grandin adventures, a young woman served as the helpless pawn of some soulless monster, but in this adventure, Dolores FitzPatrick was as evil as any of the male enemies battled by the French ghost-breaker. She was totally and completely devoted to the forces of sin. Fortunately, de Grandin knew exactly how to battle the evil forces she controlled.

Whoever, or whatever, the evil, Jules de Grandin rose to the occasion in his battle against the forces of darkness. In 1930, he was at his busiest, and at his best.

Afterword from *The Horror Chambers*

BY ROBERT WEINBERG

Weird Tales, subtitled “The Unique Magazine,” published during its thirty-plus years a number of controversial stories. In 1924, publication of “The Loved Dead,” which contained hints of necrophilia, caused the magazine to be removed from newsstands in several parts of the United States. “The Copper Bowl” in 1928, called “the most gruesome story of torture ever written,” caused many readers to protest vehemently to the editor. Strangely enough, the one story with a taboo violated by no other pulp (or for that matter, nearly any other magazine) of the thirties went virtually unnoted by the readership of the magazine. That story was “The Jest of Warburg Tantavul,” reprinted in this collection.

In the writer’s magazine, *Author and Journalist*, for October 1934, it was noted “... incest is, to all intents and purposes, an impossible theme. Offhand, it is faintly conceivable that a delicate handling of this subject might appear in some of the experimental periodicals, or even such purveyors of adult literary fare as *Harper’s*, *Scribner’s*, or *American Mercury*, but in a pulp magazine, never! Yet the September 1934 issue of *Weird Tales*, a pulp magazine for popular consumption, nonchalantly carried a story of out-and-out incest by Seabury Quinn.”

While the story received prominent mention in the author’s publication, it created no stir at all in the reader’s column of *Weird Tales*. In fact, not one reader mentioned anything at all about the incest central to the story. Comments were typical for a de Grandin adventure: “The plot was closely knit and ran very smoothly ...” — “the yarn is told vividly and in a manner that creates an almost tangible atmosphere of terror ...” — “Seabury Quinn’s latest fully comes up to his past excellent efforts.” The story tied with a Conan adventure for the most popular tale in the issue in which it appeared.

In the last few years, Quinn has come into a good deal of criticism for the Jules de Grandin series. The main thrust of these attacks was that the stories were written for money and not artistic achievement alone. Thus, these same critics argue, the de Grandin stories were inferior to the products of those few highly-regarded authors who wrote more for artistic merit than for cold cash. While on the surface, a fine sounding argument, the truth is anything but so simple. Seabury Quinn was a professional author. He wrote to sell, and because of this, he had to write well. For a good part of his life, a major portion of his income was derived from writing,

and he was easily the most popular writer ever to work for *Weird Tales*. He was paid at the highest rate that the magazine could afford, and was constantly being asked by the editor for more. The possibility of Quinn having a story rejected by *Weird Tales* was unthinkable. And, while Quinn might not have proclaimed any artistic aims or achievements, his stories were extremely important in the development of modern weird fiction.

It was Quinn who was most responsible for the modernization of the ghost-breaker. Jules de Grandin was constantly using new and modern techniques to fight spirits. While the Frenchman was not above using holy water or a crucifix, he was just as likely to use radium or an electric grid to fight phantoms. The entire de Grandin series continually presented new ideas on the supernatural.

Also, Quinn was one of the first, and in *Weird Tales* and other pulp magazines of that day, the only writer who had any trace of sex in his stories. Not only did the characters involved often evidence physical emotions, but some of Quinn’s stories even made mention of topics not normally associated with pulp literature: “Warburg Tantavul” is concerned with incest; “The Poltergeist,” featured exorcism long before it became popular, and contained more than a hint of lesbian behavior; and “The House of Golden Masks” is a fast action story of white slavery and degradation.

Quinn’s first and foremost goal, however, was to entertain, and he succeeded admirably in doing so with the Jules de Grandin adventures. In this collection, some of de Grandin’s most unique cases are recorded.

It was rare that the little Frenchman sought aid in his fight against the supernatural. Usually, his only assistance came from his friend, Dr. Trowbridge, and Sergeant Costello of the Harrisonville police. From time to time, a priest might offer some aid, either spiritual or physical; in two adventures in this collection, however, de Grandin receives help from other occultists.

Dr. Wolf is a full-blooded Indian from the plain states who aided de Grandin in summoning one of his gods to fight the evil Kali as East meets West in “The Gods of East and West.” Dr. Wolf only appeared in this one story and was rather sketchily described.

A more full-bodied character was Doctor Hussein Obeyid, “one of the world’s ten greatest philosophers” and a “very special friend of Jules de Grandin.” Though Dr.

Obeyid only appeared in the one story, “A Gamble in Souls,” he is presented so vividly by Quinn that his presence dominates the entire tale. Whenever the mysterious Doctor appears, that scene seems to crackle with electricity — For a change, even de Grandin takes a back seat to a master of the most powerful of magic. It was unfortunate that Quinn did not use Dr. Obeyid in any other de Grandin adventures since it was this unusual character that makes “A Gamble in

Souls” one of the very finest of all the de Grandins.

Seabury Quinn shrugged off criticism of the de Grandin stories during his lifetime from other writers.

The fans rarely if ever protested. Like his most famous creation, Seabury Quinn is only receiving now the recognition he long deserved as a major force in the history of weird and fantastic fiction.

Afterword from Hellfire Files

BY ROBERT WEINBERG

In a letter to fantasy artist Virgil Finlay in 1936, Seabury Quinn made a startling confession.

“In re Jules de Grandin: ... Because of my inability to visualize my characters as pictures (in places rather than words) I really don’t know quite what he looks like, myself.”

The statement was all the more astonishing since de Grandin had been the hero of more than sixty adventures up to that point; but, though Quinn had certain general characteristics in mind when he wrote of the French detective, he did not have any *exacting* physical description actually laid out for constant reference.

However, using Quinn’s own words, one was able to easily construct a word picture of the petite ghost-breaker:

“He was a perfect example of the rare French blond type, rather under medium height, but with a military erectness of carriage that made him look several inches taller than he really was. His light-blue eyes were small and exceedingly deep-set, and would have been humorous had it not been for the curiously cold directness of their gaze. With his wide mouth, light mustache waxed at the ends in two perfectly horizontal points, and those twinkling, stock-taking eyes, he reminded me of an alert tomcat.”

Thus was de Grandin described by Dr. Trowbridge in the first meeting of the two during “The Horror on the Links” in 1925. In later stories, references were made a number of times to de Grandin’s height (or rather to his lack of it). He easily set the record as the shortest ghost-breaker, being only 5’3” or 5’4” in height. From time to time, some of his friends even referred to him as “my little one” or even “my little birdling.” Not many could get away with such nicknames with Jules de Grandin but not many were among the privileged few to be one of his close friends.

While Quinn did not have a detailed picture of de Grandin in mind when he wrote the stories, Dr. Trowbridge seemed to have been much better defined. Samuel Trowbridge was a typical conservative small town doctor of the first half of the twentieth century. As described by Quinn, he was a cross between “an honest brother of George Bernard Shaw and Chief Justice (at that time) Charles E. Hughes” — bald and bewhiskered, somewhat portly, and kindly-eyed.

Quinn also never wrote a formalized biographical sketch of his two famous characters, but searching through the

series reveals small tidbits of information about each which combines to paint a fairly detailed picture of the two men.

Jules de Grandin was born of a French Protestant father and a Catholic mother. He fell in love as a young man with a girl whose family were devout Catholics. Because of the religious differences, the match was not approved and the girl entered a convent. De Grandin attended medical school, became a prominent surgeon, and in the First World War, he served first as a medical officer and then as a member of the intelligence service. After the war, he traveled throughout the world, mainly to the French colonies in Africa and Asia in the service of the French Intelligence. He wrote several well-known medical books and was a brilliant surgeon. In 1925, he journeyed to the United States to study both medical discoveries and modern police techniques, and it was here that he first met Dr. Trowbridge. After a brief return trip to France, de Grandin returned to America where he became a member of the Trowbridge household, probably realizing that the ghost-infested town of Harrisonville needed his services more than the French Intelligence Services. His age is never given, but it can be inferred that he was in his early forties. He was always in excellent shape and was a superb athlete. This last fact was somewhat surprising when coupled with the Frenchman’s insatiable taste for wine and spirits, to say nothing of his love of “hot apple pie and delectable cherry tarts.”

Of Trowbridge, less was said as less was needed. He was in his middle or late 50’s. He was raised by strict parents in New Jersey and went into medicine as a young man — his only wife was his profession, and he never married. Most, if not all, of his life was spent in Harrisonville, and it seemed that he delivered nearly every child grown to adulthood in all of the adventures. He was universally known throughout the town and surrounding suburbs, and a party or affair without Trowbridge and de Grandin in attendance was not a party. While little was ever mentioned about his home at 993 Susquehanna Ave., it was evidently in one of the better sections of town, only a few blocks from the huge mansions of the northwest side of Harrisonville. He was old-fashioned and somewhat conservative; a member of the Knights Templar, a Vestryman in the Episcopal Church, and a staunch Republican.

However, Dr. Trowbridge was no prude, nor was he against the finer things in life. While he was generally very

conservative in treating his patients, he was not so strict with his own life. He enjoyed a good cigar, liked coffee laced with brandy, and was rarely opposed to a nip of sherry from time to time. While not the gourmet that de Grandin was, he seemed to enjoy eating and sampling the finer things in life. While he would protest going to party after party, he nevertheless seemed to attend all of Harrisonville's social affairs. His housekeeper and cook, Nora McGinnis, continually prepared rich desserts for his table and there was no mention of these delicacies being thrown away. He enjoyed walking and many nights he and de Grandin took long strolls before retiring. Trowbridge was always very very proper in all his acts and opinions, but underneath that shell of respectability was a man who knew what was right and wrong and kept that thought always foremost in his mind.

While the two men were dissimilar in many ways, they were also very much the same. Both were fine doctors and surgeons. Both never considered denying aid to anyone —

in many of the stories Trowbridge was called out on a case in the middle of the night; but even though he grumbled a little, he never refused to go, whether to a rich matron or to the child of a penniless laborer. More than any other trait, though, the two men were both kind, warm human beings. Trowbridge was prim and proper and might complain from time to time about de Grandin's wild adventures, but he went along with them. There was no thought, ever, of leaving de Grandin to fight his battles alone. In some early adventures, de Grandin asked for and received a fee for his services in battling evil. Within a short time, however, he had discontinued this practice. He fought his battles because any man of right *had* to fight those fights — both he and Dr. Trowbridge did what they did because it had to be done. In that respect, the two friends were of one mind. They were two men with a mission, and for that reason, more than any other, they remained friends for all of their ninety-three adventures and countless trials.

Afterword from *The Adventures*

BY ROBERT WEINBERG

The first adventure of Jules de Grandin appeared in the October 1925 issue of *Weird Tales* magazine. The story, titled “Terror on the Links,” was billed second lead in the publication and was illustrated by one poorly executed picture by Andrew Brosnatch.

Quinn was a familiar name to fans of the magazine. He had been writing for *Weird Tales* for almost two years. He was the author of two non-fiction series, “Weird Crimes” (1923-24) and “Servants of Satan” (1925). Quinn also had contributed several short stories to the magazine before the appearance of de Grandin. The most notable of these was “The Phantom Farmhouse,” a werewolf story that was among the most popular stories published in the first few years of *Weird Tales*’ existence.

It was with the excitable Frenchman, however, that Quinn made his mark on the weird fiction field. Even before the publication of “The Horror on the Links,” Farnsworth Wright, editor of *Weird Tales*, realized the possible popularity of the occult detective and had Quinn compose a sequel to the first story. The second story in the series, “The Tenants of Broussac” was advertised at the end of the first adventure. And further adventures were promised. Quinn might have written the first story to fill an editorial blank, but all future stories were done on demand. As Quinn later stated, “I never had a de Grandin adventure rejected and, if anything, the editor was asking for more.”

Dr. Trowbridge had appeared in “The Stone Image,” a Quinn story published in 1919, but de Grandin sprang full blown into being in the first published narrative. Throughout his many adventures, the French detective changed little. His personality remained the same, as did his tastes. From time to time, some new skill or bit of knowledge was revealed but in all other respects, the Jules de Grandin of “The Horror on the Links” was the same person as the hero of the last story in the series, twenty-five years later.

“The Horror on the Links” took place in Harrisonville, New Jersey, home of Dr. Trowbridge. “The Tenants of Broussac” changed in locale to France, where de Grandin battled the ghost of an evil nobleman in a haunted estate. Where the first adventure was the second story in the monthly magazine, the second tale was the lead story and rated the cover picture by Joseph Doolin. The little Frenchman’s popularity was already beginning to make itself felt. In 1933, Farnsworth Wright listed the most

popular stories published in *Weird Tales* up to that time. In direct competition with such authors as H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and August Derleth, Seabury Quinn scored high, as “The Tenants of Broussac” was listed as one of the seven most popular stories published in the fantasy periodical.

February 1926 saw publication of “The Isle of Missing Ships.” In this adventure, de Grandin and Trowbridge battle a madman in the South Pacific. The story made clear one of the series’ strongest points. Every narrative was different. The de Grandin tales never followed some staid pulp formula. One month the occult detective would battle a mad scientist. The next might bring a ghost or a werewolf. The next, a diabolical inventor. Not all of the stories were supernatural thrillers. Many of the most memorable adventures contained no trace of fantasy. Yet each story was an excursion into the world of the bizarre and the unusual. It was this variety of menaces that made the series so popular.

The fourth story of the series, “The Dead Hand” appeared in the May 1926 issue of *Weird Tales*. Trowbridge was back in Harrisonville with de Grandin as a house guest. Quinn, by this time, could see that the series was due for a long run and continued globe-trotting by his two heroes would make the stories unwieldy. A familiar setting which needed no long pages of descriptive scenery was necessary so that the main focus of the tale would be on the events. Harrisonville, a medium-sized town outside of New York, was that location. The town was completely imaginary, though Quinn did base much of it on typical Jersey towns of the time. Living in Brooklyn, the author knew well the area about which he wrote.

By the next few adventures, any mention of de Grandin just visiting Trowbridge was already being forgotten. The Frenchman had settled with the Doctor for a long stay. De Grandin was not licensed to practice medicine in the United States, so instead, he worked as a psychic investigator and general sleuth. His fame became quite widespread and in latter years, people came seeking his aid from all over the world.

Quinn stopped writing any other type of story for *Weird Tales*. The de Grandin adventures were so popular that any other fiction would have met with howls of outrage from the readers. Instead, Quinn began to relate adventure after

adventure of his petite Frenchman. In 1927, seven adventures of the occult sleuth were published in *Weird Tales*. In 1928, Quinn had another seven stories published. A span of more than two months without de Grandin brought dozens of queries from the readership asking what had happened to the Frenchman. De Grandin was a regular feature of the publication and appeared almost every other month for the rest of the decade.

“The Man Who Cast No Shadow” was the cover story for the February 1927 issue of *Weird Tales*. The effective painting by C. Barker Petrie, Jr., depicted the climactic scene of the story, where de Grandin had just flung back the trap door and confronted Baron Czuczron just as he was about to cut the throat of Esther Norman.

The adventure, de Grandin’s first encounter with a vampire, spelled out another facet of the series that raised it above the level of common horror stories. Quinn did not restrict himself to accepted beliefs or legends to the point of slavishly copying everything stated in earlier stories. The evil vampire of the story shared with his brother monsters the trait of casting no reflection in the mirror but it was there that his resemblance to other vampires ceased. He did not remain the same ageless being throughout the story. Nor was he restricted from movement during the daylight hours. Perhaps, most importantly, he proved vulnerable to the cold steel of de Grandin’s sword cane. No stake or other device proved necessary to kill the diabolical Baron. Quinn refused to be held by the bounds of other stories, or even old legends on which other stories were based.

In “The Blood Flower,” another example of this same attitude occurred in de Grandin’s battle with Uncle Friedrich

— the werewolf in the story. At the end of the story, Trowbridge asked, puzzled:

“And wasn’t there some old legend to the effect that a werewolf could only be killed with a silver bullet?”

De Grandin answered, but it was Quinn who was speaking:

“Ah, bah,” he replied with a laugh. “*What did those old legend-mongers know of the power of modern firearms? ...* When I did shoot that wolfman, my friend, *I had something more powerful than superstition in my hand. Morbleu*, but I did shoot a hole in him large enough for him to have walked through!”

It was this concept — using modern weaponry and ideas to battle ancient sorceries and monsters that helped make de Grandin adventures something more than mere weird tales. Other psychic detectives rarely ventured into rationalizing their enemies and using scientific devices to fight them. De Grandin relied on such methods.

The de Grandin canon consisted of ninety-three stories published over a span of twenty-five years. Most of the stories appeared in early issues of *Weird Tales* magazine which are virtually impossible to find. Only one hardcover collection of ten of the stories was ever published in a limited edition of 3000 copies, and that book is out of print. Thus, up to now, it has been impossible for most fans of the fantastic or detective fiction to read the adventures of the most popular psychic sleuth ever set to paper. This collection is the first of several which will remedy this major oversight. De Grandin has been called “the Sherlock Holmes of weird fiction.” This and future collections will serve to solidify that claim.

Afterword from *The Casebook*

BY ROBERT WEINBERG

A family of ghouls who live on human flesh; a mad surgeon who extracts his revenge on helpless girls; a stone statue which harbors the spirit of a lustful female vampire; a zombie master who controls the dead; a band of ghosts dwelling in a chapel dedicated to the pagan goddess, Cytherea; and more, all located in one small geographic area. Some spot in demon-haunted Transylvania? Or a lost oasis in the middle of the Sahara desert? But, no, it was central New Jersey where all of these fiends resided. Central New Jersey where, fortunately, Harrisonville was located. The same Harrisonville where lived Jules de Grandin, sometime member of *la Sûreté Général*, and full-time ghost breaker.

There actually was a Harrisonville in New Jersey, located south of Camden in the Garden State, but this could not be the same town since numerous mentions of visits to New York located Harrisonville much closer to that urban metropolis. There was a Harrison, New Jersey, across the Passaic River from Newark. Actually almost a part of Newark, Harrison did meet many of the important criteria set by the de Grandin stories: it was close to Newark — in many of the tales, de Grandin read a Newark paper and often the action took place in Newark; it was a small city; and it was located in approximately the area where much of the action of the stories took place. However, Harrison did not exactly fit the description used by Quinn. For one thing, it was too industrialized to be the rural haven that Quinn described. And it was a little too close to Newark. Also, from other hints and descriptions, the town had to be surrounded by suburbs on all sides. Harrison was locked by other cities making it virtually suburbanless.

A much better choice for the location of Harrisonville was Elizabeth, New Jersey. While Quinn probably got his name for his town from Harrison, Elizabeth could have served as an actual model for *Harrisonville's* location. Elizabeth was close to New York City so that traveling to the metropolis for an evening's entertainment would not be unusual. It had a port and an industrial area and yet was mainly suburban. There was a downtown section, and the city was surrounded by suburbs in the 1920's and 1930's. Like most of central New Jersey it hosted a mixed ethnic group of people, as did Harrisonville. And it was still close enough to Newark to satisfy all criteria involved with that city without being too close to be a mere suburb. While

Quinn probably did not have any actual city in New Jersey in mind when he first wrote of Harrisonville, Elizabeth probably most closely fit the description of the adopted home of de Grandin. Fortunately, that similarity stopped with physical characteristics. Harrisonville's psychic location made it unique in the world of fantasy fiction.

It appeared that during the first third of the century, New Jersey was a major breeding ground for all types of fiends and monsters, human and otherwise. At first, such a premise seems illogical and ridiculous. However, a carefully thought-out reasoning of such possibilities shows that such cases were not as far-fetched as they might seem. New Jersey, during the period, was a home of many of the wealthy from America's busiest and richest city, New York. It was also one of the original thirteen colonies and thus, long settled by people of all races and creeds. New York was the center of American enterprise as well as the first landing point of emigrants to the United States. New Jersey, more than New York State, was the embarkation point to the West and South for most of these people. Many, many people passed through the state. All of these facts put together testified strongly in building a case for the necessity of Jules de Grandin's work.

The Bera's came to New Jersey as rich immigrants. With their true forms bound to arouse suspicion in any densely settled area, it was not surprising that they bought a house in a New Jersey suburb. They did not have to risk traveling to some out-of-the-way part of the country when the Jersey suburbs suited them just as well.

Dr. John Marston's son fell in love with an actress. As New York was and is the center of America's theatrical community, it was no surprise that he and his father should make their home in New Jersey. After the death of John Marston Jr., the revengeful plans of the father made it necessary for him to remain in Jersey. An out-of-the-way mansion located in suburban Jersey, close to New York was the perfect home for this mad surgeon.

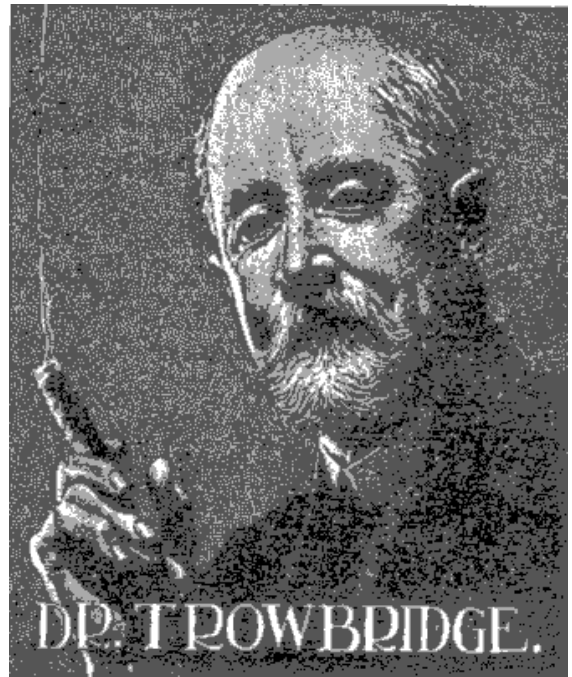
In the case of "The Silver Countess," a letter brought de Grandin and Trowbridge to Lyman's Landing, where a rich friend had bought a strange statue from a junk dealer in Newark — a statue that was the dwelling place of the Silver Countess. Again, New Jersey, home of the rich and powerful, as well as the art collector and socialite, was the logical place for such an adventure. Setting the story in

some midwest location would have destroyed the credibility of the story as well as losing the resort setting which provided de Grandin with the one clue which enabled him to break the case — and the Countess.

“Ancient Fires” shifted the action from New Jersey to a similar-type location in New York State. Again, a rich man from another country building a house on the East Coast. “The Chapel of Mystic Horror” was imported from Cyprus by an eccentric millionaire. Locating the huge monastery on property in New York would have been too difficult and too costly. However, a deserted location in New Jersey was not only an inexpensive site but also a fine investment for a rich millionaire pretending he was a country lord.

So, we have seen that in most cases Harrisonville was not the original home of the horrors battled by de Grandin. Instead, the city and surrounding locale just offered an ideal

setting for such devilment to settle. The horrors fought by the Frenchman and Dr. Trowbridge were mainly imported ones. Harrisonville was not the source of horrors, just their rallying point. As Manly Wade Wellman has stated, “In shadows along its streets may bob up things with different shapes, different eyes and mouths than honest citizens, perhaps with antlers, with wings.” But as Harrisonville was the focal point of all things evil, it also attracted one whose profession was to battle and defeat such monsters. If a locale became known as the focal point for ghosts, would it not also attract a ghost-breaker? The arrival of Jules de Grandin in Harrisonville might have been the random act of Providence. Or it might just as well have been the righting of a balance gone wrong. For one such as Jules de Grandin was a match for all the monsters and demons that might haunt Harrisonville and all the surrounding locales.



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 grew — but grew 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.

Seabury Quinn

Washington, D.C.

Foreword from

The Phantom Fighter, Arkham House 1966



SEABURY QUINN 1889-1969

*The Compleat Adventures of
Jules de Grandin*

The Horror on the Links

IT MUST have been past midnight when the skirling of my bedside telephone awakened me, for I could see the moon well down toward the horizon as I looked through the window while reaching for the instrument.

“Dr. Trowbridge,” an excited voice bored through the receiver, “this is Mrs. Maitland. Can you come over right away? Something dreadful has happened to Paul!”

“Eh?” I answered half asleep. “What’s wrong?”

“We — we don’t know,” she replied jerkily. “He’s unconscious. You know, he’d been to the dance at the country club with Gladys Phillips, and we’d been in bed for hours when we heard someone banging on the door. Mr. Maitland went down, and when he opened the door Paul fell into the hall. Oh, Doctor, he’s been hurt dreadfully. Won’t you please come right over?”

Physicians’ sleep is like a park — public property. With a sigh I climbed out of bed and into my clothes, teased my superannuated motor to life and set out for the Maitland house.

Young Maitland lay on his bed, eyes closed, teeth clenched, his face set in an expression of unutterable dread, even in his unconsciousness. Across his shoulders and on the backs of his arms I found several long incised wounds, as though the flesh had been raked by a sharp pronged instrument.

I sterilized and bandaged the cuts and applied restoratives, wondering what sort of encounter had produced such hurts.

“Help! Help! O, God, help!” the lad muttered thickly, like a person trying to call out in a nightmare. “Oh, oh, it’s got me; it’s” — his words drowned in a gurgling, inarticulate cry of fear and he sat bolt upright, staring round with vacant, fear-filmed eyes.

“Easy, easy on, young fellow,” I soothed. “Lie back, now; take it easy, you’re all right. You’re home in bed.”

He looked uncomprehendingly at me a moment, then fell to babbling inanely. “The ape-thing — the ape-thing! It’s got me! Open the door; for God’s sake, open the door!”

“Here,” I ordered gaffly as I drove my hypodermic into his arm, “none o’ that. You quiet down.”

The opiate took effect almost immediately, and I left him with his parents while I returned to catch up the ravelled ends of my torn sleep.

Headlines shrieked at me from the front page of the paper lying beside my breakfast grapefruit:

SUPER FIEND SOUGHT IN GIRL’S SLAYING

Body of Young Woman Found Near Sedgemore
Country Club Mystifies Police — Criminal
Pervert Blamed for Killing — Arrest Imminent

Almost entirely denuded of clothing, marred by a score of terrible wounds, her face battered nearly past recognition and her neck broken, the body of pretty Sarah Humphreys, nineteen, a waitress in the employ of the Sedgemore Country Club, was found lying in one of the bunkers of the club’s golf course this morning by John Burroughs, a greens keeper. Miss Humphreys, who had been employed at the clubhouse for three months, completed her duties shortly before midnight, and, according to statements of fellow workers, declared she was going to take a short cut across the links to the Andover Road, where she could get a late bus to the city. Her body, terribly mutilated, was found about twenty-five yards from the road on the golf course this morning.

Between the golf links and the Andover Road is a dense growth of trees, and it is thought the young woman was attacked while walking along the path through the woods to the road. Deputy Coroner Nesbitt, who examined the body, gave his opinion that she had been dead about five hours when found. She had not been criminally assaulted.

Several suspicious characters have been seen in the neighborhood of the club’s grounds recently, and the police are checking up on their movements. An early arrest is expected.

“There’s two gintelmen to see ye, sor,” Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, interrupted my perusal of the paper. “’Tis Sergeant Costello an’ a Frinchman, or Eyetalian, or sumpin. They do be wantin’ ter ax ye questions about th’ murder of th’ pore little Humphreys gurl.”

“Ask *me* about the murder?” I protested. “Why, the first I knew of it was when I looked at this paper, and I’m not through reading the account of the crime yet.”

“That’s all right, Dr. Trowbridge,” Detective Sergeant Costello answered with a laugh as he entered the dining room. “We don’t figure on arrestin’ you, but there’s some questions we’ll be askin’, if you don’t mind. This is Professor de Grandin of the Paris police. He’s been doin’ some work for his department over here, an’ when this murder broke he offered th’ chief his help. We’ll be needin’ it, too, I’m thinkin’. Professor de Grandin, Dr. Trowbridge,” he waved an introductory hand from one of us to the other.

The professor bowed stiffly from the hips in continental fashion, then extended his hand with a friendly smile. He was a perfect example of the rare French blond type, rather under medium height, but with a military erectness of

carriage that made him seem several inches taller than he actually was. His light blue eyes were small and exceedingly deep-set, and would have been humorous had it not been for the curiously cold directness of their gaze. With his blond mustache waxed at the ends in two perfectly horizontal points and those twinkling, stocktaking eyes, he reminded me of an alert tom-cat. Like a cat's, too, was his lithe, noiseless step as he crossed the room to shake hands.

"I fear Monsieur Costello gives you the misapprehension, doctor," he said in a pleasant voice, almost devoid of accent. "It is entirely true I am connected with the *Service de Sûreté*, but not as a vocation. My principal work is at the University of Paris and St. Lazaire Hospital; at present I combine the vocation of *savant* with the avocation of criminologist. You see—"

"Why," I interrupted as I grasped his slim, strong hand, "you're Professor Jules de Grandin, the author of *Accelerated Evolution*?"

A quick, infectious grin swept across his mouth and was reflected in his eyes. "You know me, *hein*? Good, it is that I am among friends! However, at the moment our inquiries lie in quite another field. You have a patient, one Monsieur Paul Maitland, yes? He was set upon last night in the Andover Road, no?"

"I have a patient named Paul Maitland," I admitted, "but I don't know where he received his injuries."

"Nor do we," he answered with a smile, "but we shall inquire. You will go with us while we question him, no?"

"Why, yes," I acquiesced. "I should be looking in on him this morning, anyhow."

"And now, young Monsieur," Professor de Grandin began when introductions had been completed, "you will please tell us what happened last night to you. Yes?"

Paul looked uncomfortably from one of us to the other and swallowed nervously. "I don't like to think of it," he confessed, "much less talk about it; but here's the truth, believe it or not:

"I took Gladys home from the club about 11 o'clock, for she had developed a headache. After I'd said good night to her I decided to go home and turn in, and had gotten nearly here when I reached in my pocket for a cigarette. My case was gone, and I remembered laying it on a window ledge just before my last dance.

"The Mater gave me that case last birthday, and I didn't want to lose it, so, instead of telephoning the club and asking one of the fellows to slip it in his pocket, like a fool I decided to drive back for it.

"You know — at least Dr. Trowbridge and Sergeant Costello do — the Andover Road dips down in a little valley and curves over by the edge of the golf course between the

eighth and ninth holes. I'd just reached that part of the road nearest the links when I heard a woman scream twice — it really wasn't two screams, more like one and a half, for her second cry was shut off almost before it started.

"I had a gun in my pocket, a little .22 automatic — good thing I did, too — so I yanked it out and drew up at the roadside, leaving my engine running. That was lucky, too, believe me.

"I ran into the woods, yelling at the top of my voice, and there I saw something dark, like a woman's body, lying across the path. I started toward it when there was a rustling in the trees overhead and — *plop!* — something dropped right down in front of me.

"Gentlemen, I don't know what it was, but I know it wasn't human. It wasn't quite as tall as I, but it looked about twice as wide, and its hands hung down. Clear down to the ground.

"I yelled, 'What the hell goes on here?' and pointed my gun at it, and it didn't answer, just started jumping up and down, bouncing with its feet and hands on the ground at once. I tell you, it gave me the horrors.

"'Snap out of it,' I yelled again, 'or I'll blow your head off.' Next moment — I was so nervous and excited I didn't know what I was doing — I let fly with my pistol, right in the thing's face.

"That came near bein' my last shot, too. Believe me or not, that thing, whatever it was, reached out, snatched the gun out of my hand, and broke it. Yes, sir, snapped that pistol in two with its bare hands as easily as I could break a match.

"Then it was on me. I felt one of its hands go clear over my shoulder from breast to back in a single clutch, and it pulled me toward it. Ugh! It was hairy, sir. Hairy as an ape!"

"*Morbleu!* Yes? And then?" de Grandin prompted eagerly.

"Then I lunged out with all my might and kicked it on the shins. It released its grip a second, and I beat it. Ran as I never had on the quarter-mile track, jumped into my car and took off down the road with everything wide open. But I got these gashes in my back and arms before I got to the roadster. He made three or four grabs for me, and every one of 'em took the flesh away where his nails raked me. By the time I got home I was almost crazy with fright and pain and loss of blood. I remember kicking at the door and yelling for the folks to open, and then I went out like a light."

The boy paused and regarded us seriously. "You think that I'm the biggest liar out of jail, most likely, but I've been telling you the absolute, straight truth, sirs."

Costello looked skeptical, but de Grandin nodded eagerly, affirmatively. "But certainly you speak the truth, *mon vieux*," he agreed. "Now, tell me, if you can, this *poilu*, this

hairy one, how was he dressed?"

"U'm," Paul wrinkled his brow. "I can't say surely, for it was dark in the woods and I was pretty rattled, but — I — think it was in evening clothes. Yes; I'd swear to it. I saw his white shirt bosom."

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured. "A hairy thing, a fellow who leaps up and down like a mad monkey or a jumping-jack and wears the evening clothes? It is to think, *mes amis*."

"I'll say it is," Costello agreed. "It is to think what sort o' hooch they're servin' to th' youngsters nowadays — or mebbe they can't take it like us old vets o' th' first World War —"

"Dr. Trowbridge is wanted on the 'phone, please," a maid's announcement cut his ponderous irony. "You can take it on this one, if you wish, sir. It's connected with the main line."

"This is Mrs. Comstock, doctor," a voice informed me. "Your cook told us you were at Mrs. Maitland's. Can you come to my house when you leave there? Mr. Manly, my daughter's fiancé, was hurt last night."

"Hurt last night?" I repeated.

"Yes, out by the country club."

"Very well, I'll be right over," I promised, and held out my hand to Professor de Grandin. "Sorry I have to run away," I apologized, "but another man was hurt at the club last night."

"*Pardieu!*" His little round blue eyes bored into mine. "That club, it are a most unhealthy place, *n'est-ce-pas?* May I accompany you? This other man may tell us something that we ought to know."

Young Manly's injury proved to be a gunshot wound inflicted by a small caliber weapon, and was located in the left shoulder. He was reticent concerning it, and neither de Grandin nor I felt inclined to press him insistently, for Mrs. Comstock hovered in the sick room from our entrance till the treatment was concluded.

"*Nom d'un petit porc!*" the little Frenchman muttered as we left the Comstock residence. "He is close-mouthed, that one. Almost, it would appear — *pah!* I talk the rot. Let us go to the morgue, *cher collègue*. You shall drive me there in your motor and tell me what it is you see. Oft times you gentlemen of general practice see things that we specialists cannot because we wear the blinders of our specialties, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

In the cold, uncharitable light of the city mortuary we viewed the remains of poor little Sarah Humphreys. As the newspaper had said, she was disfigured by a score or more of wounds, running, for the most part, down her shoulders and arms in a series of converging lines, and incised deeply

enough to reveal the bone where skin and flesh had been shorn through in places. On throat and neck were five distinct livid patches, one some three inches in size, roughly square, the other four extending in parallel lines almost completely round her neck, terminating in deeply pitted scars, as though the talons of some predatory beast had sunk into her flesh. But the most terrifying item of the grisly sight was the poor girl's face. Repeated blows had hammered her once-pretty features to a purpled level, bits of sand and fine gravel still bedded in the cuticle told how her countenance must have been ground into the earth with terrific force. Never, since my days as emergency hospital interne, had I seen so sickening an array of injuries on a single body.

"And what is it you see, my friend?" the Frenchman asked in a low, raucous whisper. "You look, you meditate. You do think — what?"

"It's terrible," I began, but he cut me off impatiently.

"But certainly. One does not look to see the beautiful in the morgue. I ask for what you see, not for your aesthetic impressions. *Parbleu!*"

"If you want to know what interests me most," I answered, "it is those wounds on her shoulder and arms. Except in degree they're exactly like those which I treated on Paul Maitland last night."

"Ah-ha?" His small blue eyes were dancing with excitement, his cat's-whiskers mustache was bristling more fiercely than ever. "Name of a little blue man! We begin to make the progress. Now" — he touched the livid patches on the dead girl's throat daintily with the tip of a well manicured nail — "these marks, do they tell you something?"

I shook my head. "Possibly the bruise left by some sort of garrote," I hazarded. "They are too long and thick for fingerprints; besides, there's no thumb mark."

"Ha-ha." His laugh was mirthless as that of an actor in a high school play. "No thumb mark, you say? My dear sir, had there been a thumb mark I should have been all at sea. These marks are the stigmata of the truth of young Monsieur Maitland's story. When were you last at *le jardin des plantes*, the how do you say him? — zoölogical garden?"

"The zoo?" I echoed wonderingly.

"*Précisément*, the zoo, as you call him. Have you never noted how the quadrumana take hold of a thing? I tell you, *cher collègue*, it is not very much of an exaggeration to say the thumb is the difference between man and monkey. Man and the chimpanzee grasp objects with the fingers, using the thumb as a fulcrum. The gorilla, the orangutan, the gibbon are all fools, they know not how to use their thumbs. Now see" — again he indicated the bruises on the dead girl's throat — "this large square patch, it is the mark of the heel of the hand, these circling lines, they are the fingers, and these wounds, they are nail prints. Name of an old and very

wicked tom-cat! It was the truth young Maitland told. It was an ape that he met in the wood. An ape in evening clothes! What do you make of that, *hein?*”

“God knows,” I answered helplessly.

“Assuredly,” he nodded solemnly. “*Le bon Dieu* truly knows, but me, I am determined that I shall know, too.” Abruptly he turned from the dead girl and propelled me gently toward the door by the elbow. “No more, no more now,” he declared. “You have your mission of help to the sick to perform; I also have some work to do. If you will take me to police headquarters I shall be obliged to you, and, if the imposition is not too great, may I dwell at your house while I work upon this case? You consent? Good. Until tonight, then, *au ’voir.*”

It was some time after eight o’clock that evening when he came to the house, laden with almost enough bundles to tax a motor truck. “Great Scott, professor,” I exclaimed as he laid his parcels on a convenient chair and gave me a grin which sent the waxed points of his mustache shooting upward like a pair of miniature horns, “have you been buying out the town?”

“Almost,” he answered as he dropped into an easy chair and lit an evil smelling French cigarette. “I have talked much with the grocer, the druggist, the garage man and the tobacconist, and at each place I made purchases. I am, for the time, a new resident of your so charming city of Harrisonville, eager to find out about my neighbors and my new home. I have talked like a garrulous old woman, I have milled over much wordy chaff, but from it I have sifted some good meal, *grâce à Dieu!*”

He fixed me with his curiously unwinking cat-stare as he asked: “You have a Monsieur Katmar as a neighbor, have you not?”

“Yes, I believe there’s such a person here,” I replied, “but I know very little about him.”

“Tell me that little, if you will be so kind.”

“H’m. He’s lived here just about a year, and kept very much to himself. As far as I know he’s made no friends and has been visited by no one but tradesmen. I understand he’s a scientist of some sort and took the old Means place out on the Andover Road so he could pursue his experiments in quiet.”

“One sees,” de Grandin tapped his cigarette case thoughtfully. “So much I have already gathered from my talks with the trades people. Now tell me, if you can, is this Monsieur All-Unknown a friend of the young Manly’s — the gentleman whose wound from gunshot you dressed this morning?”

“Not that I know,” I answered. “I’ve never seen them together. Manly’s a queer, moody sort of chap, never has much to say to anyone. How Millicent Comstock came to

fall in love with him I’ve no idea. He rides well and is highly thought of by her mother, but those are about the only qualifications he has as a husband that I’ve been able to see.”

“He is very strong, that one?”

“I wouldn’t know,” I had to confess.

“Very well, then. Listen at me, if you please. You think de Grandin is a fool, *hein?* Perhaps yes; perhaps no. Today I do other things than talk. I go to the Comstock lady’s house and reconnoiter. In an ash can I find a pair of patent leather dress shoes, very much scratched. I grease the palm of a servant and find out they belong to that Monsieur Manly. In the trash container I make further researches, and find a white-linen dress shirt with blood on it. It is torn about the cuffs and split at the shoulder, that shirt. It, too, I find, belonged to Monsieur Manly. Me, I am like the dealer in old clothes when I talk with Madame Comstock’s servant. I buy that shirt and those shoes from him. Behold!”

From one of his parcels he drew forth a pair of dress shoes and a shirt and spread them for my inspection as if they were curios of priceless value. “In Paris we have ways of making the inanimate talk,” he asserted as he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a bit of folded paper. “That shirt, those shoes, I put them through the degree of the third time, and how they talk to me. *Mordieu*, they gabble like a pair of spinsters over the teacups!” Opening the paper he disclosed three coarse dull-brown hairs, varying from a half inch to three inches in length.

I looked at them curiously. They might have been from a man’s head, for they were too long and straight to be body-hairs, but their texture seemed too harsh for human growth. “U’m,” I commented noncommittally.

“*Précisément*,” he grinned. “You cannot classify them, eh?”

“No,” I admitted. “They’re entirely too coarse to have come from Manly’s head. Besides, they’re almost black; his hair is a distinct brown.”

“My friend,” he leaned toward me and stared unwinkingly into my face, “I have seen hairs like that before. So have you, but you did not recognize them. They are from a gorilla.”

“From a gor — man, you’re raving!” I jerked back. “How could a gorilla’s hair get on young Manly’s shirt?”

“You have the wrong preposition,” he corrected. “They were not on his shirt, but *in* it. Below the neck line, where a bullet had torn through the linen and wounded him. The hairs I found embedded in the dried blood. Look at this garment, if you please” — he held the shirt before me for inspection — “behold how it is split. It has been on a body much too big for it. I tell you, Monsieur Trowbridge, that shirt was worn by the thing — the monster — which killed

that pitiful girl dead on the links last night, which attacked the young Maitland a few minutes later, and — which got paint from Madame Comstock's house on these shoes when it climbed into that house last night.

"You start, you stare? You say to yourself, 'This de Grandin he is crazy like the April-fish, him!' Attend me while I prove each step in the ladder:

"This morning, while you were examining young Monsieur Manly's wound I was examining both him and his room. On his window sill I noted a few scratches — such scrapes as one who drags his legs and feet might make in clambering across the window ledge. I look out of the window, and on the white-painted side of the house I see fresh scratches in the paint. Also I find scratch-marks on the painted iron pipe that carries water from the roof in rainy weather. That pipe runs down the corner of the house near Manly's window, but too far away for a man to reach it from the sill. But if a man has arms as long as my leg, what then? Ah, then he could have made the reach most easily. Yes.

"Now, when I buy those shoes, that shirt, from Madame Comstock's servant, I note both paint and scratches on the patent leather. Later I compare the paint on the shoes with that on the house-side. They are the same.

"Also I note the shirt, how he is blood-stained and all burst-out, as though the man who wore him suddenly expanded and burst through him. I find beast-hairs in the blood stains on the shirt. So, now, you see?"

"I'm hanged if I do," I denied.

He bent forward again, speaking with rapid earnestness: "The Comstock servant tells me more when I quiz him. He tells me, by example, that last night the young Manly was nervous, what you call ill at ease. He complained of headache, backache, he felt what he called rotten. Yes. He went to bed early, and his fiancée went to the country club dance without him. The old madame, she, too, went to bed early.

"Ha, but later in the night — at almost midnight — the young man went for a walk, because, he said, he could not sleep. That is what he told the servant this morning, but" — he paused impressively, then went on, spacing his words carefully — "the servant had been up all night with the toothache, and while he heard the young man come in sometime after midnight, *he did not hear him leave*, as he certainly would have done had he gone out the door.

"And now, consider this: A policeman of the motorcycle tells me he observed the young Manly coming from that Monsieur Kalmar's house, staggering like one drunk. He wonders, that policeman, if Monsieur Kalmar keeps so much to himself because he sells unlicensed liquor after the saloons are closed. What now, *cher collègue*? You say

what?"

"Damn it!" I exploded. "You're piecing out the silliest nonsense story I ever heard, de Grandin. One of us is crazy as hell, and I don't think it's I!"

"Neither of us is crazy, *mon vieux*," he returned gravely, "but men have gone mad with knowing what I know, and madder yet with suspecting what I am beginning to suspect. Will you be good enough to drive me past the house of Monsieur Kalmar?"

A few minutes' run carried us to the lonely dwelling occupied by the eccentric old man whose year's residence had been a twelve months' mystery. "He works late, that one," de Grandin commented as we drove by. "Observe, the light burns in his workshop."

Sure enough, from a window at the rear of the house a shaft of bright light cut the evening shadow, and, as we stopped the car and gazed, we could see Kalmar's bent form, swathed in a laboratory apron, passing and repassing the window. The little Frenchman looked long at the white-draped figure, as if he would imprint its image on his memory, then touched me on the elbow. "Let us go back," he ordered softly, "and as we go I shall tell you a story.

"Before the war that wrecked the world there came to Paris from Vienna one Doctor Beneckendorff. As a man he was intolerable, but as a *savant* without parallel. With my own eyes I saw him do things that in an age less tolerant of learning would have brought him to the stake as a wizard.

"But science is God's tool, my friend. It is not meant that man should play at being God. That man, he went too far. We had to put him in restraint."

"Yes?" I answered, not particularly interested in his narrative. "What did he do?"

"Ha, what did he not do, *pardieu*? Children of the poor were found missing at night. They were nowhere. The gendarmes' search narrowed to the laboratory of this Beneckendorff, and there they found not the poor missing infants, but a half-score ape-creatures, not wholly human nor completely simian, but partaking horribly of each, with fur and hand-like feet, but with the face of something that had once been of mankind. They were all dead, those poor ones, fortunately for them.

"He was adjudged mad as the June-beetle by the court, but ah, my friend, what a mentality, what a fine brain gone bad!

"We shut him up for the safety of the public, and for the safety of humanity we burned his notebooks and destroyed the serums with which he had injected the human babes to turn them into pseudo-apes."

"Impossible!" I scoffed.

"Incredible," he agreed, "but not, unfortunately, impossible — for him. His secret entered the madhouse with him;

but in the turbulence of war he escaped.”

“Good God,” I cried. “You mean this monster-maker is loose on the world?”

He shrugged his shoulders with Gallic fatalism. “Perhaps. All trace of him has vanished, but there are reports he was later seen in the Congo Belgique.”

“But —”

“No buts, my friend, if you will be so kind. To speculate is idle. We have arrived at an *impasse*, but presently we may find our way over, under or around it. One favor, if you will be good enough to grant it: When next you attend the young Manly permit that I accompany you. I would have a few minutes’ talk with Madame Comstock.”

Cornelia Comstock was a lady of imposing physique and even more imposing manner. She browbeat fellow club members, society reporters, even solicitors for “causes,” but to de Grandin she was merely a woman who had information he desired. Prefacing his inquiry with the sort of bow no one but a Frenchman can achieve, he began directly:

“Madame, do you, or did you ever, know one Doctor Beneckendorff?”

Mrs. Comstock gave him a look beside which the basilisk’s most deadly glare would have been languishing. “My good man —” she began as if he were an overcharging taxi driver, but the Frenchman met her cold gaze with one equally frigid.

“You will be good enough to answer me,” he told her. “Primarily I represent the Republic of France; but I also represent humanity. Once more, please, did you ever know a Doctor Beneckendorff?”

Her cold eyes lowered before his unwinking stare, and her thin lips twitched a little. “Yes,” she answered in a voice not much more than a whisper.

“Ah. So. We make progress. When did you know him — in what circumstances? Believe me, you may speak in confidence before me and Dr. Trowbridge, but please speak frankly. The importance is great.”

“I knew Otto Beneckendorff many years ago. He had just come to this country from Europe and was teaching biology at the university near which I lived as a girl. We — we were engaged.”

“And your betrothal, for what reason was it broken, please?”

I could scarcely recognize Cornelia Comstock in the woman who regarded Jules de Grandin with wondering frightened eyes. She trembled as with a chill, and her hands played nervously with the cord of her tortoiseshell pince-nez as she replied: “He — he was impossible, sir. We had vivisectionists, even in those days — but this man seemed to torture poor, defenseless beasts for the love of it. I handed back his ring when he boasted of one of his experiments to

me. He positively seemed to gloat over the memory of the poor brute’s sufferings before it died.”

“*Eh bien*, Madame,” de Grandin shot me a quick glance, “your betrothal, then, was broken. He left you, one assumes, but did he leave in friendship?”

Cornelia Comstock looked as if she were upon the verge of fainting as she whispered, “No, sir. No! He left me with a dreadful threat. I recall his very words — how can I ever forget them? He said, ‘I go, but I return. Nothing but death can cheat me, and when I come back I shall bring on you and yours a horror such as no man has known since the days before Adam.’”

“*Parbleu*,” the little Frenchman almost danced in his excitement. “We have the key to the mystery, almost, Friend Trowbridge!” To Mrs. Comstock he added, “One more little, so small question, if you please, Madame: your daughter is betrothed to one Monsieur Manly. Tell me, when and where did she meet this young man?”

“I introduced them,” Mrs. Comstock’s hauteur showed signs of return. “Mr. Manly came to my husband with letters of introduction from an old schoolmate of his — a fellow student at the university — in Capetown.”

“Capetown, do you say, Madame? Capetown in South Africa? *Nom d’un petit bonhomme!* When was this, if you please?”

“About a year ago. Why —”

“And Monsieur Manly, he has lived with you how long?” his question shut off her offended protest half uttered.

“Mr. Manly is *stopping* with us,” Comstock answered icily. “He is to marry my daughter next month. And, really, sir, I fail to see what interest the Republic of France, which you represent, and humanity, which you also claim to represent, can have in my private affairs. If —”

“This Capetown friend,” the little Frenchman interrupted feverishly. “His name was what, and his business?”

“Really, I must decline —”

“*Tell me!*” He thrust forth both his slender hands as if to shake an answer from her. “It is that I must know. *Nom d’un fusil!* Tell me, at once!”

“We do not know his street and number,” Mrs. Comstock seemed completely cowed, “but his name is Alexander Findlay, and he’s a diamond factor.”

“*Bien.*” The Frenchman struck his heels together and bowed as if hinged at the hips. “Thank you, Madame. You have been most kind and helpful.”

It was past midnight when the ’phone began to ring insistently. “Western Union speaking,” a girl’s voice announced. “Cablegram for Dr. Jules de Grandin. Ready?”

“Yes,” I answered, seizing pencil and pad from the bedside table, “Read it please.”

“No person named Alexander Findlay diamond factor known here no record of such person in last five years. Signed, Burlingame, Inspector of Police.”

“It’s from Capetown, South Africa,” she added as I finished jotting down her dictation.

“Very good,” I answered. “Forward a typed confirmation, please.”

“*Mille tonneres!*” de Grandin exclaimed as I read the message to him. “This makes the picture-puzzle complete, or very nearly so. Attend me, if you please.”

He leaped across the room and extracted a black-leather notebook from his jacket pocket. “Behold,” he consulted a notation, “this Monsieur Kalmar whom no one knows, he has lived here for ten months and twenty-six days — twenty-seven when tomorrow morning comes. This information I have from a realtor whom I interviewed in my rôle as compiler of a directory of scientists.

“The young Monsieur Manly, he has known the Comstocks for ‘about a year.’ He brought them letters from a schoolmate of Monsieur Comstock who proves to be unknown in Capetown. *Parbleu*, my friend, from now on Jules de Grandin turns night into day, if you will be so kind as to take him to a gun merchant from whom he may procure a Winchester rifle. Yes,” he nodded solemnly, “it is so. *Vraiment.*”

Time drifted by, de Grandin going gun in hand each night to keep his lonely vigils, but no developments in the mystery of the Humphreys murder or the attack on Paul Maitland were reported. The date of Millicent Comstock’s wedding approached, and the big house was filled to overflowing with boisterous young folks; still de Grandin kept up his lonely patron — and kept his own counsel.

The night before the wedding day he accosted me as he came down the stairs. “Trowbridge, my friend, you have been most patient with me. If you will come with me tonight I think that I may show you something.”

“All right,” I agreed. “I haven’t the slightest notion what all this folderol’s about, but I’m willing to be convinced.”

A little after twelve we parked the car at a convenient corner and walked quickly to the Comstock place, taking shelter in the shadow of a hedge that marked the boundary of the lawn.

“Lord, what a lovely night!” I exclaimed. “I don’t think I remember ever seeing brighter moonlight —”

“*H’m’m’m’m!*” His interruption was one of those peculiar nasal sounds, half grunt, half whinny, which none but the true Frenchman can produce. “Attend me, if you please, my friend: no man knows what part Tanit the Moon Goddess plays in our affairs, even today when her name is forgotten

by all but dusty-dry antiquaries. This we do know, however; at the entrance of life our appearance is governed by the phases of the moon. You, as a physician with wide obstetrical experience, can confirm that. Also, when the time of exit approaches, the crisis of disease is often governed by the moon’s phase. Why this should be we do not know, but that it is so we know all too well. Suppose, then, the cellular organization of a body be violently, unnaturally, changed, and nature’s whole force be exerted toward a readjustment. May we not suppose that Tanit who affects childbirth and death, might have some force to apply in such a case?”

“I dare say,” I conceded, “but I don’t follow you. Just what is it you expect, or suspect, de Grandin?”

“*Hélas*, nothing,” he answered. “I suspect nothing, I affirm nothing, I deny nothing. I am agnostic, but also hopeful. It may be that I make a great black *lutin* of my own shadow, but he who is prepared for the worst is most agreeably disappointed if the best occurs.” Irrelevantly he added, “That light yonder, it shines from Mademoiselle Millicent’s chamber, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Yes,” I confirmed, wondering if I were on a fool’s errand with an amiable lunatic for company.

The merrymaking in the house had quieted, and one by one the lights went out in the upper windows. I had an almost overwhelming desire to smoke, but dared not strike a match. The little Frenchman fidgeted nervously, fussing with the lock of his Winchester, ejecting and reinserting cartridges, playing a devil’s tattoo on the barrel with his long white fingers.

A wrack of clouds had crept across the moon, but suddenly it swept away, and like a floodlight turned on the scene the bright, pearly moonlight deluged everything. “Ah,” my companion murmured, “now we shall see what we shall see — perhaps.”

As if his words had been a cue there echoed from the house a scream of such wild, frenzied terror as a lost soul might emit when summoned to eternal torment. “*Ah-ha?*” de Grandin exclaimed as he raised his rifle. “Will he come forth or —”

Lights flashed inside the house. The patter of terrified feet sounded among the babel of wondering, questioning voices, but the scream was not repeated.

“Come forth, accursèd one — come forth and face de Grandin!” I heard the small Frenchman mutter, then: “Behold, my friend, he comes — *le gorille!*”

From Millicent’s window, horrible as a devil out of lowest hell, there came a hairy head set low upon a pair of shoulders at least four feet across. An arm which somehow reminded me of a giant snake slipped past the window casing, grasped the cast-iron downspout at the corner of the house, and drew a thickset, hairy body after it. A leg tipped

with a handlike foot was thrown across the sill, and, like a spider from its lair, the monster leaped from the window and hung a moment to the iron pipe, its sable body silhouetted against the white wall of the house.

But what was that, that white-robed thing which hung pendant from the grasp of the beast's free arm? Like a beautiful white moth inert in the grasp of the spider, her fair hair unbound, her silken night robe rent into a motley of tatters, Millicent Comstock lay senseless in the creature's grasp.

"Shoot, man, shoot!" I screamed, but only a thin whisper came from my fear-stiffened lips.

"Silence, *imbécile!*" de Grandin ordered as he pressed his cheek against his gunstock. "Would you give warning of our ambushade?"

Slowly, so slowly it seemed an hour was consumed in the process, the great primate descended the water-pipe, leaping the last fifteen feet of the descent and crouching on the moonlit lawn, its small red eyes glaring malignantly, as if it challenged the world for possession of its prey.

The bellow of de Grandin's rifle almost deafened me, and the smokeless powder's flash burned a gash in the night. He threw the loading mechanism feverishly, and fired a second time.

The monster staggered drunkenly against the house as the first shot sounded. At the second it dropped Millicent to the lawn and uttered a cry which was part roar, part snarl. Then, one of its great arms trailing helplessly, it leaped toward the rear of the house in a series of long, awkward bounds which reminded me, absurdly, of the bouncing of a huge inflated ball.

"Attend her, if you please, my friend," de Grandin ordered as we reached Millicent's inert form. "I shall make *Monsieur le Gorille* my personal business!"

I bent above the senseless girl and put my ear to her breast. Faint but perceptible, I made out a heart-beat, and lifted her in my arms.

"Dr. Trowbridge!" Mrs. Comstock, followed by a throng of frightened guests, met me at the front door. "What's happened? Good heavens, Millicent!" Seizing her daughter's flaccid hand in both her own she burst into a flood of tears. "Oh, what's happened? What is it?"

"Help me get Millicent to bed, then get some smelling salts and brandy," I commanded, ignoring her questions.

A little later, with restoratives applied and electric pads at her feet and back, the girl showed signs of waking. "Get out — all of you!" I ordered. Hysterical women, especially patients' mothers, are rather less than useless when consciousness returns after profound shock.

"Oh — oh, the ape-thing! The dreadful ape-thing!" cried

Millicent in a small, childish whimper. "It's got me — help—"

"It's all right, dear," I comforted. "You're safe, safe home in your own bed, with old Dr. Trowbridge standing by." It was not till several hours later that I realized her first waking exclamation had been almost identical to Paul Maitland's when he revived from his faint.

"Dr. Trowbridge," Mrs. Comstock whispered from the bedroom door. "We've looked all over, but there's no sign of Mr. Manly. Do — do you suppose anything could have happened to him?"

"I think it quite likely that something could — and did," I answered curtly, turning from her to smooth her daughter's fluttering hand.

"*Par le barbe d'un bouc vert!*" de Grandin exclaimed as, disheveled, but with a light of exhilaration in his eyes, he met me in the Comstock hall some two hours later. "Madame Comstock, you are to be congratulated. But for my so brave colleague Dr. Trowbridge and my own so very clever self your charming daughter would have shared the fate of the poor Sarah Humphreys.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, I have not been quite frank with you. I have not told you all. But this thing, it was so incredible, so seemingly impossible, that you would not have believed. *Parbleu*, I do not quite believe it myself, even though I know that it is so!

"Let us recapitulate: When this *sacré* Beneckendorff was in the madhouse he raved continually that his confinement cheated him of his revenge — the revenge he had so long planned against one Madame Cornélie Comstock of America.

"We French are logical, not like you English and Americans. We write down and keep for reference even what a madman says. Why not? It may be useful some day, who knows?

"Now, Friend Trowbridge, some time ago I told you this Beneckendorff was reported in the Congo Belgique. Yes? But I did not tell you he were reported in charge of a young, half-grown gorilla. No.

"When this so unfortunate Mademoiselle Humphreys is killed in that so terrible manner I remember my own African experiences, and I say to me, 'Ah-ha, Jules de Grandin, it look as if *Monsieur le Gorille* has had a finger in this pie.' And thereupon I ask to know if any such have escape from a circus or zoo nearby. All answers are no.

"Then that Sergeant Costello, he bring me to this so splendid *savant*, Dr. Trowbridge, and with him I go to interview the young Monsieur Maitland who have encountered much strangeness where the young Humphreys

girl met death.

“And what does the young Maitland tell me? He tells of something that have hair, that jump up and down like an enraged ape and that act like a gorilla, but wears man’s evening clothes, *parbleu!* It is to think. No gorilla have escaped, yet what *seems* like a gorilla — in gentleman’s evening clothes, *Mordieu!* — have been encountered on the golf links.

“Thereupon I search my memory. I remember that madman and the poor infants he has turned into half-ape things by administration of his so vile serums. I say to me, ‘If he can turn man-children into monkey-things, for why can he not turn ape-things into men-things. *Hein?*’

“Then I find one Dr. Kalmar who has lived here for a year, almost, and of whom no one knows anything. I search about, I make the inquiries, and learn one man has been seen coming to and from his place in secret. Also, in this same man’s discarded shirt I find the hairs of a gorilla. *Morbleu!* I think some more, and what I think is not particularly pleasant.

“I reason: suppose this serum which may make a man-thing of an ape-thing is not permanent in its effect? What then? If it is not renewed at stated intervals the man becomes an ape again. You follow? *Bien.*

“Now, the other day I learn something which gives me to think some more. This Beneckendorff, he raves against one Madame Comstock. You, Madame, admit you once knew him. He had loved you as he understood love. Now he hated you as only he could hate. Is it not against you he plans this devilish scheme? I think it quite possible.

“And so I send a cablegram — never mind to whom, Dr. Trowbridge knows that — and I got the answer I expect and fear. The man in whose shirt I find those hairs of the gorilla is no man at all, he is one terrible masquerade of a man. So. Now, I reason, ‘Suppose this masquerading monkey-thing do not get his serum as expected, what will he do?’ I fear to answer my own question, but I make myself do so: *Voilà,* I buy me a rifle.

“This gun has bullets of soft lead, and I make them even more effective by cutting a V-shaped notch in each of their heads. When they strike something they spread out and make a nobly deadly wound.

“Tonight what I have feared, but yet expected, comes to pass. *Ha,* but I am ready, me! I shoot, and each time I shoot my bullet tears a great hole in the ape-thing. He drops his prey and seeks the only shelter that his little ape-brain knows, the house of Dr. Kalmar. Yes.

“I follow all quickly, and reach the house almost as soon as he. He is maddened with the pain of my bullets, and in his rage he tears this so vile Kalmar into little bits, even as he has done to poor young Sarah Humphreys. And I, arriving with my gun, dispatch him with another shot. *C’est une affaire finie.*

“But before I come back here I recognize the corpse of this Dr. Kalmar. Who is he? Who but the escaped lunatic, the monster-maker, the entirely detestable Dr. Otto Beneckendorff? Before I leave I destroy the devil’s brews with which he makes monkeys of men and men of monkeys. It is far better that their secret be forever lost.

“I think Mademoiselle Humphreys was unfortunate enough to meet this ape-man when he was on his way to Dr. Kalmar’s, as he had been taught to come. As a man, perhaps, he did not know this Kalmar, or, as we know him, Beneckendorff; but as a brute he knew no other man but Beneckendorff — his master, the man who brought him from Africa.

“When he came upon the poor girl on the golf links she screamed in terror, and at once his savageness became uppermost. Believe me, the gorilla is more savage than the bear, the lion or the tiger. Therefore, in his anger, he tear her to pieces. He also tried to tear the young Monsieur Maitland, but luckily for us he failed, and so we got the story which put us on his trail.

“*Voilà.* it is finished. Anon I shall report to the good Sergeant Costello and show him the bodies at the Kalmar house. Also I shall cable back to Paris. The Ministry of Health will be glad to know that Beneckendorff is no more.”

“But, Monsieur de Grandin,” Mrs. Comstock demanded, “who was this man — or ape — you killed?”

I held my breath as he fixed his cold stare on her, then sighed with relief as he answered. “I can not say, Madame.”

“Well,” Mrs. Comstock’s natural disputatiousness came to the surface, “I think it’s very *queer* —”

His laugh was positively Olympian. “*You* think it very queer, Madame? *Mort d’un rat mort,* as Balkis said of Solomon’s magnificence, the half has not been told you!”

“When the police look for Monsieur Manly — *mon dieu,* what a name for an ape-thing! — they will be puzzled,” he told me as we walked to my car. “I must warn Costello to enter his disappearance as a permanently unsolved case. No one will ever know the true facts but you, I and the Ministry of Health, Friend Trowbridge. The public would not believe, even if we told them.”

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

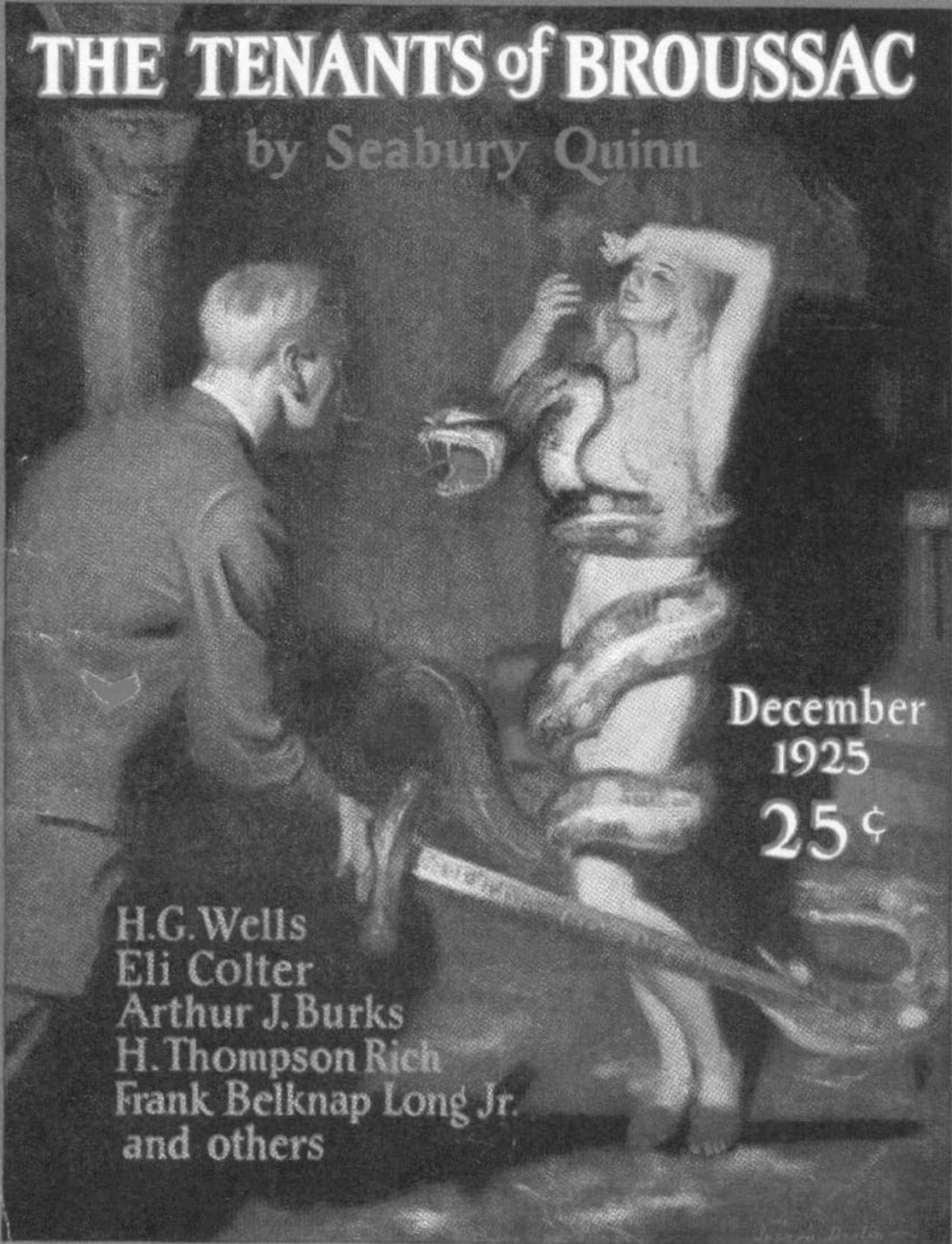
THE TENANTS of BROUSSAC

by Seabury Quinn

December
1925

25¢

H.G. Wells
Eli Colter
Arthur J. Burks
H. Thompson Rich
Frank Belknap Long Jr.
and others



The Tenants of Broussac

THE RUE DES BATAILLES was justifying its name. From my table on the narrow sidewalk before the Café de Liberté I could view three distinct fights alternately, or simultaneously. Two cock-sparrows contended noisily for possession of a wisp of straw, a girl with unbelievably small feet and incredibly thick ankles addressed a flood of gamin abuse to an oily-haired youth who wore a dirty black-silk muffler in lieu of a collar. At the curb a spade-bearded patron, considerably the worse for *vin ordinaire*, haggled volubly with an unshaven taxi chauffeur over an item of five francs.

I had dropped my cigar end into my empty coffee cup, motioned the waiter for my *addition* and shoved back my chair, when a light but commanding tap fell on my shoulder.

“Now for it,” I muttered, feeling sure some passing bravo, aching for a fight, had chosen me for his attentions. Turning suddenly, I looked straight into a pair of light blue eyes, round as a cat’s, and just missing a humorous expression because of their challenging directness. Beneath the eyes was a straw-colored mustache, trimly waxed into a horizontal line and bristling so belligerently as to heighten its wearer’s resemblance to a truculent tomcat. Below the feline mustache was a grin wider and friendlier than any I’d seen in Paris.

“*Par la barbe d’un bouc vert!*” swore my accoster. “If it is not truly my friend, the good Dr. Trowbridge, then I am first cousin to the Emperor of China.”

“Why, de Grandin,” I exclaimed, grasping his small sinewy hand, “fancy meeting you this way! I called at the *École de Médecine* the day after I arrived, but they told me you were off on one of your wild goose chases and only heaven knew when you’d be back.”

He tweaked the points of his mustache alternately as he answered with another grin. “But of course! Those dull-witted ones would term my researches in the domain of inexact science a wild goose hunt. *Pardieu!* They have no vision beyond their test tubes and retorts, those ones.”

“What is it this time?” I asked as we caught step. “A criminal investigation or a ghost-breaking expedition?”

“*Morbleu!*” he answered with a chuckle; “I think, perhaps, it is a little of both. Listen, my friend, do you know the country about Rouen?”

“Not I,” I replied. “This is my first trip to France, and I’ve been here only three days.”

“Ah, yes,” he returned, “your ignorance of our geography is truly deplorable; but it can be remedied. Have you an

inflexible program mapped out?”

“No. This is my first vacation in ten years — since 1915 — and I’ve made no plans, except to get as far away from medicine as possible.”

“Good!” he applauded. “I can promise you a complete change from your American practice, my friend, such a change as will banish all thoughts of patients, pills and prescriptions entirely from your head. Will you join me?”

“Hm, that depends,” I temporized. “What sort of case are you working on?” Discretion was the better part of acceptance when talking with Jules de Grandin, I knew. Educated for the profession of medicine, one of the foremost anatomists and physiologists of his generation, and a shining light in the University of Paris faculty, this restless, energetic little scientist had chosen criminology and occult investigation as a recreation from his vocational work, and had gained almost as much fame in these activities as he had in the medical world. During the war he had been a prominent, though necessarily anonymous, member of the Allied Intelligence Service; since the Armistice he had penetrated nearly every quarter of the globe on special missions for the French Ministry of Justice. It behooved me to move cautiously when he invited me to share an exploit with him; the trail might lead to India, Greenland or Tierra del Fuego before the case was closed.

“*Eh bien,*” he laughed. “You are ever the old cautious one, Friend Trowbridge. Never will you commit yourself until you have seen blueprints and specifications of the enterprise. Very well, then, listen:

“Near Rouen stands the very ancient château of the de Broussac family. Parts of it were built as early as the Eleventh Century; none of it is less than two hundred years old. The family has dwindled steadily in wealth and importance until the last two generations have been reduced to living on the income derived from renting the château to wealthy foreigners.

“A common story, *n’est-ce-pas?* Very well, wait, comes now the uncommon part: Within the past year the Château Broussac has had no less than six tenants; no renter has remained in possession for more than two months, and each tenancy has terminated in a tragedy of some sort.

“Stories of this kind get about; houses acquire unsavory reputations, even as people do, and tenants are becoming hard to find for the château. Monsieur Bergeret, the de Broussac family’s *avoue*, has commissioned me to discover

the reason for these interrupted tenancies; he desires me to build a dam against the flood of ill fortune which makes tenants scarce at the château and threatens to pauperize one of the oldest and most useless families of France.”

“You say the tenancies were terminated by tragedies?” I asked, more to make conversation than from interest.

“But yes,” he answered. “The cases, as I have their histories, are like this:

“Monsieur Alvarez, a wealthy Argentine cattle raiser, rented the château last April. He moved in with his family, his servants and entirely too many cases of champagne. He had lived there only about six weeks when, one night, such of the guests as retained enough soberness to walk to bed missed him at the goodnight round of drinks. He was also missing the following morning, and the following night. Next day a search was instituted, and a servant found his body in the chapel of the oldest part of the château. *Morbleu*, all the doctors in France could not reassemble him! Literally, my friend, he was strewn about the sanctuary; his limbs tom off, his head severed most untidily at the neck, every bone in his trunk smashed like Crockery in a china store struck by lightning. He was like a doll pulled to pieces by a peevish child. *Voilà*, the Alvarez family decamped the premises and the Van Brundt family moved in.

“That Monsieur Van Brundt had amassed a fortune selling supplies to the *sale Boche* during the war. *Eh bien*, I could not wish him the end he had. Too much food, too much wine, too little care of his body he took. One night he rose from his bed and wandered in the château grounds. In the place where the ancient moat formerly was they found him, his thick body thin at last, and almost twice its natural length — squeezed out like a tube of *creme* from a lady’s dressing table trodden under foot by an awkward servant. He was not a pretty sight, my friend.

“The other tenants, too, all left when some member of their families or suites met a terrifying fate. There was Simpson, the Englishman, whose crippled son fell from the battlements to the old courtyard, and Biddle, the American, whose wife now shrieks and drools in a madhouse, and Muset, the banker from Montreal, who woke one night from a doze in his study chair to see Death staring him in the eye.

“Now Monsieur Luke Bixby, from Oklahoma, resides at Broussac with his wife and daughter, and — I wait to hear of a misfortune in their midst.

“You will come with me? You will help me avert peril from a fellow countryman?”

“Oh, I suppose so,” I agreed. One part of France appealed to me as strongly as another, and de Grandin was never a dull companion.

“Ah, good,” he exclaimed, offering his hand in token of

our compact. “Together, *mon vieux*, we shall prove such a team as the curse of Broussac shall find hard to contend with.”

2

The sun was well down toward the horizon when our funny little train puffed officiously into Rouen the following day. The long European twilight had dissolved into darkness, and oblique shadows slanted from the trees in the nascent moonlight as our hired *moteur* entered the château park.

“Good evening, Monsieur Bixby,” de Grandin greeted as we followed the servant into the great hallway. “I have taken the liberty to bring a compatriot of yours, Dr. Trowbridge, with me to aid in my researches.” He shot me a meaning glance as he hurried on. “Your kindness in permitting me the facilities of the château library is greatly appreciated, I do assure you.”

Bixby, a big, full-fleshed man with ruddy face and drooping mustache, smiled amiably. “Oh, that’s all right, Monsoor,” he answered. “There must be a couple o’ million books stacked up in there, and I can’t read a one of ’em. But I’ve got to pay rent on ’em, just the same, so I’m mighty glad you, or someone who savvies the lingo, can put ’em to use.”

“And Madame Bixby, she is well, and the so charming *Mademoiselle*, she, too, is in good health, I trust?”

Our host looked worried. “To tell you the truth, she ain’t,” he replied. “Mother and I had reckoned a stay in one of these old houses here in France would be just the thing for her, but it seems like she ain’t doin’ so well as we’d hoped. Maybe we’d better try Switzerland for a spell; they say the mountain air there ...”

De Grandin bent forward eagerly. “What is the nature of *Mademoiselle*’s indisposition?” he asked. “Dr. Trowbridge is one of your America’s most famous physicians, perhaps he...” He paused significantly.

“That so?” Bixby beamed on me. “I’d kind o’ figured you was one of them doctors of philosophy we see so many of round here, ’stead of a regular doctor. Now, if you’d be so good as to look at Adrienne, Doc, I’d take it right kindly. Will you come this way? I’ll see supper’s ready by the time you get through with her.

He led us up a magnificent stairway of ancient carved oak, down a corridor paneled in priceless wainscot, and knocked gently at a high-arched door of age-blackened wood. “Adrienne, darlin’,” he called in a huskily tender voice, “here’s a doctor to see you — an American doctor, honey. Can you see him?”

“Yes,” came the reply from beyond the door, and we entered a bedroom as large as a barrack, furnished with

articles of antique design worth their weight in gold to any museum rich enough to buy them.

Fair-haired and violet-eyed, slender to the borderline of emaciation, and with too high flush on her cheeks, Bixby's daughter lay propped among a heap of real-lace pillows on the great carved bed, the white of her thin throat and arms only a shade warmer than the white of her silk nightdress.

Her father tiptoed from the room with clumsy care and I began my examination, observing her heart and lung action by auscultation and palpation, taking her pulse and estimating her temperature as accurately as possible without my clinical thermometer. Though she appeared suffering from fatigue, there was no evidence of functional or organic weakness in any of her organs.

"Hm," I muttered, looking as professionally wise as possible, "just how long have you felt ill, Miss Bixby?"

The girl burst into a storm of tears. "I'm not ill," she denied hotly. "I'm not — oh, why won't you all go away and leave me alone? I don't know what's the matter with me. I — I just want to be let alone!" She buried her face in a pillow and her narrow shoulders shook with sobs.

"Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered, "a tonic — something simple, like a glass of sherry with meals — is indicated, I think. Meantime, let us repair to the so excellent supper which waits below."

We repaired. There was nothing else to do. His advice was sound, I knew, for all the physician's skill is powerless to cheer a young woman who craves the luxury of being miserable.

3

"Find anything serious, Doc?" Bixby asked as de Grandin and I seated ourselves in the paneled dining hall of the château.

"No," I reassured him. "She seems a little run down, but there's certainly nothing wrong which can't be corrected by a light tonic, some judicious exercise and plenty of rest."

"Uh-huh?" he nodded, brightening. "I've been right smart worried over her, lately.

"You know, we wasn't always rich. Up to a couple o' years ago we was poor as church mice — land poor, in the bargain. Then, when they begun findin' oil all round our place, Mother kept at me till I started some drillin', too, and darned if we didn't bring in a gusher first crack outa the box.

"Adrienne used to teach school when we was ranchin' it — tryin' to, rather — an' she an' a young lawyer, name o' Ray Keefer, had it all fixed up to get married.

"Ray was a good, upstandin' boy, too. Had a considerable

practice worked up over Bartlesville way, took his own company overseas durin' the war, an' would a' been ran for the legislature in a little while, like as not. But when we started takin' royalties on our leases at the rate of about three hundred dollars a week, Mother, she ups and says he warn't no fittin' match for our daughter.

"Then she and Adrienne had it hot an' heavy, with me stayin' outa the fuss an' bein' neutral, as far as possible. Mother was all for breakin' the engagement off short, Adrienne was set on gettin' married right away, an' they finally compromised by agreein' to call a truce for a year while Ray stayed home an' looked after his practice an' Adrienne come over here to Europe with Mother an' me to see the world an' 'have her mind broadened by travel,' as Mother says.

"She's been gettin' a letter from Ray at every stop we made since we left home, an' sendin' back answers just as regular, till we come here. Lately she ain't seemed to care nothin' about Ray, one way or the other. Don't answer his letters — half the time don't trouble to open 'em, even, an' goes around the place as if she was sleep-walkin'. Seems kind o' peaked an' run down, like, too. We've been right worried over her. You're sure it ain't consumption, or nothin' like that, Doc?" He looked anxiously at me again.

"Have no fear, Monsieur," de Grandin answered for me. "Dr. Trowbridge and I will give the young lady our greatest care; rest assured, we shall effect a complete cure. We ..."

Two shots, following each other in quick succession, sounded from the grounds outside, cutting short his words. We rushed to the entrance, meeting a breathless gamekeeper in the corridor. "*Le serpent, le serpent!*" he exclaimed excitedly, rushing up to Bixby. "*Ohé, Monsieur, un serpent monstrueux, dans le jardin!*"

"What is it you say?" de Grandin demanded. "A serpent in the garden? Where, when; how big?"

The fellow spread his arms to their fullest reach, extending his fingers to increase the space compassed. "A great, a tremendous serpent, *Monsieur*," he panted. "Greater than the boa constrictor in the Paris menagerie — ten meters long, at the shortest!"

"*Pardieu*, a snake thirty feet long?" de Grandin breathed incredulously. "Come, *mon enfant*, take us to the spot where you saw this so great zoological wonder."

"Here, 'twas here I saw him, with my own two eyes," the man almost screamed in his excitement, pointing to a small copse of evergreens growing close beside the château wall. "See, it's here the shots I fired at him cut the bushes" — he pointed to several broken limbs where buckshot from his fowling piece had crashed through the shrubs.

"Here? *Mon Dieu!*" muttered de Grandin.

"Huh!" Bixby produced a plug of tobacco and bit off a

generous mouthful. “If you don’t lay off that brandy they sell down at the village you’ll be seein’ pink elephants roostin’ in the trees pretty soon. A thirty-foot snake! In this country? Why, we don’t grow ’em that big in Oklahoma! Come on, gentlemen, let’s get to bed; this feller’s snake didn’t come out o’ no hole in the wall, he came out a bottle!”

4

Mrs. Bixby, a buxom woman with pale eyes and tinted hair, had small courtesy to waste on us next morning at breakfast. A physician from America who obviously did not enjoy an ultra fashionable practice at home, and an undersized foreigner with a passion for old books, bulked of small importance in her price-marked world. Bixby was taciturn with the embarrassed silence of a wife-ridden man before strangers, and de Grandin and I went into the library immediately following the meal without any attempt at making table talk.

My work consisted, for the most part, of lugging ancient volumes in scuffed bindings from the high shelves and piling them on the table before my colleague. After one or two attempts I gave over the effort to read them, since those not in archaic French were in monkish Latin, both of which were as unintelligible to me as Choctaw.

The little Frenchman, however, dived into the moldering tomes like a gourmet attacking a feast, making voluminous notes, nodding his head furiously as statement after statement in the books seemed to confirm some theory of his, or muttering an occasional approving “*Morbleu!*” or “*Pardieu!*”

“Friend Trowbridge,” he looked up from the dusty book spread before him and fixed me with his unwinking stare, “is it not time you saw our fair patient? Go to her, my friend, and whether she approves or whether she objects, apply the stethoscope to her breast, and, while you do so, *examine her torso for bruises.*”

“Bruises?” I echoed.

“Precisely, exactly, quite so!” he shot back. “Bruises, I have said it. They may be of the significance, they may not, but if they are present I desire to know it. I have an hypothesis.”

“Oh, very well,” I agreed, and went to find my stethoscope.

Though she had not been present at breakfast, I scarcely expected to find Adrienne Bixby in bed, for it was nearly noon when I rapped at her door.

“*S-s-s-sh, Monsieur le Docteur,*” cautioned the maid who answered my summons. “*Mademoiselle* is still asleep. She

is exhausted, the poor, pretty one.”

“Who is it, Roxanne?” Adrienne demanded in a sleepy, querulous voice. “Tell them to go away.”

I inserted my foot in the door and spoke softly to the maid. “*Mademoiselle* is more seriously ill than she realizes; it is necessary that I make an examination.”

“Oh, good morning, doctor,” the girl said as I pushed past the maid and approached the bed. Her eyes widened with concern as she saw the stethoscope dangling from my hand. “Is — is there anything the matter — seriously the matter with me?” she asked. “My heart? My lungs?”

“We don’t know yet,” I evaded. “Very often, you know, symptoms which seem of no importance prove of the greatest importance; then, again, we often find that signs which seem serious at first mean nothing at all. That’s it, just lie back, it will be over in a moment.”

I placed the instrument against her thin chest, and, as I listened to the accelerated beating of her healthy young heart, glanced quickly down along the line of her ribs beneath the low neckband of her night robe.

“Oh, oh, doctor, what is it?” the girl cried in alarm, for I had started back so violently that one of the earphones was shaken from my head. Around the young girl’s body, over the ribs, was *an ascending livid spiral*, definitely marked, as though a heavy rope had been wound about her, then drawn taut.

“How did you get that bruise?” I demanded, tucking my stethoscope into my pocket.

A quick flush mantled her neck and cheeks, but her eyes were honest as she answered simply, “I don’t know, doctor. It’s something I can’t explain. When we first came here to Broussac I was as well as could be; we’d only been here about three weeks when I began to feel all used up in the morning. I’d go to bed early and sleep late and spend most of the day lying around, but I never seemed to get enough rest. I began to notice these bruises about that time, too. First they were on my arm, about the wrist or above the elbow — several times all the way up. Lately they’ve been around my waist and body, sometimes on my shoulders, too, and every morning I feel tireder than the day before. Then — then” — she turned her face from me and tears welled in her eyes — “I don’t seem to be interested in th-things the way I used to be. Oh, doctor, I wish I were dead! I’m no earthly good, and ...”

“Now, now,” I soothed. “I know what you mean when you say you’ve lost interest in ‘things’. There’ll be plenty of interest when you get back to Oklahoma again, young lady.”

“Oh, doctor, are we going back, really? I asked Mother if

we mightn't yesterday and she said Dad had leased this place for a year and we'd have to stay until the lease expired. Do you mean she's changed her mind?"

"M'm, well," I temporized, "perhaps you won't leave Broussac right away; but you remember that old saying about Mohammed and the mountain? Suppose we were to import a little bit of Oklahoma to France, what then?"

"No!" She shook her head vigorously and her eyes filled with tears again. "I don't want Ray to come here. This is an evil place, doctor. It makes people forget all they ever loved and cherished. If he came here he might forget me ..." as the sentence dissolved in a fresh flood of tears.

"Well, well," I comforted, "we'll see if we can't get Mother to listen to medical advice."

"Mother never listened to anybody's advice," she sobbed as I closed the door softly and hurried downstairs to tell de Grandin my discovery.

5

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin swore excitedly as I concluded my recitation. "A bruise? A bruise about her so white body, and before that on her arms? *Non d'un nom!* My friend, this plot, it acquires the thickness. What do you think?"

"M'm." I searched my memory for long-forgotten articles in the *Medical Times*. "I've read of these stigmata appearing on patients' bodies. They were usually connected with the presence of some wasting disease and an abnormal state of mind, such as extreme religious fervor, or ..."

"Ah, bah!" he cut in. "Friend Trowbridge, you can not measure the wind with a yardstick nor weigh a thought on the scales. We deal with something not referable to clinical experiments in this case, or I am much mistaken."

"Why, how do you mean ...?" I began, but he turned away with an impatient shrug.

"I mean nothing, now," he answered. "The wise judge is he who gives no decision until he has heard all the testimony." Again he commenced reading from the huge volume open before him, making notations on a slip of paper as his eyes traveled rapidly down the lines of faded type.

Mrs. Bixby did not join us at dinner that evening, and, as a consequence, the conversation was much less restrained. Coffee was served in the small corridor connecting the wide entrance hall with the library, and, under the influence of a hearty meal, three kinds of wine and several glasses of *liqueur*, our host expanded like a flower in the sun.

"They tell me Jo-an of Arch was burned to death in Ruin," he commented as he bit the end from a cigar and elevated one knee over the arm of his chair. "Queer way to treat a girl who'd done so much for 'em, seems to me. The

guide told us she's been made a saint or somethin' since then, though."

"Yes," I assented idly, "having burned her body and anathematized her soul, the ecclesiastical authorities later decided the poor child's spirit was unjustly condemned. Too bad a little of their sense of justice wasn't felt by the court which tried her in Rouen."

De Grandin looked quizzically at me as he pulled his waxed mustaches alternately, for all the world like a tomcat combing his whiskers. "Throw not too many stones, my friend," he cautioned. "Nearly five hundred years have passed since the Maid of Orleans was burned as a heretic. Today your American courts convict high school-teachers for heresy far less grave than that charged against our Jeanne. We may yet see the bones of your so estimable Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin exhumed from their graves and publicly burned by your heretic-baiters of this today. No, no, my friend, it is not for us of today to sneer at the heretic-burners of yesterday. Torquemada's body lies in the tomb these many years, but his spirit still lives. *Mon Dieu!* What is it that I say? 'His spirit still lives?' *Sacré nom d'une souris!* That may be the answer!" And, as if propelled by a spring, he bounded from his seat and rushed madly down the corridor into the library.

"De Grandin, what's the matter?" I asked as I followed him into the book-lined room.

"*Non, non,* go away, take a walk, go to the devil!" he shot back, staring wildly around the room, his eager eyes searching feverishly for a particular volume. "You vex me, you annoy me, you harass me; I would be alone at this time. Get out!"

Puzzled and angered by his brusqueness, I turned to leave, but he called over his shoulder as I reached the door: "Friend Trowbridge, please interview Monsieur Bixby's chef — and obtain from him a sack of flour. Bring it here to me in not less than an hour, please."

6

"Forgive my rudeness, Friend Trowbridge," he apologized when I re-entered the library an hour or so later, a parcel of flour from Bixby's pantry under my arm. "I had a thought which required all my concentration at the time, and any disturbing influence — even your own always welcome presence — would have distracted my attention. I am sorry and ashamed I spoke so."

"Oh, never mind that," I replied. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

He nodded emphatically. "*Mais oui,*" he assured me. "All which I sought — and more. Now let us to work. First I would have you go with me into the garden where that

gamekeeper saw the serpent last night.”

“But he couldn’t have seen such a snake,” I protested as we left the library. “We all agreed the fellow was drunk.”

“Surely, exactly; of course,” he conceded, nodding vigorously. “Undoubtedly the man had drunk brandy. Do you recall, by any chance, the wise old Latin proverb, *‘In vino veritas’*?”

“‘In wine is truth’?” I translated tentatively. “How could the fact that the man was drunk when he imagined he saw a thirty-foot snake in a French garden make the snake exist when we know perfectly well such a thing could not be?”

“*Oh la, la,*” he chuckled. “What a sober-sided one you are, *cher ami*. It was here the fellow declared *Monsieur le Serpent* emerged, was it not? See, here are the shot-marks on the shrubs.”

He bent, parting the bushes carefully, and crawled toward the château’s stone foundation. “Observe,” he commanded in a whisper, “between these stones the cement has weathered away, the opening is great enough to permit passage of a sixty-foot serpent, did one desire to come this way. No?”

“True enough,” I agreed, “but the driveway out there would give room for the great Atlantic sea serpent himself to crawl about. You don’t contend he’s making use of it, though, do you?”

He tapped his teeth thoughtfully with his forefinger, paying no attention to my sarcasm. “Let us go within,” he suggested, brushing the leaf-mold carefully from his knees as he rose.

We re-entered the house and he led the way through one winding passage after another, unlocking a succession of nail-studded doors with the bunch of jangling iron keys he obtained from Bixby’s butler.

“And here is the chapel,” he announced when half an hour’s steady walk brought us to a final age-stained door, “It was here they found that so unfortunate Monsieur Alvarez. A gloomy place in which to die, truly.”

It was, indeed. The little sanctuary lay dungeon-deep, without windows or, apparently, any means of external ventilation. Its vaulted roof was composed of a series of equilateral arches whose stringers rose a scant six feet above the floor and rested on great blocks of flint carved in hideous designs of dragons’ and griffins’ heads. The low altar stood against the farther wall, its silver crucifix blackened with age and all but eaten away with erosion. Row on row, about the low upright walls, were lined the crypts containing the coffins of long dead de Broussacs, each closed with a marble slab engraved with the name and title of its occupant. A pall of cobwebs, almost as heavy as woven fabrics, festooned from vaulted ceiling to floor,

intensifying the air of ghostly gloom which hung about the chamber like the acrid odor of ancient incense.

My companion set the flickering candle-lantern upon the floor beside the doorway and broke open the package of flour. “See, Friend Trowbridge, do as I do,” he directed, dipping his hand into the flour and sprinkling the white powder lightly over the flagstone pavement of the chapel. “Back away toward the door,” he commanded, “and on no account leave a footprint in the meal. We must have a fair, unsoiled page for our records.”

Wonderingly, but willingly, I helped him spread a film of flour over the chapel floor from altar-step to doorway, then turned upon him with a question: “What do you expect to find in this meal, de Grandin? Surely not footprints. No one who did not have to would come to this ghastly place.”

He nodded seriously at me as he picked up his lantern and the remains of the package of flour. “Partly right and partly wrong you are, my friend. One may come who must, one may come who wants. Tomorrow, perhaps, we shall know more than we do today.”

7

I was in the midst of my toilet when he burst into my bedroom next morning, feline mustache bristling, his round eyes fairly snapping with excitement. “Come, *mon vieux,*” he urged, tugging at my arm as a nervous terrier might have urged his master to go for a romp, “come and see; right away, quick, at once, immediately!”

We hastened through the château’s modern wing, passed the doors blocking the corridors of the fifteenth century buildings and came at last to the eleventh century chapel. De Grandin paused before the oak-and-iron door like a showman about to raise the curtain from an exhibit as he lit the candle in his lantern, and I heard his small, even teeth clicking together in a chill of suppressed excitement. “Behold, *mon ami,*” he commanded in a hoarse whisper more expressive of emotion than a shout, “behold what writings are on the page which we did prepare!”

I looked through the arched doorway, then turned to him, dumb with surprise.

Leading from the chapel entrance, and ending at the center of the floor, directly before the altar, was the unmistakable trail of little, naked feet. No woodcraft was needed to trace the walker’s course. She had entered the sanctuary, marched straight and unswervingly to a spot about fifteen feet from the altar, but directly before it, then turned about slowly in a tiny circle, no more than two feet in diameter, for at that point the footprints were so superimposed on each other that all individual traces were lost.

But the other track which showed in the strewn flour was less easily explained. Beginning at a point directly opposite the place the footprints ceased, this other trail ran some three or four inches wide in a lazy zigzag, as though a single automobile wheel had been rolled in an uncertain course across the floor by someone staggeringly drunk. But no prints of feet followed the wheel-track. The thing had apparently traversed the floor of its own volition.

“See,” de Grandin whispered, “flour-prints lead away from the door” — he pointed to a series of white prints, plainly describing bare heels and toes, leading up the passage from the chapel floor, diminishing in clearness with each step until they faded out some ten paces toward the modern part of the château. “And see,” he repeated, drawing me inside the chapel to the wall where the other, inexplicable, track began, “a trail leads outward here, too.”

Following his pointing finger with my eye I saw what I had not noticed before, a cleft in the chapel wall some five inches wide, evidently the result of crumbling cement and gradually sinking foundation stones. At the entrance of the fissure a tiny pile of flour showed, as though some object previously dusted with the powder had been forced through the crevice.

I blinked stupidly at him. “Wh-what is this track?” I asked in bewilderment.

“Ah, bah!” he exclaimed disgustedly. “The blindest man is he who shuts his own eyes, my friend. Did you never, as a boy, come upon the trail of a serpent in the dusty road?”

“A snake track” — my mind refused the evidence of my eyes — “but how can that be — here?”

“The gamekeeper *thought* he saw a serpent in the garden *exactly outside this chapel*,” de Grandin replied in a low voice, “and it was where that besotted gamekeeper imagined he beheld a serpent that the body of Mijneer Van Brundt was found crushed out of semblance to a human man. Tell me, Friend Trowbridge — you know something of zoology — what creature, besides the constrictor-snake, kills his prey by crushing each bone of his body till nothing but shapeless pulp remains? *Hein?*”

“Bu — but ...” I began, when he cut me short.

“Go call on our patient,” he commanded. “If she sleeps, do not awaken her, but *observe the drugget on her floor!*”

I hastened to Adrienne Bixby’s room, pushed unceremoniously past Roxanne, the maid, and tiptoed to the girl’s bedside. She lay on her side, one cheek pillowed on her arm, sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. I bent over her a moment, listening to her even breathing, then, nodding to the maid, turned and walked softly from the room, my eyes glued to the dark-red plush carpet which covered the

chamber floor.

Five minutes later I met the little Frenchman in the library, my excitement now as high as his own. “De Grandin,” I whispered, involuntarily lowering my voice, “I looked at her carpet. The thing’s made of red velvet and shows a spot of dust ten feet away. A trail of faint white footprints leads right up to her bed!”

8

“*Sacré nom d’un petit bonhomme!*” He reached for his green felt hat and turned toward the door. “The trail becomes clear; even my good, skeptical friend Trowbridge can follow it, I think. Come, *cher ami*, let us see what we can see.”

He led me through the château park, between the rows of tall, trembling poplar trees, to a spot where black-boughed evergreens cast perpetual shade above a stonefenced area of a scant half acre. Rose bushes, long deteriorated from their cultivated state, ran riot over the ground, the whole enclosure had the gloomy aspect of a deserted cemetery. “Why,” I asked, “what place is this, de Grandin? It’s as different from the rest of the park as ...”

“As death is from life, *n’est-ce-pas?*” he interjected. “Yes, so it is, truly. Observe.” He parted a mass of intertwined brambles and pointed to a slab of stone, once white, but now brown and roughened with centuries of exposure. “Can you read the inscription?” he asked.

The letters, once deeply cut in the stone, were almost obliterated, but I made out:

*CI GIT TOUJOURS RAIMOND
SEIGNEUR DE BROUSSAC*

“What does it say?” he demanded.

“Here lies Raimond, Lord of Broussac,” I replied, translating as well as I could.

“*Non, non,*” he contradicted. “It does not say, ‘*Ci git,*’ here lies; but ‘*Ci git toujours*’ — here lies always, or forever. Eh, my friend, what do you make of that, if anything?”

“Dead men usually lie permanently,” I countered.

“Ah, so? Have I not heard your countrymen sing:

“John Brown’s body lies a-moldering
in the grave,
But his soul goes marching on.”

“What of the poor Seigneur de Broussac, is he to lie buried here *toujours*, or shall he, too, not rise once again?”

“I’m not familiar with French idioms,” I defended. Perhaps the stonemason merely intended to say the Seigneur

de Broussac lies here for his last long sleep.”

“*Cher* Trowbridge,” de Grandin replied, speaking with slow impressiveness, “when a man’s monument is carved the words are not chosen without due consideration. Who chose Raimond de Broussac’s epitaph thought long upon its wording, and when he dictated those words his wish was father to his thought.”

He stared thoughtfully at the crumbling stone a moment, repeating softly to himself, “And *Madame l’Abesse* said, ‘Snake thou art, and ...’” he shook his shoulders in an impatient shrug as though to throw off some oppressive train of thought. “*Eh bien*, but we waste time here, my friend; let us make an experiment.” Turning on his heel he led the way to the stables.

“I would have some boards, a hammer and some sharp nails, if you please,” he informed the hostler who greeted us at the barn door. “My friend, the very learned *Docteur* Trowbridge, from America, and I desire to test an idea.”

When the servant brought the desired materials, de Grandin sawed the boards into two lengths, one about eighteen inches, the other about three feet, and through these he drove the sharp-pointed horseshoe nails at intervals of about three-quarters of an inch, so that, when he finished, he had what resembled two large combs of which the boards were the backs and the needle-pointed nails the teeth. “Now,” he announced, surveying his work critically, “I think we are prepared to give a little surprise party.”

Taking up the hammer and two short pieces of boards in addition to his “combs,” he led the way to the spot outside the château walls where the tipsy gamekeeper claimed to have seen the great snake. Here he attached the two strips of wood at right angles to the shorter of the pieces of board through which he had driven the nails, then, using the lateral lengths of wood as staked, attached the comblike contrivance he had made firmly to the earth, its back resting levelly in the ground, its sharp spikes pointing upward before the crevice in the château foundations. Any animal larger than an earthworm desiring to make use of the crack in the wall as a passageway would have to jump or crawl over the sharp, lancelike points of the nails. “*Bien*,” he commented, viewing his work with approval, “now to put your wise American maxim of ‘Safety First’ into practice.”

We found our way to the ancient, gloomy chapel, and he wedged the longer of the nail-filled boards firmly between the jambs at the inner side of the doorway. “And now,” he announced, as we turned once more toward the inhabited part of the house, “I have the splendid appetite for dinner, and for sleep, too, when bedtime arrives.”

“What on earth does all this child’s play mean, de Grandin?” I demanded, my curiosity getting the better of

me.

He winked roguishly by way of answer, whistled a snatch of tune, then remarked, irrelevantly, “If you have the desire to gamble, *cher ami*, I will lay you a wager of five francs that our fair patient will be improved tomorrow morning.”

9

He won the bet. For the first time since we had been seen at Broussac, Adrienne Bixby was at the breakfast table the following day, and the healthy color in her cheeks and the clear sparkle of her lovely eyes told of a long, restful sleep.

Two more days passed, each seeing a marked improvement in her spirits and appearance. The purple semicircles beneath her eyes faded to a wholesome pink, her laughter rippled like the sound of a purling brook among the shadows of the château’s gloomy halls.

“I gotta hand it to you, Doc,” Bixby complimented me. “You’ve shore brought my little girl round in great , shape. Name your figger an’ I’ll pay the bill, an’ never paid one with a better heart, neither.”

“Dr. Trowbridge,” Adrienne accosted me one morning as I was about to join de Grandin in the library. “Remember what you said about importing a little bit of Oklahoma to France the other day? Well, I’ve just received a letter — the dearest letter — from Ray. He’s coming over — he’ll be here day after tomorrow, I think, and no matter what Mother says or does, we’re going to be married, right away. I’ve been Mrs. Bixby’s daughter long enough; now I’m going to be Mr. Keefer’s wife. If Mother makes Dad refuse to give us any money, it won’t make the least little bit of difference. I taught school before Father got his money, and I know how to live as a poor man’s wife. I’m going to have my man — my own man — and no one — *no one at all* — shall keep him away from me one day longer!”

“Good for you!” I applauded her rebellion. Without knowing young Keefer I was sure he must be a very desirable sort of person to have incurred the enmity of such a character as Bixby’s wife.

But next morning Adrienne was not at breakfast, and the downcast expression of her father’s face told his disappointment more eloquently than any words he could have summoned. “Reckon the girl’s had a little set-back, Doc,” he muttered, averting his eyes. His wife looked me fairly between the brows, and though she said never a word I felt she considered me a pretty poor specimen of medical practitioner.

“*Mais non, Monsieur le Docteur*,” Roxanne demurred when I knocked at Adrienne’s door, “you shall not waken her. The poor lamb is sleeping, she exhaust this morning,

and she shall have her sleep. I, Roxanne, say so.”

Nevertheless, I shook Adrienne gently, rousing her from a sleep which seemed more stupor than slumber. “Come, come, my dear,” I scolded, “this won’t do, you know. You’ve got to brace up. You don’t want Ray to find you in this condition, do you? Remember, he’s due at Broussac tomorrow.”

“Is he?” she answered indifferently. “I don’t care. Oh, doctor, I’m — so — tired.” She was asleep again, almost at the last word.

I turned back the covers and lifted the collar of her robe. About her body, purple as the marks of a whiplash, lay the wide, circular bruise, fresher and more extensive than it had been the day I first noticed it.

“Death of my life!” de Grandin swore when I found him in the library and told him what I had seen. “That *sacré* bruise again? Oh, it is too much! Come and see what else I have found this cursed day!” Seizing my hand he half led, half dragged me outdoors, halting at the clump of evergreens where he had fixed his nail-studded board beside the château wall.

Ripped from its place and lying some ten feet away was the board, its nails turned upward in the morning sunlight and reminding me, somehow, of the malicious grin from a fleshless skull.

“Why, how did this happen?” I asked.

He pointed mutely to the moist earth in which the dwarf cedars grew, his hand shaking with excitement and rage. In the soft loam beside the place where the board had been fixed were the prints of two tiny, bare feet.

“What’s it mean?” I demanded, exasperated at the way he withheld information from me, but his answer was no more enlightening than any of his former cryptic utterances.

“The battle is joined, my friend,” he replied through set teeth. “Amuse yourself as you will — or can — this day. I go to Rouen right away, immediately, at once. There are weapons I must have for this fight besides those we now have. Eh, but it will be a fight to the death! Yes, *par la croix*, and we shall help Death reclaim his own too. *Pardieu!* Am I not Jules de Grandin? Am I to be made a monkey of by one who preys on women? *Morbleu*, we shall see!”

And with that he left me, striding toward the stables in search of a motor car, his little yellow mustache bristling with fury, his blue eyes snapping, French oaths pouring from him like spray from a garden-sprinkler.

10

It was dark before he returned, his green hat set at a rakish angle over his right ear, a long, closely wrapped brown paper parcel under his arm. “*Eh bien*,” he confided to me with an elfish grin, “it required much argument to secure this. That old priest, he is a stubborn one and unbelieving, almost as skeptical as you, Friend Trowbridge.”

“What on earth is it?” I demanded, looking curiously at the package. Except that it was too long, it might have been an umbrella, judging by its shape.

He winked mysteriously as he led the way to his room, where, having glanced about furtively, as though he apprehended some secret watcher, he laid the bundle on the bed and began cutting the strings securing its brown paper swaddling clothes with his pocket knife. Laying back the final layer of paper he uncovered a long sword, such a weapon as I had never beheld outside a museum. The blade was about three and a half feet in length, tapering from almost four inches and a half at the tip, where, it terminated in a beveled point. Unlike modern weapons, this one was furnished with two sharpened edges, almost keen enough to do duty for a knife, and, instead of the usual groove found on the sides of sword blades, its center presented a distinct ridge where the steep bevels met at an obtuse angle as they sloped from the edges. The handle, made of ivory or some smoothly polished bone, was long enough to permit a two-handed grip, and the hilt which crossed the blade at a right angle turned downward toward the point, its ends terminating in rather clumsily carved cherubs’ heads. Along the blade, apparently carved, rather than etched, marched a procession of miscellaneous angels, demons and men at arms with a mythological monster, such as a griffin or dragon, thrown in for occasional good measure. Between the crudely carved figures I made out the letters of the motto: *Dei Gratia* — by the grace of God.

“Well?” I asked wonderingly as I viewed the ancient weapon.

“Well?” he repeated mockingly, then: “Had you as many blessings on your head as this old bit of carved metal has received, you would be a very holy man indeed, Friend Trowbridge. This sword, it was once strapped to the thigh of a saint — it matters not which one — who fought the battles of France when France needed all the champions, saintly or otherwise, she could summon. For centuries it has reposed in a very ancient church at Rouen, not, indeed, as a relic, but as a souvenir scarcely less venerated. When I told the *curé* I proposed borrowing it for a day or more I thought he would die of the apoplexy forthwith, but” — he gave his diminutive mustache a complacent tweak — “such was my power of persuasion that you see before you the very

sword.”

“But what under heaven will you do with the thing, now you’ve got it?” I demanded.

“Much — perhaps,” he responded, picking up the weapon, which must have weighed at least twenty pounds, and balancing it in both hands as a wood-chopper holds his ax before attacking a log.

“*Nom d’un bouc!*” he glanced suddenly at his wristwatch and replaced the sword on his bed. “I do forget myself. Run, my friend, fly, fly like the swallow to Mademoiselle Adrienne’s room and caution her to remain within — at all hazards. Bid her close her windows, too, for we know not what may be abroad or what can climb a wall this night. See that stubborn, pig-foolish maid of hers has instructions to lock her mistress’ door on the inside and, should Mademoiselle rise in the night and desire to leave, on no account permit her to pass. You understand?”

“No, I’ll be banged if I do,” I replied. “What...?”

“*Non, non!*” he almost shrieked. “Waste not time nor words, my friend. I desire that you should do as I say. Hurry, I implore; it is of the importance, I do assure you.”

I did as he requested, having less difficulty than I had expected concerning the windows, since Adrienne was already sunk in a heavy sleep and Roxanne possessed the French peasant’s inborn hatred of fresh air.

“Good, very, very good,” de Grandin commended when I rejoined him. “Now we shall wait until the second quarter of the night — then, ah, perhaps I show you something to think about in the after years, Friend Trowbridge.”

He paced the floor like a caged animal for a quarter-hour, smoking one cigarette after another, then: “Let us go,” he ordered curtly, picking up the giant sword and shouldering it as a soldier does his rifle. “*Aller au feu!*”

We tramped down the corridor toward the stairway, when he turned quickly, almost transfixing me with the sword blade, which projected two feet and more beyond his shoulder. “One more inspection, Friend Trowbridge,” he urged. “Let us see how it goes with Mademoiselle Adrienne. *Eh bien*, do we not carry her colors into battle this night?”

“Never mind that monkey-business!” we heard a throaty feminine voice command as we approached Adrienne’s room. “I’ve stood about all I intend to from you; tomorrow you pack your clothes, if you’ve any to pack, and get out of this house.”

“Eh, what is this?” de Grandin demanded as we reached the chamber door and beheld Roxanne weeping bitterly, while Mrs. Bixby towered over her like a Cochin hen bullying a half-starved sparrow.

“I’ll tell you what it is!” replied the irate mistress of the house. “I came to say goodnight to my daughter a few

minutes ago and this — this hussy! — refused to open the door for me. I soon settled her, I can tell you. I told her to open that door and get out. When I went into the room I found every window locked tight — in this weather, too.

“Now I catch her hanging around the door after I’d ordered her to her room. Insubordination; rank insubordination, it is. She leaves this house bright and early tomorrow morning, I can tell you!”

“Oh, Monsieur Trow-breege, Monsieur de Grandin,” sobbed the trembling girl, “I did but attempt to obey your orders, and — and she drove me from my duty. Oh, I am so soree!”

De Grandin’s small teeth shut with a snap like a miniature steel trap. “And you forced this girl to unbar the door?” he asked, almost incredulously, gazing sternly at Mrs. Bixby.

“I certainly did,” she bridled, “and I’d like to know what business is it of yours. If ...”

He brushed by her, leaping into the bedroom with a bound which carried him nearly two yards beyond the doorsill.

We looked past him toward the bed. It was empty. Adrienne Bixby was gone.

“Why — why, where can she *be*?” Mrs. Bixby asked, her domineering manner temporarily stripped from her by surprise.

“I’ll tell you where she is!” de Grandin, white to the lips, shouted at her. “She is where you have sent her, you meddling old ignoramus, you, you — oh, *mon Dieu*, if you were a man how I should enjoy cutting your heart out!”

“Say, see here ...” she began, her bewilderment sunk in anger, but he cut her short with a roar.

“Silence, you! To your room, foolish, criminally foolish one, and pray *le bon Dieu* on your bare knees that the pig-ignorance of her mother shall not have cost your daughter her life this night! Come, Trowbridge, my friend, come away; the breath of this woman is a contamination, and we must hurry if we are to undo her fool’s work. Pray God we are not too late!”

We rushed downstairs, traversed the corridors leading to the older wing of the house, wound our way down and down beneath the level of the ancient moat till we stood before the entrance of the chapel.

“Ah,” de Grandin breathed softly, lowering his sword point a moment as he dashed the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand, “no sound, Friend Trowbridge. Whatever happens, whatever you may see, do not cry out; ’tis death to one we seek to save if you waken her!”

Raising his hand, he signed himself quickly with the cross, muttering an indistinct *in nomine*, while I gaped in amazement to see the cynical, scoffing little man of science

shedding his agnosticism and reverting to a simple act of his childhood's faith.

Lifting the sword in both hands, he gave the chapel door a push with his foot, whispering to me, "Hold high the lanterns, Friend Trowbridge; we need light for our work."

The rays from my lamp streamed across the dark, vaulted chapel and I nearly let the lantern crash to the floor at what I beheld.

Standing before the ancient, tumbledown altar, her nude, white body gleaming in the semi-darkness like a lovely, slender statue of sun-stained marble, was Adrienne Bixby. Her long rippling hair, which had always reminded me of molten gold in the assayer's crucible, streamed over her shoulders to her waist; one arm was raised in a gesture of absolute abandon while her other hand caressed some object which swayed and undulated before her. Parted in a smile such as Circe, the enchantress, might have worn when she lured men to their ruin, her red lips were drawn back from her gleaming teeth, while she crooned a slow, sensuous melody the like of which I had never heard, nor wish to hear again.

My astounded eyes took this in at first glance, but it was my second look which sent the blood coursing through my arteries like river-water in zero weather. About her slender, virginal torso, ascending in a spiral from hips to shoulders, was the spotted body of a gigantic snake.

The monster's horrid, wedge-shaped head swung and swayed a scant half-inch before her face, and its darting, lambent tongue licked lightly at her parted lips.

But it was no ordinary serpent which held her, a laughing prisoner, in its coils. Its body shone with alternate spots of green and gold, almost as if the colors were laid on in luminous paint; its flickering tongue was red and glowing as a flame of fire, and in its head were eyes as large and blue as those of human kind, but set and terrible in their expression as only the eyes of a snake can be.

Scarcely audible, so low his whisper was, de Grandin hissed a challenge as he hurled himself into the chapel with one of his lithe, catlike leaps: "*Snake thou art, Raimond de Broussac, and snake thou shalt become! Garde à vous!*"

With a slow, sliding motion, the great serpent turned its head, gradually released its folds from the leering girl's body and slipped to the floor, coiled its length quickly, like a giant spring, and launched itself like a flash of green-and-gold lightning at de Grandin!

But quick as the monster's attack was, de Grandin was quicker. Like the shadow of a flying hawk, the little Frenchman slipped aside, and the reptile's darting head crashed against the granite wall with an impact like a wave slapping a ship's bow.

"One!" counted de Grandin in a mocking whisper, and swung his heavy sword, snipping a two-foot length from the serpent's tail as neatly as a seamstress snips a thread with her scissors. "*En garde, fils du diable!*"

Writhing, twisting, turning like a spring from which the tension has been loosed, the serpent gathered itself for another onslaught, its malign, human-seeming eyes glaring implacable hatred at de Grandin.

Not this time did the giant reptile launch a battering-ram blow at its adversary. Instead, it reared itself six feet and more in the air and drove its wicked, scale armored head downward with a succession of quick, shifting jabs, seeking to take de Grandin off his guard and enfold him in its crushing coils.

But like a veritable *chevaux-de-frise* of points, de Grandin's sword was right, left, and in between. Each time the monster's head drove at the little man, the blade engraved with ancient battle-cry stood in its path, menacing the hateful blue eyes and flashing, backward-curving fangs with its sharp, tapering end.

"Ha, ha!" de Grandin mocked; "to fight a man is a greater task than to bewitch a woman, *n'cest-ce-pas, M'sieur le Serpent?*"

"Ha! You have it!" Like a wheel of living flame, the sword circled through the air; there was a sharp, slapping impact, and the steel sheared clean and clear through the reptile's body, six inches below the head.

"*Sa, ha; sa, ha!*" de Grandin's face was set in a look of incomparable fury; his small mouth was squared beneath his bristling mustache like that of a snarling wildcat, and the sword rose and fell in a quick succession of strokes, separating the writhing body of the serpent into a dozen, twenty, half a hundred sections.

"*S-s-h*, no noise!" he cautioned as I opened my lips to speak. "First clothe the poor child's nakedness; her gown lies yonder on the floor."

I looked behind me and saw Adrienne's silk nightrobe lying in a crumpled ring against the altar's lowest step. Turning toward the girl, revulsion and curiosity fighting for mastery of my emotions, I saw she still retained the same fixed, carnal smile; her right hand still moved mechanically in the air as though caressing the head of the loathsome thing yet quivering in delayed death at her white feet.

"Why, de Grandin," I exclaimed in wonder, "why, she's *asleep!*"

"*S-s-h*, no sound!" he cautioned again, laying his finger on his lips. "Slip the robe over her head, my friend, and pick her up gently. She will not know."

I draped the silken garment about the unconscious girl, noticing as I did so, that a long, spiral bruise was already taking form on her tender flesh.

“Careful! Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin commanded, picking up the lantern and sword and leading the way from the chapel. “Carry her tenderly, the poor, sinned-against one. Do not waken her, I beseech you. *Pardieu*, if that scolding mother of hers does but open her shrewish lips within this poor lamb’s hearing this night, I shall serve her as I did the serpent. *Mordieu*, may Satan burn me if I do not so!”

11

“Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend, come and see!” de Grandin’s voice sounded in my ear.

I sat up, sleepily staring about me. Daylight had just begun; the gray of early morning still mingled with the first faint rose of the new day, and outside my window the blackbirds were singing.

“Eh, what’s up?” I demanded, swinging my feet to the floor.

“Plenty, a very plenty, I do assure you,” he answered, tugging delightedly first at one end of his mustache, then the other. “Arise, my friend, arise and pack your bags; we must go immediately, at once, right away.”

He fairly pranced about the room while I shaved, washed, and made ready for the journey, meeting my bewildered demands for information only with renewed entreaties for haste. At last, as I accompanied him down the great stairway my kit bags banging against my knees:

“Behold!” he cried, pointing dramatically to the hall below. “Is it not superb?”

On a couch before the great empty fireplace of the château hall sat Adrienne Bixby, dressed and ready for a trip, her slender white hands securely held in a pair of bronzed ones, her fluffy golden head pillowed on a broad, homespun-clad shoulder.

“Monsieur Trowbridge,” de Grandin almost purred in his elation, “permit that I present to you Monsieur Ray Keefer, of Oklahoma, who is to make happy our so dear Mademoiselle Adrienne at once, right away, immediately. Come, *mes enfants*, we must go away,” he beamed on the pair of lovers. “The American consul at Rouen, he will unite you in the bonds of matrimony, then — away for that joyous wedding trip, and may your happiness never be less than it is this day. I have left a note of explanation for Monsieur your father, Mademoiselle; let us hope he gives you his blessing. However, be that as it may, you have already the blessing of happiness.”

A large motor was waiting outside, Roxanne seated beside the chauffeur, mounting guard over Adrienne’s baggage.

“I did meet Monsieur Keefer as he entered the park this

morning,” de Grandin confided to me as the car gathered speed, “and I did compel him to wait while I rushed within and roused his sweetheart and Roxanne from their sleep. Ha, ha, what was it Madame the Scolding One did say to Roxanne last night, that she should pack her clothes and leave the house bright and early this morning? *Eh bien*, she has gone, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

Shepherded by de Grandin and me, the lovers entered the consulate, emerging a few minutes later with a certificate bearing the great seal of the United States of America and the information that they were man and wife.

De Grandin hunted feverishly in the gutters, finally discovered a tattered old boot, and shied it after them as, with the giggling Roxanne, they set out for Switzerland, Oklahoma, and happiness.

“Name of a little green man!” he swore, furtively flicking a drop of moisture from his eyes. “I am so happy to see her safe in the care of the good young man who loves her that I could almost bring myself to kiss that so atrocious Madame Bixby!”

12

“Now, de Grandin,” I threatened, as we seated ourselves in a compartment of the Paris express, “tell me all about it, or I’ll choke the truth out of you!”

“*La, la*,” he exclaimed in mock terror, “he is a ferocious one, this *Americain!* Very well, then, *cher ami*, from the beginning:

“You will recall how I told you houses gather evil reputations, even as people do? They do more than that, my friend; they acquire character.

“Broussac is an old place; in it generations of men have been born and have lived, and met their deaths; and the record of their personalities — all they have dreamed and thought and loved and hated — is written fair upon the walls of the house for him who cares to read. These thoughts I had when first I went to Broussac to trace down the reason for these deaths which drove tenant after tenant from the château.

“But fortunately for me there was a more tangible record than the atmosphere of the house to read. There was the great library of the de Broussac family, with the records of those who were good, those who were not so good, and those who were not good at all written down. Among those records did I find this story:

“In the years before your America was discovered, there dwelt at Broussac one Sieur Raimond, a man beside whom the wickedest of the Roman emperors was a mild-mannered gentleman. What he desired he took, this one, and as most

of his desires leaned toward his neighbors' women folk, he was busy at robbery, murder, and rapine most of the time.

"*Eh bien*, he was a mighty man, this *Sieur Raimond*, but the Bishop of Rouen and the Pope at Rome were mightier. At last, the wicked gentleman came face-to-face with the reckoning of his sins, for where the civil authorities were fearful to act, the church stepped in and brought him to trial.

"Listen to this which I found among the chronicles at the *château*, my friend. Listen and marvel!" He drew a sheaf of papers from his portmanteau and began reading slowly, translating as he went along:

*Now when the day for the wicked *Sieur Raimond's* execution was come, a great procession issued from the church where the company of faithful people were gone to give thanks that Earth was to be rid of a monster.*

*Francois and Henri, the de Broussac's wicked accomplices in crime, had become reconciled to Mother Church, and so were accorded the mercy of strangling before burning, but the *Sieur Raimond* would have none of repentance, but walked to his place of execution with the smile of a devil on his false, well-favored face.*

*And as he marched between the men at arms toward the stake set up for his burning, behold, the Lady Abbess of the convent of Our Lady of Mercy, together with the gentlewomen who were her nuns, came forth to weep and pray for the souls of the condemned, even the soul of the unrepentant sinner, *Raimond de Broussac*.*

*And when the *Sieur Raimond* was come over against the place where the abbess stood with all her company, he halted between his guards and taunted her., saying, "What now, old hen, dost seek the chicks of thy brood who are missing?" (For it was a fact that three novices of the convent of Our Lady had been ravished away from their vows by this vile man and great was the scandal thereof everywhere.)*

*Then did the Lady Abbess pronounce these words to that wicked man, "Snake thou art, *Raimond de Broussac*, snake thou shalt become and snake thou must remain until some good man and true shall cleave thy foul body into as many pieces as the year hath weeks."*

And I, who beheld and heard all, do declare upon the rood that when the flames were kindled about that wicked man and his sinful body had been burned to ashes, a small snake of the colors of green and gold was seen by all to emerge from the fire and, maugre the efforts of the men at arms to slay it, did escape to

*the forest of the *château* of Broussac.*

"Eh? What think you of that, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked as he laid the papers beside him on the car-seat.

"Rather an interesting medieval legend," I answered, "but hardly convincing today."

"Truly," he conceded, "but as your English proverb has it, where there is much smoke there is apt to be a little flame. Other things I found in the records, my friend. For instance:

"The ashes of this *Raimond de Broussac* could not be buried in the *château* chapel among his ancestors and descendants, for the chapel is consecrated ground, and he died excommunicate. They buried him in what was then a pine forest hard by the house where he lived his evil life, and on the stone which they set over him they did declare that he lay there forever.

"But one year from the day of his execution, as the *de Broussac* chaplain was reciting his office in the chapel, he did see a green-and-gold snake, something thicker than a monk's girdle but not so long as a man's forearm, enter the chapel, and the snake attacked the holy man so fiercely that he was much put to it to defend himself.

"Another year went by, and a servant bearing off to refill the sanctuary lamp in the chapel did behold a similar snake, but now grown to the length of a man's arm, coiled above one of the tombs; and the snake also attacked that servant, and nearly slew him.

"From year to year the records go on. Often about *Broussac* was seen a snake, but each succeeding time it appeared larger than before.

"Too, there were strange stories current — stories of women of the locality who wandered off into the woods of *Broussac*, who displayed strange bruises upon their bodies, and who died eventually in a manner unexplained by any natural cause. One and all, *mon ami*, they were crushed to death.

"One was a member of the *de Broussac* family, a distant kinswoman of *Sieur Raimond* himself, who had determined to take the veil. As she knelt in prayer in the chapel one day, a great sleep fell upon her, and after that, for many days, she seemed distraught — her interest in everything, even her religious vocation, seemed to wane to nothing. But it was thought that she was very saintly, for those who watched her did observe that she went often to the chapel by night. One morning she was found, like the others, crushed to death, and on her face was the look not of the agony of dying but the evil smile of an abandoned woman. Even in death she wore it.

"These things I had already read when that gamekeeper

brought us news of the great snake he had seen in the garden, and what I had noted down as idle legend appeared possible to me as a sober fact — if we could prove it.

“You recall how we spread flour on the chapel floor; you also recall the tracks we read in the flour next day.

“I remembered, too, how that poor Madame Biddle, who went mad in the château Broussac, did so when she wandered one day by chance into the chapel, and I remembered how she does continually cry out of a great snake which seems to *kiss* her. The doctor who first attended her, too, when her reason departed, told me of a bruise not to be explained, a spiral bruise about the lady’s arm.

“*Pardieu!* I think I will test these legends some more, and I search and search until I find this wicked Sieur Raimond’s grave. It was even as the chronicler wrote, for, to prove it, I made you go with me and read the inscription on the tombstone. *Morbleu!* Against my reason I am convinced, so I make and place them so that their sharp nails would scratch the belly of any snake — if he were really a snake — who tried to crawl over them. *Voilà*, next she was better. Then I knew for a certainty that she was under the influence of this Sieur Raimond snake, even as that poor intending-nun lady who met so tragic a death in the days of long ago.

“Something else I learn, too. This demon snake, this relic of the accurst Raimond de Broussac, was like a natural snake. Material iron nails would keep him from the house

his wickedness had so long held under a spell. If this was so, then a natural weapon could kill his body if one man was but brave enough to fight him. ‘*Cordieu*, I am that man!’ says Jules de Grandin to Jules de Grandin.

“But in the meantime what do I see? *Hélas!* That wicked one has now so great an influence over poor Mademoiselle Adrienne that he can compel her, by his wicked will, to rise from her bed at night and go barefoot to the garden to tear away the barrier I have erected for her protection.

“*Nom d’un coq!* I am angered, I am furious. I decide this snake-devil have already lived too long; I shall do even as the lady abbess prescribes and slash his so loathly body into as many parts as the year has weeks.

“*Morbleu!* I go to Rouen and obtain that holy sword; I come back, thinking I shall catch that snake waiting alone in the chapel for his assignation, since I shall bar Mademoiselle’s way to him. And then her so stupid mother must needs upset all my plans, and I have to fight that snake almost in silence — I can not shout and curse at him as I would, for if I raise my voice I may waken that then, perhaps she goes mad, even as did Madame Biddle.

“*Eh bien*, perhaps it is for the best. Had I said all the foul curses I had in mind as I slew that blue-eyed snake, all the priests, clergymen, and rabbis in the world could scarce have shriven my soul of their weight.”

The Isle of Missing Ships

THE *Mevrouw*, Sumatra-bound out of Amsterdam, had dropped the low Holland coast an hour behind that day in 1925, when I recognized a familiar figure among the miscellany of Dutch colonials. The little man with the erect, military carriage, trimly waxed mustache and direct, challenging blue eyes was as conspicuous amid the throng of over-fleshed planters, traders and petty administrators as a *fleur-de-lis* growing in the midst of a cabbage patch.

“For the Lord’s sake, de Grandin! What are you doing here?” I demanded, seizing him by the hand. “I thought you’d gone back to your microscopes and test tubes when you cleared up the Broussac mystery.”

He grinned at me like a blond brother of Mephistopheles as he linked his arm in mine and caught step with me. “*Eh bien*,” he agreed with a nod, “so did I; but those inconsiderate Messieurs Lloyd would not have it so. They must needs send me an urgent message to investigate a suspicion they have at the other end of the earth.

“I did not desire to go. The summer is come and the blackbirds are singing in the trees at St. Cloud. Also, I have much work to do; but they tell me: ‘You shall name your own price and no questions shall be asked,’ and, *hélas*, the franc is very low on the exchange these days.

“I tell them, ‘Ten pounds sterling for each day of my travels and all expenses.’ They agree. *Voilà*. I am here.”

I looked at him in amazement. “Lloyds? Ten pounds sterling a day?” I echoed. “What in the world—?”

“*La, la!*” he exclaimed. “It is a long story, Friend Trowbridge, and most like a foolish one in the bargain, but, at any rate, the English money is sound. Listen” — he sank his voice to a confidential whisper — “you know those Messieurs Lloyd, *hein*? They will insure against anything from the result of one of your American political elections to the loss of a ship in the sea. That last business of theirs is also my business, for the time.

“Of late the English insurers have had many claims to pay — claims on ships which should have been good risks. There was the Dutch Indiaman *Van Damm*, a sound little iron ship of twelve thousand tons displacement. She sail out of Rotterdam for Sumatra, and start home heavy-laden with spices and silks, also with a king’s ransom in pearls safely locked in her strong box. Where is she now?” He spread his hands and shrugged expressively. “No one knows. She was never heard of more, and the Lloyds had to make good her value to her owners.

“There was the French steamer *l’Orient*, also dissolved

into air, and the British merchantman *Nightingale*, and six other sound ships gone — all gone, with none to say whither, and the estimable Messieurs Lloyd to pay insurance. All within one single year. *Parbleu*, it is too much! The English company pays its losses like a true sportsman, but it also begins to sniff the aroma of the dead fish. They would have me, Jules de Grandin, investigate this business of the monkey and tell them where the missing ships are gone.

“It may be for a year that I search; it may be for only a month, or, perhaps, I spend the time till my hair is as bald as yours, Friend Trowbridge, before I can report. No matter; I receive my ten pounds each day and all incidental expenses. Say now, are not those Messieurs Lloyd gambling more recklessly this time than ever before in their long career?”

“I think they are,” I agreed.

“But,” he replied with one of his elfish grins, “remember, Trowbridge, my friend, those Messieurs Lloyd were never known to lose money permanently on any transaction. *Morbleu!* Jules de Grandin, as the Americans say, you entertain the hatred for yourself!”

The *Mevrouw* churned and wallowed her broad-beamed way through the cool European ocean, into the summer seas, finally out upon the tropical waters of Polynesia. For five nights the smalt-blue heavens were ablaze with stars; on the sixth evening the air thickened at sunset. By ten o’clock the ship might have been draped in a pall of black velvet as a teapot is swathed in a cozy, so impenetrable was the darkness. Objects a dozen feet from the porthole lights were all but indistinguishable, at twenty feet they were invisible, and, save for the occasional phosphorescent glow of some tumbling sea denizen, the ocean itself was only an undefined part of the surrounding blackness.

“Eh, but I do not like this,” de Grandin muttered as he lighted a rank Sumatra cigar from the ship steward’s store and puffed vigorously to set the fire going: “this darkness, it is a time for evil doings, Friend Trowbridge.”

He turned to a ship’s officer who strode past us toward the bridge. “Is it that we shall have a storm, Monsieur?” he asked. “Does the darkness portend a typhoon?”

“No,” returned the Dutchman. “Id iss folcanic dust. Some of dose folcano mountains are in eruption again and scatter steam and ash over a hundred miles. Tomorrow, perhaps, or de nex’ day, ve are out of id an’ into de zunzhine again.”

“Ah,” de Grandin bowed acknowledgment of the information, “and does this volcanic darkness frequently come at this latitude and longitude, Monsieur?”

“*Ja*,” the other answered, “dese vaters are almost always cofered; de chimneys of hell poke up through de ocean hereabouts, *Mijnheer*.”

“*Cordieu!*” de Grandin swore softly to himself. “I think he has spoken truth, Friend Trowbridge. Now if — *Grand Dieu*, see! What is that?”

Some distance off our port bow a brand of yellow fire burned a parabola against the black sky, burst into a shower of sparks high above the horizon and flung a constellation of colored fireballs into the air. A second flame followed the first, and a third winged upward in the wake of the second. “Rockets,” de Grandin announced. “A ship is in distress over there, it would seem.”

Bells clanged and jangled as the engine room telegraph sent orders from the bridge; there was a clanking of machinery as the screws churned in opposite directions and the steering mechanism brought the ship’s head about toward the distress signals.

“I think we had best be prepared, my friend,” de Grandin whispered as he reached upward to the rack above us and detached two kapok swimming jackets from their straps. “Come, slip this over your shoulders, and if you have anything in your cabin you would care to save, get it at once,” he advised.

“You’re crazy, man,” I protested, pushing the life preserver away. “We aren’t in any danger. Those lights were at least five miles away, and even if that other ship is fast on a reef our skipper would hear the breakers long before we were near enough to run aground.”

“*Nom d’un nom!*” the little Frenchman swore in vexation. “Friend Trowbridge, you are one great zany. Have you no eyes in that so empty head of yours? Did you not observe how those rockets went up?”

“How they went up?” I repeated. “Of course I did; they were fired from the deck — perhaps the bridge — of some ship about five miles away.”

“So?” he replied in a sarcastic whisper. “Five miles, you say? And you, a physician, do not know that the human eye sees only about five miles over a plane surface? How, then, if the distressed ship is five miles distant, could those flares have appeared to rise from *a greater height than our own deck*? Had they really a masthead, at that distance — they should have appeared to rise across the horizon. As it was, they first became visible at a considerable height.”

“Nonsense,” I rejoined; “whoever would be setting off rockets in midair in this part of the world?”

“Who, indeed?” he answered, gently forcing the swimming coat on me. “That question, *mon ami*, is precisely what those Messieurs Lloyd are paying me ten pounds a day to answer. Hark!”

Distinctly, directly in our path, sounded the muttering

roar of waves breaking against rocks.

Clang! The ship’s telegraph shrieked the order to reverse, to put about, to the engine room from the bridge.

Wheels and chains rattled, voices shouted hoarse orders through the dark, and the ship shivered from stem to stern as the engine struggled hysterically to break our course toward destruction.

Too late! Like a toy boat caught in a sudden wind squall, we lunged forward, gathering speed with each foot we traveled. There was a rending crash like all the crockery in the world being smashed at once, de Grandin and I fell headlong to the deck and shot along the smooth boards like a couple of ball players sliding for second base, and the stout little *Mevrouw* listed suddenly to port, sending us banging against the deck rail.

“Quick, quick, my friend!” de Grandin shouted. “Over the side and swim for it. I may be wrong, *prie-Dieu* I am, but I fear there will be devil’s work here anon. Come!” He lifted himself to his feet, balanced on the rail a moment, then slipped into the purple water that swirled past the doomed ship’s side a scant seven feet below us.

I followed, striking out easily toward the quiet water ahead, the kapok jacket keeping me afloat and the rushing water carrying me forward rapidly.

“By George, old fellow, you’ve been right this far,” I congratulated my companion, but he shut me off with a sharp hiss.

“Still, you fool,” he admonished savagely. “Keep your silly tongue quiet and kick with your feet. Kick, kick, I tell you! Make as great commotion in the water as possible — *nom de Dieu!* We are lost!”

Faintly luminous with the phosphorescence of tropical sea water, something seeming as large as a submarine boat shot upward from the depths below, headed as straight for my flailing legs as a sharpshooter’s bullet for its target.

De Grandin grasped my shoulder and heaved me over in a clumsy back somersault, and at the same time thrust himself as deeply into the water as his swimming coat would permit. For a moment his fiery silhouette mingled with that of the great fish and he seemed striving to embrace the monster, then the larger form sank slowly away, while the little Frenchman rose puffing to the surface.

“*Mordieu!*” he commented, blowing the water from his mouth, “that was a near escape, my friend. One little second more and he would have had your leg in his belly. Lucky for us. I knew the pearl divers’ trick of slittin’ those fellows’ gills with a knife, and luckier still I thought to bring along a knife to slit him with.”

“What was it?” I asked, still bewildered by the performance I had just witnessed. “It looked big enough to be a whale.”

He shook his head to clear the water from his eyes as he replied. "It was our friend, *Monsieur le Requin* — the shark. He is always hungry, that one, and such morsels as you would be a choice titbit for his table, my friend."

"A shark!" I answered incredulously. "But it couldn't have been a shark, de Grandin, they have to turn on their backs to bite, and that thing came straight at me."

"Ah, bah!" he shot back disgustedly. "What old wives' tale is that you quote? *Le requin* is no more compelled to take his food upside down than you are. I tell you, he would have swallowed your leg up to the elbow if I had not cut his sinful gizzard in two!"

"Good Lord!" I began splashing furiously. "Then we're apt to be devoured any moment!"

"Possibly," he returned calmly, "but not probably. If land is not too far away that fellow's brethren will be too busy eating him to pay attention to such small fry as us. *Grace à Dieu*, I think I feel the good land beneath our feet even now."

It was true. We were standing armpit-deep on a sloping, sandy beach with the long, gentle swell of the ocean kindly pushing us toward the shore. A dozen steps and we were safely beyond the tide-line, lying face down upon the warm sands and gulping down great mouthfuls of the heavy, sea-scented air. What de Grandin did there in the dark I do not know, but for my part I offered up such unspoken prayers of devout thanksgiving as I had never breathed before.

My devotions were cut short by a sputtering mixture of French profanity.

"What's up?" I demanded, then fell silent as de Grandin's hand closed on my wrist like a tightened tourniquet.

"Hark, my friend," he commanded. "Look across the water to the ship we left and say whether or no I was wise when I brought us away."

Out across the quiet lagoon inside the reef the form of the stranded *Mevrouw* loomed a half shade darker than the night, her lights, still burning, casting a fitful glow upon the crashing water at the reef and the quiet water beyond. Two, three, four, half a dozen shades gathered alongside her; dark figures, like ants swarming over the carcass of a dead rat, appeared against her lights a moment, and the stabbing flame of a pistol was followed a moment later by the reports of the shots wafted to us across the lagoon. Shouts, cries of terror, screams of women in abject fright followed one another in quick succession for a time, then silence, more ominous than any noise, settled over the water.

Half an hour, perhaps, de Grandin and I stood tense-muscled on the beach, staring toward the ship, waiting expectantly for some sign of renewed life. One by one her porthole lights blinked out; at last she lay in utter darkness.

"It is best we seek shelter in the bush, my friend," de

Grandin announced matter-of-factly. "The farther out of sight we get the better will be our health."

"What in heaven's name does it all mean?" I demanded as I turned to follow him.

"Mean?" he echoed impatiently. "It means we have stumbled on as fine a nest of pirates as ever cheated the yardarm. When we reached this island, Friend Trowbridge, I fear we did but step from the soup kettle into the flame. *Mille tonneres*, what a fool you are, Jules de Grandin! You should have demanded fifty pounds sterling a day from those Messieurs Lloyd! Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us seek shelter. Right away, at once, immediately."

2

The sloping beach gave way to a line of boulders a hundred yards inland, and these in turn marked the beginning of a steady rise in the land, its lower portion overgrown with bushes, loftier growth supplanting the underbrush as we stumbled upward over the rocks.

When we had traversed several hundred rods and knocked nearly all the skin from our legs against unexpectedly projecting stones, de Grandin called a halt in the midst of a copse of wide-leafed trees. "We may as well rest here as elsewhere," he suggested philosophically. "The pack will scarcely hunt again tonight."

I was too sleepy and exhausted to ask what he meant. The last hour's events had been as full of surprises to me as a traveling carnival is for a farmhand.

It might have been half an hour later, or only five minutes, judging by my feelings, that I was roused by the roar of a muffled explosion, followed at short intervals by two more detonations. "*Mordieu!*" I heard de Grandin exclaim. "Up, Friend Trowbridge. Rise and see!" He shook me roughly by the shoulder, and half dragged me to an opening in the trees. Out across the lagoon I saw the hulk of the *Mevrouw* falling apart and sliding into the water like a mud bank attacked by a summer flood, and round her the green waters boiled and seethed as though the entire reef had suddenly gone white hot. Across the lagoon, wave after swelling wave raced and tumbled, beating on the glittering sands of the beach in a furious surf.

"Why—" I began, but he answered my question before I could form it.

"Dynamite!" he exclaimed. "Last night, or early this morning, they looted her, now they dismantle the remains with high explosives; it would not do to let her stand there as a sign-post of warning for other craft. *Pardieu!* They have system, these ones. Captain Kidd and Blackbeard, they were but freshmen in crime's college, Friend Trowbridge. We deal with postgraduates here. Ah" — his small,

womanishly slender hand caught me by the arm — “observe, if you please; what is that on the sands below?”

Following his pointing finger with my eyes, I made out, beyond a jutting ledge of rocks, the rising spiral of a column of wood smoke. “Why,” I exclaimed delightedly “some of the people from the ship escaped, after all! They got to shore and built a fire. Come on, let’s join them. Hello, down here; hello, hello! You...”

“Fool!” he cried in a suppressed shout, clapping his hand over my mouth. “Would you ruin us altogether, completely, entirely? *Le bon Dieu* grant your ass’s bray was not heard, or, if heard, was disregarded!”

“But,” I protested, “those people probably have food, de Grandin, and we haven’t a single thing to eat. We ought to join them and plan our escape.”

He looked at me as a school teacher might regard an unusually backward pupil. “They have food, no doubt,” he admitted, “but what sort of food, can you answer me that? Suppose — *nom d’un moineau, regardez-vous!*”

As if in answer to my hail, a pair of the most villainous-looking Papuans I had ever beheld came walking around the rocky screen beyond which the smoke rose, looked undecidedly toward the heights where we hid, then turned back whence they had come. A moment later they reappeared, each carrying a broad-bladed spear, and began climbing over the rocks in our direction.

“Shall we go to meet them?” I asked dubiously. Those spears looked none too reassuring to me.

“*Mais non!*” de Grandin answered decidedly. “They may be friendly; but I distrust everything on this accursed island. We would better seek shelter and observe.”

“But they might give us something to eat,” I urged. “The whole world is pretty well civilized now, it isn’t as if we were back in Captain Cook’s day.”

“Nevertheless,” he returned as he wriggled under a clump of bushes, “we shall watch first and ask questions later.”

I crawled beside him and squatted, awaiting the savages’ approach.

But I had forgotten that men who live in primitive surroundings have talents unknown to their civilized brethren. While they were still far enough away to make it impossible for us to hear the words they exchanged as they walked, the two Papuans halted, looked speculatively at the copse where we hid, and raised their spears menacingly.

“*Ciel!*” de Grandin muttered. “We are discovered.” He seized the stalk of one of the sheltering plants and shook it gently.

The response was instant. A spear whizzed past my ear, missing my head by an uncomfortably small fraction of an inch, and the savages began clambering rapidly toward us,

one with his spear poised for a throw, the other drawing a murderous knife from the girdle which constituted his sole article of clothing.

“*Parbleu!*” de Grandin whispered fiercely. “Play dead, my friend. Fall out from the bush and lie as though his spear had killed you.” He gave me a sudden push which sent me reeling into the open.

I fell flat to the ground, acting the part of a dead man as realistically as possible and hoping desperately that the savages would not decide to throw a second spear to make sure of their kill.

Though my eyes were closed, I could feel them standing over me, and a queer, cold feeling tingled between my shoulder blades, where I momentarily expected a knife thrust.

Half opening one eye, I saw the brown, naked shins of one of the Papuans beside my head, and was wondering whether I could seize him by the ankles and drag him down before he could stab me, when the legs beside my face suddenly swayed drunkenly, like tree trunks in a storm, and a heavy weight fell crashing on my back.

Startled out of my sham death by the blow, I raised myself in time to see de Grandin in a death grapple with one of the savages. The other one lay across me, the spear he had flung at us a few minutes before protruding from his back directly beneath his left shoulder blade.

“*A moi, Friend Trowbridge!*” the little Frenchmen called. “Quick, or we are lost.”

I tumbled the dead Papuan unceremoniously to the ground and grappled with de Grandin’s antagonist just as he was about to strike his dirk into my companion’s side.

“*Bien, très bien!*” the Frenchman panted as he thrust his knife forward, sinking the blade hilt-deep into the savage’s left armpit. “Very good, indeed, Friend Trowbridge. I have not hurled the javelin since I was a boy at school, and I strongly misdoubted my ability to kill the one with a single throw from my ambush, but, happily, my hand has not lost its cunning. *Voilà*, we have a perfect score to our credit! Come, let us bury them.”

“But was it necessary to kill the poor fellows?” I asked as I helped him scrape a grave with one of his victim’s knives. “Mightn’t we have made them understand we meant them no harm?”

“Friend Trowbridge,” he answered between puffs of exertion as he dragged one of the naked bodies into the shallow trench we had dug, “never, I fear me, will you learn the sense of the goose. With fellows such as these, even as with the shark last night, we take necessary steps for our own protection first.

“This interment which we make now, think you it is for

tenderness of these *canaille*? Ah, non. We bury them that their friends find them not if they come searching, and that the buzzards come not flapping this way to warn the others of what we have done. Good, they are buried. Take up that one's spear and come with me. I would investigate that fire which they have made."

We approached the heights overlooking the fire cautiously, taking care to remain unseen by any possible scout sent out by the main party of natives. It was more than an hour before we maneuvered to a safe observation post. As we crawled over the last ridge of rock obstructing our view I went deathly sick at my stomach and would have fallen down the steep hill, had not de Grandin thrown his arm about me.

Squatting around a blazing bonfire in a circle, like wolves about the stag they have run to earth, were perhaps two dozen naked savages, and, bound upright to a stake fixed in the sand, was a white man, lolling forward against the restraining cords with a horrible limpness. Before him stood two burly Papuans, the war clubs in their hands, red as blood at the tips, telling the devil's work they had just completed. It was blood on the clubs. The brown fiends had beaten their helpless captive's head in, and even now one of them was cutting the cords that held his body to the stake.

But beyond the dead man was a second stake, and, as I looked at this, every drop of blood in my body seemed turned to liquid fire, for, lashed to it, mercifully unconscious, but still alive, was a white woman whom I recognized as the wife of a Dutch planter going out from Holland to join her husband in Sumatra.

"Good God, man!" I cried. "That's a woman; a white woman. We can't let those devils kill *her*!"

"Softly, my friend," de Grandin cautioned, pressing me back, for I would have risen and charged pell-mell down the hill. "We are two, they are more than a score; what would it avail us, or that poor woman, were we to rush down and be killed?"

I turned on him in amazed fury. "You call yourself a Frenchman," I taunted, "yet you haven't chivalry enough to attempt a rescue? A fine Frenchman you are!"

"Chivalry is well — in its place," he admitted, "but no Frenchman is so foolish as to spend his life where there is nothing to be bought with it. Would it help her if we, too, were destroyed, or, which is worse, captured and eaten also? Do we, as physicians, seek to throw away our lives when we find a patient hopelessly sick with phthisis? But no, we live that we may fight the disease in others — that we may destroy the germs of the malady. So let it be in this case. Save that poor one we can not; but take vengeance on her slayers we can and will. I, Jules de Grandin, swear it. Ha,

she has it!"

Even as he spoke one of the cannibal butchers struck the unconscious woman over the head with his club. A stain of red appeared against the pale yellow of her hair, and the poor creature shuddered convulsively, then hung passive and flaccid against her bonds once more.

"*Par le sang du diable*," de Grandin gritted between his teeth, "if it so be that the good God lets me live, I swear to make those *sales bouchers* die one hundred deaths apiece for every hair in that so pitiful woman's head!"

He turned away from the horrid sight below us and began to ascend the hill. "Come away, Friend Trowbridge," he urged. "It is not good that we should look upon a woman's body served as meat. *Pardieu*, almost I wish I had followed your so crazy advice and attempted a rescue; we should have killed some of them so! No matter, as it is, we shall kill all of them, or may those Messieurs Lloyd pay me not one penny."

3

Feeling secure against discovery by the savages, as they were too engrossed in their orgy to look for other victims, we made our way to the peak which towered like a truncated cone at the center of the island.

From our station at the summit we could see the ocean in all directions and get an accurate idea of our surroundings. Apparently, the islet was the merest point of land on the face of the sea — probably only the apex of a submarine volcano. It was roughly oval in shape, extending for a possible five miles in length by two-and-a-quarter miles at its greatest width, and rising out of the ocean with a mountainous steepness, the widest part of the beach at the water-line being not more than three or four hundred feet. On every side, and often in series of three or four, extended reefs and points of rock (no doubt the lesser peaks of the mountain whose un-submerged top constituted the island) so that no craft larger than a whaleboat could hope to come within half a mile of the land without having its bottom torn out by the hidden semi-submerged crags.

"*Nom d'un petit bonhomme!*" de Grandin commented. "This is an ideal place for its purpose, *c'est certain*. Ah, see!" — he drew me to a ridge of rock which ran like a rampart across the well-defined path by which we had ascended. Fastened to the stone by bolts were three sheet-iron troughs, each pointing skyward at an angle of some fifty degrees, and each much blackened by smoke stains. "Do you see?" he asked. "These are for firing rockets — observe the powder burns on them. And here" — his voice rose to an excited pitch and he fairly danced in eagerness — "see what is before us!"

Up the path, almost at the summit of the peak, and about twenty-five feet apart, stood two poles, each some twelve feet in height and fitted with a pulley and lanyard. As we neared them we saw that a lantern with a green globe rested at the base of the right-hand stake, while a red-globed lamp was secured to the rope of the left post “Ah, clever, clever,” de Grandin muttered, staring from one pole to the other. “Observe, my friend. At night the lamps can be lit and hoisted to the tops of these masts then gently raised and lowered. Viewed at a distance against the black background of this mountain they will simulate a ship’s lights to the life. The unfortunate mariner making for them will find his ship fast on these rocks while the lights are still a mile or more away, and — too well we know what happens then. Let us see what more there is, eh?”

Rounding the peak we found ourselves looking down upon the thatched beehive-roofs of a native village, before which a dozen long Papuan canoes were beached on the narrow strip of sand. “Ah,” de Grandin inspected the cluster of huts, “it is there the butchers dwell, eh? That will be a good spot for us to avoid, my friend. Now to find the residence of what you Americans call the master mind. Do you see aught resembling a European dwelling, Friend Trowbridge?”

I searched the greenery below us, but nowhere could I descry a roof. “No,” I answered after a second inspection, “there’s nothing like a white man’s house down there; but how do you know there’s a white man here, anyway?”

“Ho, ho,” he laughed, “how does the rat know the house contains a cat when he hears it mew? Think you those *sacré* eaters of men would know enough to set up such devil’s machinery as this, or that they would take care to dynamite the wreck of a ship after looting it? No, no, my friend, this is white man’s work, and very bad work it is, too. Let us explore.”

Treading warily, we descended the smooth path leading to the rocket-troughs, looking sharply from left to right in search of anything resembling a white man’s house. Several hundred feet down the mountain the path forked abruptly, one branch leading toward the Papuan village, the other running to a narrow strip of beach bordering an inlet between two precipitous rock walls. I stared and stared again, hardly able to believe my eyes, for, drawn up on the sand and made fast by a rope to a ringbolt in the rock was a trim little motor-boat, flat-bottomed for navigating the rock-strewn waters in safety, broad-beamed for mastering the heavy ocean swells, and fitted with a comfortable, roofed-over cabin. Forward, on the little deck above her sharp clipper bow, was an efficient looking Lewis gun mounted on a swivel, and a similar piece of ordnance poked its aggressive nose out of the engine cockpit at the stern.

“*Par la barbe d’un bouc vert,*” de Grandin swore delightedly, “but this is marvelous, this is magnificent, this is superb! Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us take advantage of this miracle; let us leave this hell-hole of an island right away, immediately, at once. *Par—*” The exclamation died, half uttered, and he stared past me with the expression of a superstitious man suddenly face-to-face with a sheeted specter.

3

“Surely, Gentlemen,” said a suave voice behind me, “you are not going to leave without permitting me to offer you some slight hospitality? That would be ungenerous.”

I turned as though stung by a wasp and looked into the smiling eyes of a dark-skinned young man, perhaps thirty years of age. From the top of his spotless *topi* to the tips of his highly polished tan riding boots he was a perfect model of the well-dressed European in the tropics. Not a stain of dust or travel showed on his spruce white drill jacket or modishly cut riding breeches, and as he waved his silver-mounted riding crop in greeting, I saw his slender hands were carefully manicured, the nails cut rather long and stained a vivid pink before being polished to the brightness of mother-of-pearl.

De Grandin laid his hand upon the knife at his belt, before he could draw it, a couple of beetle-browed Malays in khaki jackets and *sarongs* stepped from the bushes bordering the path and leveled a pair of business-like Mauser rifles at us. “I wouldn’t,” the young man warned in a blasé drawl, “I really wouldn’t, if I were you. These fellows are both dead shots and could put enough lead in you to sink you forty fathoms down before you could get the knife out of its sheath, much less into me. Do you mind, really?” He held out his hand for the weapon. “Thank you, that is much better” — he tossed the blade into the water of the inlet with a careless gesture — “really, you know, the most frightfully messy accidents are apt to happen with those things.”

De Grandin and I eyed him in speechless amazement, but he continued as though our meeting were the most conventional thing imaginable.

“Mr. Trowbridge — pardon my assumption, but I heard your name called a moment ago — will you be good enough to favor me with an introduction to your friend?”

“I am Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, of Harrisonville, New Jersey,” I replied, wondering, meanwhile, if I were in the midst of some crazy dream, “and this is Dr. Jules de Grandin, of Paris.”

“So good of you,” the other acknowledged with a smile. “I fear I must be less frank than you for the nonce and

remain veiled in anonymity. However, one really must have some sort of designation, mustn't one? So suppose you know me for the present as Goonong Besar. Savage, unchristian-sounding sort of name, I'll admit, but more convenient than calling, 'hey, you!' or simply whistling when you wish to attract my attention. Eh, what? And now" — he made a slight bow — "if you will be so kind as to step into my humble burrow in the earth ... Yes, that is it, the doorway right before you."

Still under the menacing aim of the Malays' rifles, de Grandin and I walked through the cleft in the rock, traversed a low, narrow passage, darker than a windowless cellar, made a sharp turn to the left, and halted abruptly, blinking our eyes in astonishment.

Before us, seeming to run into infinity, was a wide, long apartment paved with alternate squares of black and white marble, colonnaded down each side with double rows of white-marble pillars and topped with a vaulted ceiling of burnished copper plates. Down the center of the corridor, at intervals of about twenty feet, five silver oil lamps with globes of finely cut crystal hung from the polished ceiling, making the entire room almost as bright as equatorial noon.

"Not half bad, eh?" our host remarked as he viewed our astonishment with amusement. "This is only the vestibule, gentlemen; you really have no idea of the wonders of this house under the water. For instance, would either of you care to retrace your steps? See if you can find the door you came in."

We swung about, like soldiers at the command of execution, staring straight at the point where the entranceway should have been. A slab of marble, firm and solid as any composing the walls of the room, to all appearances, met our gaze; there was neither sign nor remote evidence of any door or doorway before us.

Goonong Besar chuckled delightedly and gave an order to one of his attendants in the harsh, guttural language of Malaya. "If you will look behind you, gentlemen," he resumed, again addressing us, "you will find another surprise."

We wheeled about and almost bumped into a pair of grinning Malay lads who stood at our elbows.

"These boys will show you to your rooms." Goonong Besar announced. "Kindly follow them. It will be useless to attempt conversation, for they understand no language but their native speech, and as for replying, unfortunately, they lack the benefits of a liberal education and can not write, while ..." he shot a quick order to the youths, who immediately opened their mouths as though yawning. Both de Grandin and I gave vent to exclamations of horror. The boys' mouths gaped emptily. Both had had their tongues cut off at the roots.

"You see," Goonong went on in the same musical, slightly bored voice, "these chaps can't be a bit of use to you as gossips, they really can't.

"I think I can furnish you with dinner clothes, Dr. de Grandin, but" — he smiled apologetically — "I'm afraid you, Dr. Trowbridge, are a little too — er — corpulent to be able to wear any garments made for me. So sorry! However, no doubt we can trick you out in a suit of whites Captain Van Thun — er, that is, I'm sure you can be accommodated from our stores. Yes.

"Now, if you will follow the guides, please" — he broke off on a slightly interrogative note and bowed with gentle courtesy toward each of us in turn — "you will excuse me for a short time, I'm sure."

Before we could answer, he signaled his two attendants, and the three of them stepped behind one of the marble columns. We heard a subdued click, as of two pieces of stone coming lightly together.

"But, Monsieur, this is incredible, this is monstrous!" de Grandin began, striding forward. "You shall explain, I demand — *Cordieu*, he is gone!"

He was. As though the wall had faded before his approach, or his own body had dissolved into ether, Goonong Besar had vanished. We were alone in the brilliantly lighted corridor with our tongueless attendants.

Nodding and grinning, the lads signaled us to follow them down the room. One of them ran a few paces ahead and parted a pair of silken curtains, disclosing a narrow doorway through which only one could go at a time. Obeying the lad's gestures, I stepped through the opening, followed by de Grandin and our dumb guides.

The lad who had held aside the curtains for us ran ahead a few paces and gave a strange, eerie cry. We looked sharply at him, wondering what the utterance portended, and from behind us sounded the thud of stone on stone. Turning, we saw the second Malay grinning broadly at us from the place where the doorway had been. I say "had been" advisedly, for, where, the narrow arched door had pierced the thick wall a moment before, was now a solid row of upright marble slabs, no joint or crack showing which portion of the wall was solid stone and which cunningly disguised door.

"*Sang du diable!*" de Grandin muttered. "But I do not like this place. It reminds me of that grim fortress of the Inquisition at Toledo where the good fathers, dressed as demons, could appear and disappear at will through seeming solid walls and frighten the wits out of and the true faith into superstitious heretics."

I suppressed a shudder with difficulty. This underground house of secret doors was too reminiscent of other practises of the Spanish Inquisition besides the harmless mummery of

the monks for my peace of mind.

“*Eh bien,*” de Grandin shrugged, “now we are here we may as well make the best of it. Lead on, *Diablotins*” — he turned to our dark-skinned guides — “we follow.”

We were standing in a long, straight passage, smooth-walled with panels of polished marble, and, like the larger apartment, tiled with alternate squares of black and white. No doorways led off the aisle, but other corridors crossed it at right angles at intervals of thirty to thirty-five feet. Like the larger room, the passage was lighted by oil lamps swung from the ceiling.

Following our guides, we turned to the right down a passageway the exact duplicate of the first, entered a third corridor, and, after walking a considerable distance, made another turn and stopped before a narrow curtained archway. Through this we entered a large square room, windowless, but well lighted by lamps and furnished with two bedsteads of bamboo having strong China matting on them in lieu of springs or mattress. A low bamboo dressing table, fitted with a mirror of polished metal, and several reed chairs constituted the residue of the furniture.

One of the boys signed to us to remove our clothes, while the other ran out, returning almost immediately dragging two sheet-iron bath tubs after him. Placing these in the center of the room he left us again, and reappeared in a few minutes with a wheeled contrivance something like a child’s express wagon in which stood six large earthen jars, four containing warm water, the other two cold.

We stepped into the tubs and the lads proceeded to rub us down with an oily liquid, strongly perfumed with sandalwood and very soothing to feel. When this had been well worked into our skins the lads poured the contents of the warm-water jars over us, splashing us thoroughly from hair to feet, then sluiced us off with a five-gallon douche of almost ice-cold water. Towels of coarse native linen were unfolded, and in less than five minutes we were as thoroughly cleansed, dried and invigorated as any patron of a Turkish bath at home.

I felt rather dubious when my personal attendant produced a clumsy native razor and motioned me to be seated in one of the cane chairs, but the lad proved a skillful barber, light and deft of touch and absolutely speechless — a great improvement upon the loquacious American tonsorialist, I thought.

Dinner clothes and a suit of carefully laundered white drill, all scented with the pungent, pleasing odor of clove husks, were brought in on wicker trays, and as we put the finishing touches on our toilet one of the lads produced a small casket of polished cedar in which reposed a layer of long, black cigars, the sort which retail for a dollar apiece in Havana.

“*Nom d’un petit bonhomme!*” de Grandin exploded as he exhaled a lungful of the fragrant smoke; “this is marvelous; it is magnificent; it is superb — but I like it not, Friend Trowbridge.”

“Bosh,” I responded, puffing in placid content, “you’re afraid of your shadow, de Grandin! Why, man, this is wonderful — think where we were this morning, shipwrecked, pursued by man-eaters, with starvation as the least of our perils, and look at us now, both dressed in clean clothes, with every attention and convenience we could have at home, and safe, man, safe.”

“Safe?” he answered dubiously. “‘Safe,’ do you say? Did you apprehend, my friend, how our host, that so mysterious Monsieur Goonong, almost spoke of Captain Van Thun when the question of clothing you came up?”

“Why, now you speak of it, I do remember how he seemed about to say something about Captain Something-or-Other, and apparently thought better of it,” I agreed. “But what’s that to do with us?”

The little Frenchman came close to me and sank his voice to a scarcely audible whisper: “Captain Franz Van Thun,” he breathed, “was master of the Dutch Indiaman *Van Damm*, which sailed from Rotterdam to Sumatra, and was lost, as far as known, *with all on board*, on her homeward voyage.”

“But—” I protest.

“*She-s-sh!*” he cut me off. “Those servant boys are beckoning: come, we are wanted elsewhere.”

I looked up at the two mutes, and shuddered at sight of the leering grins on their faces.

4

The lads led us through another bewildering series of corridors till our sense of location was completely obfuscated, finally paused, one on each side of an archway, and, bowing deeply, signaled us to enter.

We strode into a long, marble-tiled room which, unlike every other apartment in the queer house, was not brilliantly lighted. The room’s sole illumination was furnished by the glow of fourteen wax candles set in two seven-branched silver candelabra which stood at opposite ends of a polished mahogany table of purest Sheraton design, its waxed surface giving back reflections of crystal, and silver dinner service fit for the table of a king.

“Ah, gentlemen,” Goonong Besar, arrayed in immaculate evening clothes, greeted us from the farther end of the room. “I hope you have brought good appetites with you. I’m fairly ravenous, for my part. Will you join me?”

The same Malay servitors who had accompanied him at our meeting stood behind him now, their semi-military

khaki jackets and sarongs exchanged for costumes of freshly ironed white linen and their rifles replaced by a pair of large-caliber Luger pistols which each wore conspicuously tucked in his scarlet silk cummerbund.

“Sorry I can’t offer you a cocktail,” our host apologized as we seated ourselves, “but ice is not among the improvements available in my modest little menage, unfortunately. However, we find the sea caves do quite well as refrigerators and I think you’ll find this chilled wine really acceptable as a substitute. Ah” — he looked diffidently from one of us to the other, finally fixing his gaze on me — “will you be good enough to ask the blessing, Dr. Trowbridge? You look as if you might be experienced in that line.”

Startled, but greatly reassured by the request, I bowed my head and repeated the customary formula, almost springing from my chair with amazement as I opened my eyes at the prayer’s end. While de Grandin and I had bent above the table during grace, the servants had pulled back the rich *batik* with which the wall facing us was draped, revealing a series of heavy plate glass panels against which the ocean’s green waters pressed. We are looking directly on to the sea bottom.

“Jolly clever idea, what?” Goonong Besar inquired smiling at our surprised faces. “Thought it all up myself; like to see the little finny fellows swim past, you know. Had a beastly hard time getting workmen to do the job for me, too; but all sorts of unbelievable persons trickle into these islands from time to time — architects gone *ga-ga* with drink, skilled artisans in all the trades and what-not — I finally managed to collect the men I wanted.”

“But, Monsieur, the expense,” de Grandin protested with typical Gallic logic, “it must have been prodigious!”

“Oh, no,” the young man answered negligently. “I had to feed the beggars, of course, but most of ’em were habituated to native food, and that’s not very expensive.”

“But their salaries,” de Grandin persisted; “why Monsieur, this house is a work of genius, a marvel of engineering; even drink-ruined architects and engineers capable of producing such a place as this would demand fabulous fees for their services — and the laborers, the men who cut and polished the marble here, they must have been numerous as an army; their wages would be ruinous.”

“Most of the marble was salvaged from deserted Dutch colonial palaces,” Goonong Besar replied. “You know, Holland built a mighty empire in these islands a century or so ago, and her planters lived in palaces fit for kings. When the empire crumbled the planters left, and he who cared to might help himself to their houses, wholly or in part. As for wages” — he waved a jeweled hand carelessly — “I am rich, but the wages made no great inroads on my fortune. Do you remember your medieval history, Dr. de Grandin?”

“Eh? But certainly,” the Frenchman responded, “but ...”

“Don’t you recall, then, the precaution the nobles, ecclesiastical as well as temporal, took to insure the secrecy of their castle or cathedral plans?” He paused, smiling quizzically at de Grandin.

“*Parbleu!* But you would not; you could not, you would not dare!” the Frenchman almost shouted, half rising from his chair and staring at our host as though a mad dog sat in his place.

“Nonsense, of course I would — and did,” the other replied good-humoredly. “Why not? The men were bits of human flotsam, not worth salvaging. And who was to know? Dead men are notoriously uncommunicative, you know. Proverbially so, in fact.”

“But, you tell this to me?” de Grandin looked at him incredulously.

Our host’s face went perfectly expressionless as he stared directly at de Grandin for a period while one might count five slowly, then his dark, rather sullen face lighted with a smile. “May I offer you some more wine, my dear doctor?” he asked.

I looked alternately at my companions in wonderment. Goonong Besar had made some sinister implication which de Grandin had been quick to comprehend, I knew, and their subsequent conversation concerning dead men telling no tales contained a thinly veiled threat; but try as I would I could not find the key to their enigmatic talk. “Medieval castles and cathedrals? Dead men tell no tales?” I repeated to myself. What did it all mean?

Goonong Besar broke in on my thought: “May I offer you a bit more of this white meat, Dr. Trowbridge?” he asked courteously. “Really, we find this white meat” (the words were ever, so slightly emphasized) “most delicious. So tender and well flavored, you know. Do you like it?”

“Very much, thank you,” I replied. “It’s quite different from anything I’ve ever tasted. In a way it reminds me of delicate young pork, yet it’s different, too. Is it peculiar to the islands, Mr. Goonong?”

“Well — er” — he smiled slightly as he cut a thin slice of the delicious roast and placed it on my plate — “I wouldn’t say it is peculiar to our islands, though we have an unusual way of preparing it in this house. The natives hereabouts refer to the animal from which it comes as ‘long pig’ — really a disgusting sort of beast while living; but quite satisfactory when killed and properly cooked. May I serve you again, Dr. de Grandin?” He turned toward the Frenchman with a smile.

I sat suddenly upright in utter, dumfounded amazement as I beheld Grandin’s face. He was leaning forward in his chair, his fierce little blue eyes very round and almost

protruding from his head, his weather-tanned cheeks gone the color of putty as he stared at our host like a subject regarding a professional hypnotist. “*Dieu, grand Dieu!*” he ejaculated in a choking whisper. “‘Long pig,’ did you say? *Sang de St. Denis!* And I have eaten it!”

“My dear chap, are you ill?” I cried, leaping from my chair and hastening to his side. “Has your dinner disagreed with you?”

“*Non, non!*” he waved me away, still speaking that choking whisper. “Sit down, Friend Trowbridge, sit down; but *par l’amour de Dieu*, I beseech you, eat no more of that accurst meat, at least not tonight.”

“Oh, my dear sir!” Goonong Besar protested mildly. “You have spoiled Dr. Trowbridge’s appetite, and he was enjoying this delicious white meat so much, too. This is really too bad, you know. Really, it is!”

He frowned at the silver meat platter before him a moment, then signaled one of his attendants to take it away, adding a quick command in Malayan as he did so.

“Perhaps a little entertainment will help us forget this unfortunate *contretemps*,” he suggested. “I have sent for Miriam. You will like her, I fancy. I have great hopes for her; she has the makings of a really accomplished *artiste*, I think.”

The servant who had taken away the meat returned and whispered something in our host’s ear. As he listened, Goonong Besar’s thin, well-bred face took on such an expression of fury as I had never before seen displayed by a human being. “What?” he shouted, forgetting, apparently, that the Malay did not understand English. “I’ll see about this — we’ll soon see who says ‘must’ and ‘shall’ in this house.”

He turned to us with a perfunctory bow as he rose. “Excuse me, please,” he begged. “A slight misunderstanding has arisen, and I must straighten it out. I shan’t keep you waiting long, I hope; but if you wish anything while I am gone, Hussein” — he indicated the Malay who stood statue-still behind his chair — “will attend your wants. He speaks no English, but you can make him understand by signs, I think.”

“Quick, de Grandin, tell me before he comes back,” I besought as Goonong, accompanied by one of the Malays, left the room.

“Eh?” replied the Frenchman, looking up from an absorbed contemplation of the tableware before him. “What is it you would know, my friend?”

“What was all that word-juggling about medieval builders and dead men telling no tales?” I demanded.

“Oh, that?” he answered with a look of relief. “Why, do you not know that when a great lord of the Middle Ages commissioned an architect to build a castle for him it was

almost tantamount to a death sentence? The architect, the master builders, even the principal workmen, were usually done to death when the building was finished in order that they might not divulge its secret passages and hidden defenses to an enemy, or duplicate the design for some rival noble.”

“Why — why, then, Goonong Besar meant he killed the men who built this submarine house for him!” I ejaculated, horror-stricken.

“Precisely,” de Grandin answered, “but, bad as that may be, we have a more personal interest in the matter. Did you notice him when I showed surprise he should confess his guilt to us?”

“Good heavens, yes!” I answered. “He meant—”

“That, though still breathing, we are, to all intents dead men,” de Grandin supplied.

“And that talk of ‘white meat,’ and ‘long pig’?” I asked.

He drew a shuddering breath, as though the marble-lined cavern had suddenly gone icy-cold. “Trowbridge my friend,” he answered in a low, earnest whisper, “you must know this thing; but you must control yourself, too. Not by word or sign must you betray your knowledge. Throughout these devil-ridden islands, wherever the brown fiends who are their natives eat men, they refer to the cannibal feast as a meal of long pig. That so unfortunate man we saw dead at the stake this morning, and that pitiful Dutch woman we saw clubbed to death — they, my friend, were ‘long pigs.’ That was the *white meat* this devil out of lowest hell set before us this night. That is the food we have eaten at this accurst table!”

“My God!” I half rose from my chair, then sank back, overcome with nausea. “Did we — do you suppose — was it *her* flesh—?”

“*S-s-sh!*” he warned sharply. “Silence, my friend; control yourself. Do not let him see you know. He is coming!”

As though de Grandin’s words had been a theatrical cue for his entrance, Goonong Besar stepped through the silken portieres at the doorway beyond the table, a pleased smile on his swarthy face. “So sorry to keep you waiting,” he apologized. “The trouble is all adjusted now, and we can proceed with our entertainment. Miriam is a little diffident before strangers, but I — er — persuaded her to oblige us.” He turned toward the door through which he had entered and waved his hand to someone behind the curtains.

Three Malays, one a woman bent with age and hideously wrinkled, the other two vacant-faced youths, came through the doorway at his gesture. The woman, bearing a section of bamboo fitted with drumheads of rawhide at each end, led the way, the first boy rested his hand on her shoulder, and the second lad, in turn, held tightly to his companion’s jacket. A second glance told us the reason for this

procedure. The woman, though aged almost to the point of paralysis, possessed a single malignant, blood-shot eye; both boys were sightless, their scarred and sunken eyelids telling mutely of eyeballs gouged from their faces by unskilled hands which had torn the surrounding tissues as they ripped the optics from the quivering flesh.

“*Ha-room; ha-room!*” cried the old crone in a cracked treble, and the two blind boys seated themselves cross-legged on the marble floor. One of them raised a reed pipe to his lips, the other rested a sort of zither upon his knees, and each began trying his instrument tentatively, producing a sound approximating the complaints of a tom-cat suffering with cholera morbus.

“*Ha-room; ha-room!*” the hag cried again, and commenced beating a quick rhythm on her drum, using her fingertips and the heels of her hands alternately for drumsticks. “*Tauk-auk-a — tauk-auk-a — tauk-auk-a!*” the drum-beats boomed hollowly, the first stroke heavily accented, the second and third following in such quick succession that they seemed almost indivisible parts of one continuous thrumming.

Now the pipe and zither took up the tribal tune, and a surge of fantastic music swirled and eddied through the marble-walled apartment. It was unlike anything I had ever heard, a repetitious, insistent, whining of tortured instruments, an air that pleaded with the hearers’ evil nature to overthrow restraint and give the beast within him freedom, a harmony that drugged the senses like opium or the extract of the cola-nut. The music raced and soared, faster, shriller and higher, the painted-silk curtains swung apart and a girl glided out upon the tessellated pavement.

She was young — sixteen, or seventeen at the most — and the sinuous, lithe grace of her movements was as much due to healthy and perfectly co-ordinated muscles as to training. The customary *sarong* of the islands encased her nether limbs, but, instead of the native woman’s jacket, her *sarong* was carried up beyond the gold six-inch wide belt about her waist and tightly wrapped about her bosom so that it formed a single comprehensive garment covering her from armpits to ankles. Save for a chaplet of blazing cabochon rubies about her slender throat, her neck and shoulders were bare, but ornaments in the form of flexible golden snakes with emerald eyes twined up each arm from elbow to shoulder, and bangles of pure, soft gold, hung with triple rows of tiny hawk-bells, circled her wrists. Other bangles, products of the finest goldsmiths of India, jangled about her white ankles above the pearl-encrusted slippers of amethyst velvet, while the diamond aigrette fastened comb-fashion in her sleekly parted black hair was worth a king’s ransom. Fit to ransom a monarch, too, was the superb blue-white

diamond of her nose-stud, fixed in her left nostril, and the rope of pearls which circled her waist and hung swaying to the very hem of her sarong of Philippine pineapple gauze was fit to buy the Peacock Throne of the Grand Mogul himself.

Despite the lavishly applied cosmetics, the antimony which darkened her eyelids to the color of purple grape skins, the cochineal which dyed her lips and cheeks a brilliant scarlet and the powdered charcoal which traced her eyebrows in continuous, fluted line across her forehead, she was beautiful with the rich, ripe beauty of the women who inspired Solomon of old to indite his *Song of Songs*. None but the Jewish race, or perhaps the Arabian, could have produced a woman with the passionate, alluring beauty of Miriam, the dancer in the house beneath the sea.

Back and forth across the checkered floor the girl wove her dance, tracing patterns intricate as lace from Canary or the looms of spiders over the marble with the soft soles of her velvet slippers, the chiming bells at her wrists and ankles keeping time to the calling, luring tune of the old hag and her blind musicians with the consummate art of a Spanish castanet dancer following the music with her hand cymbals.

At last the dance was done.

Shaking like a leaf with the intoxication of her own rhythmic movements, Miriam flung herself full length face downward, before Goonong Besar, and lay upon the marble floor in utter, abject self-abasement.

What he said to her we did not understand, for the words were in harsh Malayan, but he must have given her permission to go, for she rose from her prostration like a dog expecting punishment when its master relents, and ran from the room, bracelets and anklets ringing time to her panic flight, pearls clicking together as they swayed with the motion of her *sarong*.

The old crone rose, too, and led her blind companions from the room, and we three sat staring at each other under the winking candles’ light with the two impassive Malay guards standing motionless behind their master’s chair.

“Do you think she is beautiful?” Goonong Besar asked as he lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke toward the copper ceiling.

“Beautiful?” de Grandin gasped, “*Mon Dieu*, Monsieur, she is wonderful, she is magnificent, she is superb. Death of my life, but she is divine! Never have I seen such a dancer; never such, such — *nom de Dieu*, I am speechless as the fish! In all the languages I know there are no words to describe her!”

“And you, Dr. Trowbridge, what do you think of my little Miriam?” Goonong addressed me.

“She is very lovely,” I acknowledged, feeling the words

foolishly inadequate.

“Ha, ha,” he laughed good-naturedly. “Spoken with true Yankee conservatism, by Jove.

“And that, gentlemen,” he continued, “leads us to an interesting little proposition I have to make you. But first you will smoke? You’ll find these cigars really good. I import them from Havana.” He passed the polished cedar humidor across the table and held a match for us to light our selections of the expensive tobacco.

“Now, then,” he commenced, inhaling a deep lungful of smoke, “first a little family history, then my business proposition. Are you ready, gentlemen?”

De Grandin and I nodded, wondering mutely what the next chapter in this novel of incredible surprises would be.

5

“When we met so auspiciously this afternoon,” our host began in his pleasant voice, “I requested that you call me Goonong Besar. That, however, is what we might call, for want of a better term, merely my *nom de l’ile*. Actually gentlemen, I am the Almost Honorable James Abingdon Richardson.

“*Parbleu, Monsieur*,” de Grandin demanded, “how is it you mean that, ‘the Almost Honorable’?”

The young man blew a cloud of fragrant smoke toward the room’s copper ceiling and watched it float upward a moment before he replied: “My father was an English missionary, my mother a native princess. She was not of the Malay blood, but of the dominant Arab strain, and was known as Laila, Pearl of the Islands.

“My father had alienated himself from his family when he and an elder sister deserted the Church of England and, embracing a dissenting creed, came to Malay to spread the gospel of repentance or damnation among the heathen in their blindness.”

He drew thoughtfully at his cigar and smiled rather bitterly as he resumed: “He was a fine figure of a man, that father of mine, six feet tall, blue-eyed and curly-haired, with a deep, compelling voice and the fire of fanaticism burning in his heart. The natives, Arab and Malay alike, took to his fiery gospel as the desert dwellers of Arabia once listened to the preaching of Mohammed, the camel driver. My grandfather, a pirate prince with a marble palace and a thousand slaves of his own, was one of the converts, and came to the mission bringing his ten-year-old daughter, Laila, with him. He left her at the mission school to learn the gentle teachings of the Prophet of Nazareth. She stayed there four years.”

Again our host paused, puffing silently at his cigar, seemingly attempting to marshal his thoughts. “I believe I

said my father was a dissenting clergyman? Yes, so I did, to be sure. Had he been a member of the established church things might have been different. The established English clergy are bad enough, with their fox hunting and general worldliness, but they’re usually sportsmen. When she was a scant fifteen years old — women of the East mature more rapidly than your Western women, you know — Laila, the Pearl of the Islands, came back to her father’s palace of marble and cedar, bearing a little boy baby in her arms. The charitable Christian sister of the missionary had driven her out of the mission settlement when she learned that she (the sister) was about to have a little nephew whose birth was not pre-sanctified by a wedding ring.

“The old pirate prince was furious. He would have put his daughter and her half-caste child to death and swooped down on the mission with fire and dagger, but my mother had learned much of Christian charity during her stay at the school. She was sure, if she went to my father with as many pearls as her hands could hold, and with a dowry of rubies strung round her neck, he would receive her as his wife — er — make an honest woman of her, as the saying goes.

“However, one thing and another prevented her return to the mission for three years, and when we finally got there we found my reverend sire had taken an English lady to wife.

“Oh, he took the jewels my mother brought — no fear of his refusing — and in return for them he permitted us to live in the settlement as native hangers-on. She, a princess, and the daughter of generations of princesses, scrubbed floors and baked bread in the house presided over by my father’s wife and I, my father’s first-born son, duly christened with his name, fetched and carried for my father’s younger sons.

“They were hard, those days at the mission school. The white boys who were my half-brothers overlooked no chance to remind me of mother’s shame and my own disgrace. Humility and patience under affliction were the lessons my mother and I had ground into us day by day while we remained there.

“Then, when I was a lad of ten years or so, my father’s cousin, Viscount Abingdon, broke his neck at a fox hunt, and, as he died without issue, my father became a member of England’s landed gentry, and went back home to take over the title and the entails. He borrowed on his expectancy before he left and offered my mother money to have me educated as a clerk in some trader’s store, but my mother, for all her years of servitude, was still a princess of royal blood. Also she remembered enough Scripture to quote, ‘Thy money perish with thee.’ So she spat in his face and went back to the palace of her father, telling him that her husband was dead.

“I was sent to school in England — oh, yes, I’m a public school man, Winchester, you know — and I was down from my first term at Cambridge when the war broke out in 1914.

“Why should I have fought for England? What had England or the English ever done for me? It was the call of the blood — the English blood — perhaps. At any rate I joined up and was gazetted to a London regiment. Everything was death or glory those days, you know. ‘For King and Country,’ and all that sort of tosh. Racial lines were wiped out, and every man, whatever his color or creed, was for the common cause. Rot!

“I came into the officers’ mess one night after a hard day’s drill, and was presented to a young man from one of the guards regiments. ‘Lieutenant Richardson,’ my captain said, ‘this is Lieutenant Richardson. Queer coincidence, you chaps are both James Abingdon Richardson. Ought to be great pals on that account, what?’

“The other Lieutenant Richardson looked me over from head to foot, then repeated distinctly, so everyone in the room could hear and understand. ‘James, my boots need polishing. Attend to it.’ It was the same order he had given me at the mission school a hundred times when we were lads together. He was Lieutenant the Honorable James Abingdon Richardson, *legitimate* eldest son of Viscount Abingdon. I was...”

He broke off, staring straight before him a moment, then: “There was a devil of a row. Officers weren’t supposed to beat other officers into insensibility in company mess, you know. I was dismissed from the service, and came back to the islands.

“My grandfather was dead; so was my mother. I was monarch of all I surveyed — if I was willing not to look too far — and since my return I have consecrated my life to repaying my debt to my father on such of his race as crossed my path.

“The hunting has been fairly good, too. White men are such fools! Ship after ship has run aground on the rocks here, sometimes in answer to my signal rockets, sometimes mistaking the red and green lamps on the hill up yonder for ships’ lights.

“It’s been profitable. Nearly every ship so far has contained enough loot to make the game distinctly worth the trouble. I must admit your ship was somewhat of a disappointment in respect of monetary returns, but then I have had the pleasure of your company; that’s something.

“I keep a crew of Papuans around to do the dirty work, and let ’em eat a few prisoners now and then by way of reward — don’t mind an occasional helping of ‘long pig’ myself, as a matter of fact, provided it’s a white one.

“But” — he smiled unpleasantly — “conditions aren’t ideal, yet. I still have to install electricity in the house and

rig up a wireless apparatus — I could catch more game that way — and then there’s the question of women. Remember how Holy Writ says, ‘It is not good for man to dwell alone’? I’ve found it out, already.

“Old Umera, the woman who played the drum tonight, and the slave girl, Miriam, are the only women in the establishment, thus far, but I intend to remedy that soon. I shall send to one of the larger islands and buy several of the most beautiful maidens available within the next few months, and live as befits a prince — a pirate prince, even as my grandfather was.

“Now, white men” — his suave manner dropped from him like a mask let down, and implacable hatred glared from his dark eyes — “this is my proposition to you. Before I establish my seraglio it is necessary that I possess suitable furniture. I can not spare any of my faithful retainers for the purpose of attending my women, but you two come into my hands providentially. Both of you are surgeons — you shall perform the necessary operations on each other. It is a matter of indifference to me which of you operates first — you may draw straws for the privilege if you wish — but it is my will that you do this thing, and my will is law on this island.”

Both de Grandin and I looked at him in speechless horror, but he took no notice of amazement. “You may think you will refuse,” he told us, “but you will not. Captain Van Thun, of the Dutch steamer *Van Damm*, and his first mate were offered the same chance and refused it. They chose to interview a little pet I keep about the premises as an alternative: but when the time for the interview came both would gladly have reconsidered their decision. This house is the one place in the world where a white man must keep his word, willy-nilly. Both of them were obliged to carry out their bargain to the letter — and I can not say the prestige of the pure Caucasian breed was strengthened by the way they did it.

“Now, I will give you gentlemen a greater opportunity for deliberation than I gave the Dutchmen. You shall first be allowed to see my pet, then decide whether you will accept my offer or not. But I warn you beforehand, whatever decision you make must be adhered to.

“Come.” He turned to the two armed Malays who stood behind his chair and barked an order. Instantly de Grandin and I were covered by their pistols, and the scowling faces behind the firearms’ sights told us we might expect no quarter if the order to fire were given.

“Come,” Goonong Besar — or Richardson — repeated imperiously, “walk ahead, you two, and remember, the first attempt either of you makes to escape will mean a bullet through his brain.”

We marched down a series of identical corridors as bewildering as the labyrinth of Crete, mysterious stone doors thudding shut behind us from time to time, other doors swinging open in the solid walls as our guards pressed cunningly concealed springs in the walls or floor. Finally we brought up on a sort of colonnaded porch, a tiled footpath bordered with a low stone parapet from which a row of carved stone columns rose to a concave ceiling of natural stone. Below the balcony's balustrade stretched a long, narrow pool of dead-motionless water between abrupt vertical walls of rock, and, some two hundred feet away, through the arch of a natural cave, the starlit tropical sky showed like a little patch of freedom before our straining eyes. The haze which had thickened the air the previous night must have cleared away, for rays of the bright, full moon painted a "path to Spain" over the waters at the cavern's mouth, and sent sufficient light as far back as our balcony to enable us to distinguish an occasional tiny ripple on the glassy surface below us.

"Here, pretty, pretty!" our captor called, leaning forward between two columns. "Come up and see the brave white men who may come to play with you. Here, pretty pet; come up, come up!"

We stared into the purple waters like lost souls gazing on the hell prepared for them, but no motion agitated the depths.

"Sulky brute!" the half-caste exclaimed, and snatched a pistol from the girdle of one of his attendants. "Come up," he repeated harshly. "Damn you, come when I call!" He tossed the weapon into the pool below.

De Grandin and I uttered a gasp of horror in unison, and I felt his nails bite into my arm as his strong slender fingers gripped me convulsively.

As though the pistol had been superheated and capable of setting the water in the cave boiling by its touch, the deep, blue-black pool beneath us suddenly woke to life. Ripples — living, groping ripples — appeared on the pool's smooth face and long, twisting arms, sinuous as snakes, thick as fire-hose, seemed waving just under the surface, flicking into the air now and again and displaying tentacles roughened with great, wart-like protuberances. Something like a monster bubble, transparent-gray like a jelly-fish, yet, oddly, spotted like an unclean reptile, almost as big around as the umbrellas used by teamsters on their wagons in summer-time, and, like an umbrella, ribbed at regular intervals, rose from the darker water, and a pair of monstrous, hideous white eyes, large as dinner plates, with black pupils large as saucers, stared greedily, unwinkingly, at us.

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" de Grandin breathed.

"The sea-devil; the giant octopus!"

"Quite so," Goonong Besar agreed affably, "the giant octopus. What he grasps he holds forever, and he grasps all he can reach. A full-grown elephant thrown into that water would have no more chance of escape than a minnow — or, for unpleasant example, than you gentlemen would. Now, perhaps you realize why Captain Van Thun and his first officer wished they had chosen to enter my — er — employ, albeit in a somewhat extraordinary capacity. I did not afford them a chance of viewing the alternative beforehand, as I have you, however. Now that you have had your chance, I am sure you will take the matter under serious advisement before you refuse.

"There is no hurry; you will be given all tonight and tomorrow to arrive at a decision. I shall expect your answer, at dinner tomorrow. Good gentlemen, my boys will show you to your room. Good night, and — er — may I wish you pleasant dreams?"

With a mocking laugh he stepped quickly back into the shadows, we heard the sound we had come to recognize as the closing of one of the hidden stone doors, and found ourselves alone upon the balcony over-looking the den of the giant octopus.

"*Bon Dieu!*" de Grandin cried despairingly, "Trowbridge, my friend, they make a mistake, those people who insist the devil dwells in hell. *Parbleu!* What is that?"

The noise which startled him was the shuffling of bare brown feet. The tongueless youths who acted as our *valets de chambre* were coming reluctantly toward us down the passageway, their eyes rolling in fearful glances toward the balustrade beyond which the devil of the sea lurked in his watery lair.

"*En bien,*" the Frenchman shrugged, "it is the two devilkins again. Lead on, *mes enfants*; any place is better than this threshold of hell."

6

"And now," he announced as he dropped into one of the bedroom's wicker chairs and lighted a cigarette, "we are in what you Americans would call a tight fix, Friend Trowbridge. To accede to that half-caste hellion's proposition would be to dishonor ourselves forever — that is unthinkable. But to be eaten up by that so infernal octopus, that, too, is unthinkable. *Morbleu,* had I known then what I know now I should have demanded one thousand pounds a day from those Messieurs Lloyd and then refused their offer. As your so splendid soldiers were wont to say during the war, we are, of a surety, S.O.L., my friend."

Beneath the bamboo bedstead across the room a slight

rustling sounded. I looked apathetically toward the bed, indifferent to any fresh horror which might appear; but, wretched as I was, I was not prepared for the apparition which emerged.

Stripped of her gorgeous raiment of pineapple gauze, a *sarong* and jacket of the cheapest native cotton inadequately covering her glorious body, an ivory-wood button replacing her diamond nose-stud, her feet bare and no article of jewelry adorning her, Miriam, the dancer, crept forth and flung herself to her knees before de Grandin.

“Oh, Monsieur,” she begged in a voice choked with tears, “have pity on me, I implore you. Be merciful to me, as you would have another in your place be pitiful to your sister, were she in mine.”

“*Morbleu*, child, is it of me you ask pity?” de Grandin demanded. “How can I, who can not even choose my own death, show compassion to you?”

“Kill me,” she answered fiercely. “Kill me now, while yet there is time. See, I have brought you this” — from the folds of her scanty sarong she drew a native kris, a wavy-bladed short sword with a razor edge and needle point.

“Stab me with it,” she besought, “then, if you wish, use it on your friend and yourself; there is no other hope. Look about you, do not you see there is no way of dying in this prison room? Once on a time the mirror was of glass, but a captive white man broke it and almost succeeded in cutting his wrists with the pieces until he died. Since then Goonong Besar has had a metal mirror in this room.”

“*Pardieu*, you are right, child!” de Grandin agreed as he glanced at the dressing table over which the metal mirror hung. “But why do you seek death? Are you, too, destined for the octopus?”

She shuddered. “Some day, perhaps, but while I retain my beauty there is small fear of that. Every day old Umera, the one-eyed she-devil, teaches me to dance, and when I do not please her (and she is very hard to please) she beats me with bamboo rods on the soles of my feet till I can scarcely bear to walk. And Goonong Besar makes me dance for him every night till I am ready to drop, and if I do not smile upon him as I dance, or if I grow weary too soon, so that my feet lag before he gives me permission to stop, he beats me.

“Every time a ship is caught in his trap he saves some of the officers and makes me dance before them, and I know they are to be fed to the fish-devil, yet I must smile upon them, or he will beat me till my feet bleed, and the old woman will beat me when he is weary of it.

“My father was French, Monsieur, though I, myself, was born in England of a Spanish mother. We lost all our money in the war, for my father kept a goldsmith’s shop in Rheims, and the *sale boche* stole everything he had. We came to the islands after the war, and my father made money as a trader.

We were returning home on the Dutch ship *Van Damm* when Goonong Besar caught her in his trap.

“Me he kept to be taught to dance the dances of the islands and to be tortured — see, he has put a ring in my nose, like a native woman’s.” She lifted a trembling hand to the wooden peg which kept the hole pierced in her nose from growing together when she was not wearing her jeweled stud. “My father — oh, God of Israel! — he fed to the devil-fish before my eyes and told me he would serve me the same way if I proved not submissive to his will in all things.

“And so, Monsieur,” she ended simply, “I would that you cause me to die and be out of my unhappiness.”

As the girl talked, de Grandin’s face registered every emotion from amazement to horror and compassion. As she completed her narrative he looked thoughtful “Wait, wait, my pretty one,” he besought, as she would have forced the kris into his hand. “I must think. *Pardieu!* Jules de Grandin, you silly fool, you must think now as never before.” He sank his face in his hands and bowed his chin nearly to his knees.

“Tell me, my little cabbage,” he demanded suddenly, “do they let you out of this accursed house by daylight, *hein?*”

“Oh, yes,” she responded. “I may go or come as I will when I am not practising my dances or being beaten. I may go anywhere on the island I wish, for no one, not even the cannibals who live on the shore, would dare lay his little finger on me for fear of the master. I belong to Goonong Besar, and he would feed anyone who touched his property to the great fish-devil.”

“And why have you never sought to die by your own hand?” de Grandin asked suspiciously.

“Jews do not commit suicide,” she answered proudly. “To die by another’s hand is not forbidden — Jephthah’s daughter so died — but to go from life with your hands reddened with your own blood is against the law of my fathers.”

“Ah, yes, I understand,” he agreed with a short nod. “You children of Jacob shame us so-called Christians in the way you keep your precepts, child. *Eh bien*, ’tis fortunate for all us you have a strong conscience, my beautiful.

“Attend me: In your walks about this never-enough-to-be-execrated island have you observed, near the spot where the masts which carry the false ship’s lights stand, certain plants growing, plants with shining leaves and a fruit like the unripe apple which grows in France — a low bush with fruit of pale green?”

The girl wrinkled her white forehead thoughtfully, then nodded twice. “Yes,” she replied, “I have seen such a plant.”

“*Très bien*,” he nodded approvingly, “the way from this

evil place seems to open before us, *mes amis*. At least, we have the sporting chance. Now listen, and listen well, my little half-orange, for upon your obedience rests our chance of freedom.

“Tomorrow, when you have a chance to leave this vestibule of hell, go you to the place where those fruits like apples grow and gather as many of them as you can carry in your *sarong*. Bring these fruits of the *Cocculus indicus* to the house and mash them to a pulp in some jar which you must procure. At the dinner hour, pour the contents of that jar into the water where dwells the devil-fish. Do not fail us, my little pigeon, for upon your faithful performance of your trust our lives, and yours, depend, *pardieu!* If you do but carry out your orders we shall feed that Monsieur Octopus such a meal as he will have small belly for, *parbleu!*”

“When you have poured all the crushed fruit into the water, secret yourself in the shadows near by and wait till we come. You can swim? Good. When we do leap into the water, do you leap also, and altogether we shall swim to that boat I was about to borrow when we met this so excellent Monsieur Goonong-Besar-James-Abingdon-Richardson-Devil. *Cordieu*, I think that Jules de Grandin is not such a fool as I thought he was!

“Good night, fairest one, and may the God of your people, and the gentle Mary, too, guard you this night, and all the nights of your life.”

7

“Good evening, gentlemen,” Goonong Besar greeted as we entered the dining room next evening; “have you decided upon our little proposition?”

“But certainly,” de Grandin assured him. “If we must choose between a few minutes’ conversation with the octopus and a lifetime, or even half an hour’s sight of your neither-black-nor-white face, we cast our vote for the fish. He, at least, does what he does from nature; he is no vile parody of his kind. Let us go to the fish-house *tout vite*, *Monsieur*. The sooner we get this business completed, the sooner we shall be rid of you!”

Goonong Besar’s pale countenance went absolutely livid with fury. “You insignificant little fool,” he cried, “I’ll teach you to insult me! *Ha-room!*” he sent the call echoing through the marble-lined cave. “You’ll not be so brave when you feel those tentacles strangling the life out of your puny body and that beak tearing your flesh off your bones before the water has a chance to drown you.”

He poured a string of burning orders at his two guards, who seized their rifles and thrust them at us. “Off, off to the grotto!” he shrieked, beside himself with rage. “Don’t think you can escape the devil-fish by resisting my men. They

won’t shoot to kill; they’ll only cripple you and drag you to the pool. Will you walk, or shall we shoot you first and pull you there?”

“Monsieur,” de Grandin drew himself proudly erect, “a gentleman of France fears no death, a Malay *batard* can offer. Lead on!”

Biting his pale lips till the blood ran to keep from screaming with fury, Goonong Besar signaled his guards, and we took up our way toward the sea monster’s lair.

“*La bon Dieu* grant *la belle juive* has done her work thoroughly,” de Grandin whispered as we came out upon the balcony. “I like not this part of our little playlet, my friend. Should our plan have failed, *adieu.*” He gave my hand a hasty pressure.

“Who goes first?” Goonong Besar asked as we halted by the balustrade.

“*Pardieu*, you do!” de Grandin shouted, and before anyone was aware of his intention he dashed one of his small hard fists squarely into the astonished half-caste’s face, seized him about the waist and flung him bodily into the black, menacing water below.

“In, Friend Trowbridge!” he called, leaping upon the parapet. “Dive and swim — it is our only chance!”

I waited no second bidding, but jumped as far outward as possible, striking out vigorously toward the far end of the cave, striving to keep my head as near water level as possible, yet draw an occasional breath.

Horror swam beside me. Each stroke I took I expected one of the monster’s slimy tentacles to seize me and drag me under; but no great, gray bubble rose from the black depths, no questing arms reached toward me. For all we could observe to the contrary, the pool was as harmless as any of the thousands of rocky caves which dot the volcanic coast of Malaya.

Bullets whipped and tore the water around us, striking rocky walls and singing off in vicious ricochets; but the light was poor, and the Malay marksmen emptied their pieces with no effect.

“*Triomphe!*” de Grandin announced, blowing the water from his mouth in a great, gusty sigh of relief as we gained the shingle outside the cave. “Miriam, my beautiful one, are you with us?”

“Yes,” responded a voice from the darkness. “I did as you bade me, Monsieur, and the great fish-devil sank almost as soon as he thrust his snake-arms into the fruit as it floated on the water. But when I saw he was dead I did not dare wait; but swam out here to abide your coming.”

“It is good,” de Grandin commended. “One of those bullets might easily have hit you. They are execrable marksmen, those Malays, but accidents do occur.

“Now, Monsieur,” he addressed the limp bundle he towed

behind him in the water, "I have a little business proposition to make to *you*. Will you accompany us, and be delivered to the Dutch or British to be hanged for the damned pirate you are, or will you fight me for your so miserable life here and now?"

"I cannot fight you now," Goonong Besar answered, "you broke my arm with your cowardly ju-jitsu when you took advantage of me and attacked me without warning."

"Ah, so?" de Grandin replied, helping his captive to the beach. "That is unfortunate, for — *Mordieu*, scoundrel, would you do so!"

The Eurasian had suddenly drawn a dagger from his coat and lunged viciously at de Grandin's breast.

With the agility of a cat the Frenchman evaded the thrust, seized his antagonist's wrist, and twisted the knife from his grasp. His foot shot out, he drove his fist savagely into Goonong's throat, and the half-caste sprawled helplessly on the sand.

"Attend Mademoiselle!" de Grandin called to me. "It is not well for her to see what I must do here."

There was the sound of a scuffle, then a horrible gargling noise, and the beating of hands and feet upon the sands.

"*Fini!*" de Grandin remarked nonchalantly, dipping his hands in the water and cleansing them of some dark stains.

"You ...?" I began.

"*Mais certainement,*" he replied matter-of-factly. "I slit his throat. What would you have? He was a mad dog; why should he continue to live?"

Walking hurriedly along the beach, we came to the little power-boat moored in the inlet and set her going.

"Where to?" I asked as de Grandin swung the trim little craft around a rocky promontory.

"Do you forget, *cher* Trowbridge, that we have a score to settle with those cannibals?" he asked.

We settled it. Running the launch close inshore, de Grandin shouted defiance to the Papuans till they came tumbling out of their cone-shaped huts like angry bees from their hives.

"*Sa ha, messieurs,*" de Grandin called, "we give you food of another sort this night. Eat it, *sacré canaille*; eat it!" The

Lewis machine-gun barked and sputtered, and a chorus of cries and groans rose from the beach.

"It is well," he announced as he resumed the wheel. "They eat no more white women, those ones. Indeed, did I still believe the teachings of my youth, I should say they were even now partaking of the devil's hospitality with their late master."

"But see here," I demanded as we chugged our way toward the open water, "what was it you told Miriam to put in the water where the octopus was, de Grandin?"

He chuckled. "Had you studied as much biology as I, Friend Trowbridge, you would recognize that glorious plant, the *Cocculus indicus*, when you saw it. All over the Polynesian islands the lazy natives, who desire to obtain food with the minimum of labor, mash up the berry of that plant and spread it in the water where the fish swim. A little of it will render the fish insensible, a little more will kill him as dead as the late lamented Goonong Besar. I noticed that plant growing on the island, and when our lovely Jewess told me she could go and come at will I said to me, 'By the George, why not have her poison that great devil-fish and swim to freedom?' *Voilà tout!*"

A passing Dutch steamer picked us up two days later.

The passengers and crew gaped widely at Miriam's imperial beauty, and wider still at de Grandin's account of our exploits. "*Pardieu!*" he confided to me one night as we walked the deck, "I fear those Dutchmen misbelieve me, Friend Trowbridge. Perhaps I shall have to slit their ears to teach them to respect the word of a Frenchman."

It was six months later that a Western Union messenger entered my consulting room at Harrisonville and handed me a blue-and-white envelope. "Sign here," he ordered.

I tore the envelope open, and this is what I read:

*Miriam made big sensation in Folies Bèrgères tonight.
Felicitations.* — de Grandin

The Vengeance of India

ALL DAY the March wind had been muttering and growling like a peevish giant with the toothache. As darkness fell it began to raise its voice; by nine o'clock it was shrieking and screaming like a billion banshees suffering with *cholera morbus*. I huddled over the coke fire burning in my study grate and tried to concentrate on my book, to forget the wailing of the wind and the misfortunes of the day, but made very poor work of it.

Mingling with the wind's skirling there suddenly sounded the raucous bellow of an automobile siren, followed, a moment later, by a hammering and clattering at the front door as if whoever stood outside would beat the panels in by main force.

"If ye plaze, sor," Nora, my maid of all work, announced, poking her nose around the half-opened study door, "there's a gintilman ter see ye — an Eyetalian man, I think he is." Nora disapproves strongly of "furriners" in general and Italians in particular, and when they come, as they frequently do, to summon me from the house on a stormy night, her disapproval is hidden neither from my callers nor me.

Tonight, however, I greeted the interruption with something like relief. Action of any sort, even traveling a dozen miles to set an Italian laborer's broken limb without much hope of compensation, would provide a welcome distraction from the pall of gloom which enveloped me. "Bring him in," I ordered.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed a voice behind her. "He is already in! Did you think, my friend, that I would travel all this way on such a night to have your servant debate entrance with me?"

I leaped from my chair with a whoop of delight and seized both my visitor's slender hands in mine. "De Grandin!" I exclaimed delightedly. "Jules de Grandin! What in the world are you doing here? I thought you'd be in your laboratory at the Sorbonne by now."

"But no," he denied, handing his sopping cap and raincoat to Nora and seating himself across the fire from me, "there is little rest for the wicked in this world, my friend, and for Jules de Grandin there is none at all. Hardly had we finished with that villainous Goonong Besar than I was dispatched, post-haste, to Brazil, and when my work was finished there I must needs be called to tell of my experiments before your association of physicians in New York. *Eh bien*, but I fear me I shall not see my peaceful laboratory for some time, my friend."

"Oh, so you were in Brazil?" I answered thoughtfully.

"Trowbridge, my friend!" he put out both hands impulsively. "The mention of that country distresses you. Tell me, can I be of help?"

"H'm, I'm afraid not," I replied sadly. "It's an odd coincidence, your coming from there today, though. You see, a patient of mine, a Brazilian lady, died today, and I've no more idea what killed her than an African Bushman has about the nebular hypothesis."

"*Oh, la, la!*" he chuckled. "Friend Trowbridge, to see you is worth traveling twice around the world. Forty years a physician, and he worries over a faulty diagnosis! My dear fellow, do you not know the only truthful certificate a physician ever gives for the cause of death is when he writes down 'unknown'?"

"I suppose so," I agreed, "but this case is out of the ordinary, de Grandin. These people, the Drigos, have lived here only a few weeks, and virtually nothing is known of them, except that they seem to have plenty of money. This morning, about eleven o'clock, I was called to attend their only child, a daughter about eighteen years of age, and found her in a sort of stupor. Not a faint, nor yet a condition of profound depression, simply sleepy, like any young woman who was up late the previous night. There was no history of unusual activity on her part; she had gone to bed at her usual hour the night before, and was apparently in good health within an hour of the time I was called. I could see no reason for my services, to tell you the truth, for her condition did not appear at all serious, yet, before I could reassure her parents and leave the house, she went to sleep and slept her life away. *Died in what appeared a healthy, natural sleep in less than ten minutes!*"

"A-a-ah?" he answered on a rising note. "You interest me, my friend. It is, perhaps, some new, acute form of sleeping sickness we have here. Come, can you make some excuse to go to the people's house? I would make inquiries from them. Perchance we shall learn something for the benefit of science."

I was about to demur when the tinkle of my telephone cut in. "Dr. Trowbridge," called the party at the other end, "this is Johnston, the undertaker, speaking. Can you come over to Drigo's to sign the death certificate, or shall I bring it to your house tomorrow? I can't get any information from these folks. They don't even know what she died of."

"Neither do I," I muttered to myself, but aloud I said, "Why, yes, Mr. Johnston, I'll come right over. There's a friend of mine, another doctor, here; I'll bring him along."

"Good enough," he responded. "If I have to argue with

these dagoes much longer I'll need you and your friend, too, to patch up my nerves."

Robed in a gown of priceless old lace, a white net mantilla drawn over her smoothly parted black hair, Ramalha Drigo lay at rest in an elaborate open-couch casket of mahogany, her slender, oleander-white hands piously crossed upon her virginal bosom, a rosary of carved ebony, terminating in a silver crucifix, intertwined in her waxen fingers.

"*Bon Dieu*," de Grandin breathed as he bent over the girl's composed oval face, "she was beautiful, this poor one! *Hélas* that she should die thus early!"

I murmured an assent as I took the form Mr. Johnston proffered me and wrote "unknown" in the space reserved for cause of death and "about one-half hour" in the place allotted for duration of last illness.

"Gosh, Doc, he's a queer one, that foreign friend of yours," the undertaker commented, attracting my attention with a nudge and nodding toward de Grandin. The little Frenchman was bending over the casket, his blond, waxed mustache twitching like the whiskers of an alert tom-cat, his slender, womanish hands patting the girl's arms and breast questioningly, as though they sought the clue to her mysterious death beneath the folds of her robe.

"He's queer, all right," I agreed, "but I've never seen him do anything without good reason. Why—"

A faltering step in the hall cut short my remark as Mr. Drigo entered the parlor. "Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted with a courteous bow. "Dr. de Grandin" — as I presented the Frenchman — "I am honored to make your acquaintance."

De Grandin nodded an absent-minded acknowledgment of the courtesy and turned away, addressing Mr. Johnston in a whisper. "You are an embalmer, my friend?" he asked, almost eagerly, it seemed to me.

"Yes," answered the other, wonderingly. "I've had a license to practice for ten years."

"And it is customary that you embalm the dead in this country, yes?" de Grandin insisted.

"Yes, sir; but sometimes—"

"And when embalment is not made, it is the exception, rather than the rule?"

"Decidedly, but—"

"You would embalm as a matter of course, unless expressly ordered to the contrary, then?"

"Yes," Johnston admitted.

"Ah, then, was it Monsieur Drigo who forbade that you embalm his daughter?"

The undertaker started as though pricked with a needle. "How did you know?" he demanded.

The ghost of one of his impish smiles flickered across de Grandin's face, to be replaced instantly with a look more suited to the occasion. "In France, my friend," he confided, "the science of embalming, as practised in America, is still a rarity. But in Paris we have a young man, a Canadian, who preserves the dead even as you do here, and from him I have learn many things. I have, for example, learned that you inject the preserving fluids in either the brachial, the carotid, the axillary or the femoral artery. *Très bien*, if you have embalmed this poor child here, you have used one of those arteries, *n'est-ce-pas?* The chances are that an American embalmer would not utilize the femoral artery to embalm a woman's body, so I feel to see if you have bandaged the arm or breast of that poor dead child where you have inserted your fluid-tube in one of those other arteries. I find no bandage; I feel her cheeks, they are firm as life; therefore, I decide embalment have not been done, and, knowing your custom here, I ask to know who have ordered the contrary. *Voilà*, it are not magic which make me know; but the ordinary sense of the horse."

He linked his arm in mine. "Come, Friend Trowbridge," he announced, "there is no more we can do here. Let us leave this sad house to its sorrow. Tomorrow, or the next day, perhaps, you will have more of these so mysterious cases, and we can study them together. Meanwhile, let us leave what we can not help."

The three of us, Johnston, de Grandin and I, were about to pass from the house when the Frenchman paused, gazing intently at a life-sized half-length portrait in oils hanging on the hall wall. "Monsieur Drigo," he asked, "forgive my unseemly curiosity, but that gentleman, who was he?"

Something like terror appeared in the other's face as he answered, "My grandfather, sir."

"Ah, but *Monsieur*," de Grandin objected, "that gentleman, he wears the British uniform, is it not so?"

"Yes," Drigo replied. "My mother's father was a British officer, her mother was a Portuguese lady."

"Thank you," de Grandin replied with a bow as he followed me through the front door.

They buried Ramalha Drigo in the little graveyard of the Catholic chapel the following day. It was a dreary ceremony, no one but the old priest, the Drigo family, de Grandin and I were in attendance, and the wailing March wind seemed echoing our own somber thoughts as it soughed through the branches of the leafless Lombardy poplars.

"It is old, that cemetery?" de Grandin hazarded as we drove from the church to my house following the brief committal service.

"Very old," I assented. "St. Benedict's is one of the

earliest Roman Catholic parishes in New Jersey, and the cemetery is one of the few in this neighborhood dating back to Colonial days.”

“And have you noticed any strange colored men in the neighborhood lately?” he asked irrelevantly.

“Strange colored men?” I echoed. “What in the world are you driving at, de Grandin? First you ask me if the cemetery is old, then you go off at a tangent, and want to know if there are any strange Negroes in the neighborhood. You—”

“Tell me, my friend,” he interrupted, “how did the poor dead lady spend her time? Did she walk much in the country, or go from home much in the night?”

“For heaven’s sake!” I looked at him in wonderment, and almost ran the car into the roadside ditch. “Have you lost your senses completely, or are you trying to see how foolish you can be? I never heard such rambling questions!”

“Nor have you ever heard that the longest way round is usually the shortest way home, apparently,” he added. “Believe me, my friend, I do not ask aimless questions. But no, that is not my method. Come, if you will set me down I shall walk through the village and attempt to collect some information. My regards to your amiable cook, if you please, and request that she will prepare some of her so excellent apple pie for dinner. I shall be home by meal time, never fear.”

He was as good as his word. It lacked twenty minutes of the dinner hour when he hurried into the house, his cheeks reddened from brisk walking in the chilly March air. But something in his manner, his nervously quick movements, his air of suppressed excitement, told me he was on the track of some fresh mystery.

“Well, what is it?” I asked as we adjourned to the library after dinner. “Have you heard anything of the strange colored men you were so anxious about this afternoon?” I could not forbear a malicious grin as I reminded him of his senseless question.

“But of course,” he returned evenly as he lighted a French cigarette and blew a cloud of acrid smoke toward the ceiling. “Am I not Jules de Grandin, and does not Jules de Grandin get the information he seeks? At all times? Most certainly.”

He laughed outright at the amazed look with which I greeted his egotistical sally. “*La la*, Friend Trowbridge,” he exclaimed, “you are so droll! Always you Americans and English would have the world believe you have yourselves in perfect control, yet I can play upon you as a harpist plays upon his strings. When will you learn that my honest, well-merited self-respect is not empty boastfulness?”

He cast aside his bantering manner and leaned forward very suddenly. “What do you know of St. Benedict’s

cemetery?” he demanded.

“Eh, St. Benedict’s—?” I countered, at a loss to answer.

“Precisely, exactly,” he affirmed. “Do you, for example, know that the entire ground near the old chapel is underlaid with ancient tombs — vaulted, brick-lined passageways?”

“No,” I replied. “Never heard such a thing.”

“Ah, so?” he answered sarcastically. “All your life you have lived here, yet you know naught of this curiosity. Truly, I have said not half enough in praise of Jules de Grandin, I fear. And, since you know nothing of the tombs, I take it you did not know that when the Drigo family became affiliated with St. Benedict’s congregation they bought the freehold to a pew, and, along, with it, the license to bury their dead in one of the old tombs. Eh, you did not know that?”

“Of course not,” I returned. “I’m a physician, not a detective, de Grandin. Why should I pry into my patients’ private affairs?”

“U’m, why, indeed?” he replied. Then, with an abrupt change of subject: “Have you heard Beinhauer’s new hypothesis concerning catabolism? No?” And with that he launched on a long and highly technical explanation of the Austrian’s theory of destructive metabolism, nor could all my efforts drag him back to a single word concerning his discoveries of the afternoon.

“Pretty bad business, down to th’ graveyard, ain’t it, Doc?” asked the postman as I passed him on my way to my morning calls the following day.

“What’s that?” I asked, startled. “What’s happened?”

He smiled with the conscious superiority of one who has interesting gossip to retail. “That Drigo girl” — he jerked an indicative thumb in the general direction of the Drigo home, — “th’ one that died th’ other day. Some grave robbers musta dug her up last night, ’cause th’ sexton of St. Benedict’s found her veil layin’ on th’ ground this mornin’. They’re goin’ to open her grave this afternoon to see if her body’s still there, I hear. ’Tain’t likely they’ll find nothin’, though; them body-snatchers don’t usually leave nothin’ layin’ around when they get through.”

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed. “Grave robbery?”

“Yep; that’s what they say.”

I hurried on my way, my thoughts racing faster than the wheels of my motor. It was all too likely. Gossip of the mysterious cause of the girl’s death was bound to have got about, and her lovely body would have proved an irresistibly attractive bait for some anatomist with a passion for morbid research. At my first stop I called the house and told de Grandin.

“*Cordieu!* Is it so!” he shouted in answer. “I have won my bet, then!”

“You — what?” I replied incredulously.

“Last night, when I had learned what I had learned, I wagered with myself that she would not remain grave-bound,” he replied. “Now I have won. This afternoon I go to witness the exhumation; but it is little more than a waste of time. She will not be there. On that I bet myself ten francs.”

“What the devil—” I began, but a sharp click told me he had hung up. Three minutes later, when I reestablished communication with the office, Nora told me that the “furrin gintilman” had “gone down th’ road as if th’ Little Good Paypul wuz aftther ’im.”

By four o’clock that afternoon the entire village was buzzing with the gruesome news of the rifling of Ramalha Drigo’s grave. Father Lamphier, the aged parish priest of St. Benedict’s, wrung his hands in an agony of vicarious suffering for the girl’s distracted parents; Arthur Lesterton, the county prosecutor, vowed legal vengeance on the miscreants; Duffey, the police chief, gave an interview to a reporter from our one and only evening paper declaring that the police had several suspects under surveillance and expected to make an early arrest. Indignation was at fever heat; everybody made endless impracticable suggestions, nobody did anything. In all the town there seemed only two calm people: Ricardo Drigo, Ramalha’s father; and Jules de Grandin.

Drigo thanked me courteously when I expressed sympathy for his misfortune, and said quietly, “It is fate, Doctor. It can not be escaped.” De Grandin nodded his head sapiently once or twice, and said nothing at all. But the glitter of his little blue eyes and the occasional nervous twitching of his slender white hands told me he was seething inwardly.

We ate dinner in silence, I with no appetite at all, de Grandin with a gusto which seemed to me, in the circumstances, hardly decent.

Each of us took a book in the library after dinner, and several hours passed in gloomy quiet.

Suddenly: “The time approaches, Trowbridge, my friend,” de Grandin exclaimed, shutting his book with a snap and rising from his chair.

“Eh?” I answered wonderingly.

“We go; we observe; perhaps we find that answer to this *sacré* riddle tonight,” he replied.

“Go? Observe?” I echoed stupidly.

“But certainly. Have I been going hither and elsewhere all this time to sit idly by when the opportunity to act has come? Your coat, my friend, and your hat! We go to that St. Benedict’s cemetery. Right away, at once, immediately. This night, perhaps, I show you that which you have never

seen before.”

St. Benedict’s churchyard lay stark and ghastly in the night-light as I parked my car beside the dilapidated fence separating the little God’s Acre from the road. Discolored tombstones reared themselves from the dead winter grass like bones long dried upon some ancient battlefield, patches of hoar-frost showed leprous against the sod, and, mingling with the moaning of the night wind in the poplar boughs, the shrill, eery cry of a screech-owl came to us like the lament of an earth-bound spirit.

“Have a care, my friend,” de Grandin warned in a low breath as he clambered over the fence and made his way between the graves, “the ground is treacherous here. One false step, and *pouf!* your leg is broken against some of these mementoes of mortality.”

I followed him as quickly as I could till his upraised hand signaled a halt. “It is here we shall see what we shall see, if, indeed, we see it at all,” he promised, sinking to the moss at the foot of a great pine tree. “Observe that monument yonder? *Bien*, it is to it we must give our particular attention this night.”

I recognized the gravestone he indicated as standing in the Drigos’ burial plot. It was one of the cemetery’s oldest monuments, a low, table-like box of stone consisting of a flat horizontal slab about the size of a grave’s ground dimensions, supported by four upright pieces of marble, the name and vital dates of the family which first owned the plot being engraved on the tomb’s top. I recalled having heard the grave space originally belonged to the Bouvier family, but the last of the line had gone to his eternal rest long before I was born.

Fixing my eyes steadily on the old monument, I wondered what my companion meant by his assertion, wondered again, and turned to look over my shoulder toward the road where the clatter of a passing vehicle sounded on the macadam.

Somewhere in the town a tower clock began telling midnight. *Bong, bong, bong*, the sixteen-note chime sounded the full hour, followed by the deep resonant *boom* of the bell as it began its twelve strokes. One — two — three—

“*Regardez!*” de Grandin’s slim fingers bit into my arm as he hissed the command. A shiver, not due to the raw March air, raced up my spine and through my scalp, raising the short hairs above my greatcoat collar as a current of electricity might have done.

Beyond the Bouvier tomb, like a column of mist, too strong to be dissipated by the wind, yet almost too impalpable to be seen, a slender white form was rising, taking shape — *coming toward us*.

“Good God!” I cried in a choking voice, shrinking against de Grandin with the involuntary, unreasoning fear of the living for the dead. “What is it?”

“*Zut!*” he shook off my restraining clutch as an adult might brush aside a child in time of emergency. “*Attendez, mon ami!*” With a cat-like leap he cleared the intervening graves and planted himself square in the path of the advancing wraith. *Click!* His pocket electric flash shot a beam of dazzling light straight into the specter’s face. I went sick with horror as I recognized the drawn features and staring, death-glazed eyes of—

“Ramalha Drigo, look at me, — I command it!” De Grandin’s voice sounded shrill and rasping with the intensity of purpose which was behind it. Coming abreast of him, I saw his little blue eyes were fairly starting from his face as he bent an unwinking stare on the dead face before him. The waxed ends of his small, blond mustache started upward, like the horns of an inverted crescent, as his lips drew themselves about his words. “Look — at — me — Ramalha Drigo, — I — command — it!”

Something like a tremor passed through the dead girl’s flaccid cheeks. For an instant her film-coated eye flickered with a look of lifelike intelligence. Then the face went limp with the flaccidity of death once more, the lids half dropped before the staring eyes, and her whole body crumpled like a wax figure suddenly exposed to a blast of heat.

“Catch her, Trowbridge, my friend!” de Grandin ordered excitedly. “Bear her to her father’s house and put her to bed. I come as soon as possible; meantime I have work to do.”

Thrusting the flashlight into his pocket he jerked out a small whistle and blew three quick, shrilling blasts. “*À moi, sergent; à moi, mes enfants!*” he called as the whistle fell clinking and bouncing to the gravestone beneath his feet.

As I carried the light, crumpled body of Ramalha Drigo toward the cemetery gate I heard the crash of booted feet against the graveyard shrubs mingling with hoarsely shouted commands and the savage, eager baying of police dogs straining at the leash. A hulking shape brushed past me at a run, and I made out the form of a state trooper rushing toward de Grandin, swinging a riot stick as he ran.

Something cold as clay touched my face. It was one of Ramalha’s little hands lying against my cheek as her arm had bent between her body and my shoulder when I caught her as she fell. Shifting her weight to one arm I took the poor dead hand in my free hand and lowered it to her side, then froze like a statue in my tracks. Faint, so faint it could scarcely be recognized, but perceptible, nevertheless, a feeble pulse was beating in her wrist.

“Good Lord!” I almost shouted to the unheeding night. “Merciful heaven, the child is alive!”

Rushing as I had not rushed since my cub days as an

ambulance surgeon, I carried her to my waiting car, bundled the motor rug about her and drove to her father’s house at a pace which took account of no speed limit save my engine’s greatest capacity.

Kicking at the door, I roused the Drigo family from their beds, carried the senseless girl upstairs and placed her between woolen blankets with every available water-bottle and hot-pack in the house at her feet and spine.

Ten, fifteen minutes I watched beside her, administering a hypodermic injection of strychnine each five minutes. Gradually, like the shadow of the dawn breaking against a winter horizon, the faint flush of circulating blood appeared in her pallid lips and cheeks.

Standing at my elbow, Ricardo Drigo watched first apathetically, then wonderingly, finally in a fever of incredulous hope and fear. As a faint respiration fluttered in the girl’s breast, he fell to his knees beside the bed, burying his face in his hands and sobbing aloud in hysterical joy. “Oh, Lord of heaven,” he prayed between sobs, “reward, I beseech you, this Dr. de Grandin, for surely he is not as other men!”

“*Tiens*, my friend, you do speak truth!” agreed a complacent voice from the doorway behind us. “Of a certainty Jules de Grandin is a very remarkable fellow; but if you seek some necromancer, you would better look elsewhere. This de Grandin, he is a scientist; no more. *Cordieu!* Is that not enough!”

“*Par la barbe d’un corbeau, Monsieur*, but this port is exquisite!” de Grandin assured Drigo three hours later as he passed his tumbler across the table for replenishment. “And these so divine cigars” — he raised both hands in mute admiration, — “*parbleu*, I could smoke three of them at once and mourn because my mouth would not accommodate a fourth!”

“But I see our good friend Trowbridge grows restless. He would have the whole story, from the beginning. Very well, then, to begin:

“As I told Friend Trowbridge, I had but come from Rio when I arrived in New York the other day. While I was in that so superb city of Brazil I became acquainted with more than one *delegado* of police, and from them I heard many strange things. For example” — he fixed his penetrating gaze on Drigo for a moment — “I heard the mystery of a Portuguese gentleman who came to Brazil from East Africa and took a beautiful house in the Praia Botafogo, only to relinquish it before his furniture was fairly settled in it. Before this gentleman lived in Africa he had dwelt in India. He was born there, in fact.

“Why he left that so beautiful city of Rio, the police did not know; but they had a story from one of their detectives

that that gentleman came suddenly face to face with a Hindoo sailor from one of the ships in the harbor while he and his daughter were shopping in the Ouvidor. The Hindoo, it was said, had but looked at the daughter and laughed in the father's face; but it was enough. He departed from Rio next day, that gentleman; both he and his family and all his servants. To the United States he went, though none knew to what part, or why.

"*Eh bien*, it was one of the fragments of mystery which we of the Service de Sûreté do constantly encounter — a little incident of life without beginning or end, without ancestry or posterity. Never mind, I stored it in my brain for future reference. Sooner or later all things we remember come to have a use, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"When next I see my dear friend Trowbridge he is looking very long in the face. One of his patients, a Brazilian lady, have died that very day, and he can not account for her death. But his story sounds interesting, and I think, perhaps — maybe, I find out something of some new disease, so I ask him to let me investigate.

"When we come to the house where this dead lady lay I am struck with — with *something* about her look, and I remember most American dead are embalmed almost instantly for their burial. I touch her face, it has not the hardness of flesh preserved with formaldehyde. Then I feel for the wounds where the embalmer would have cut; but I find none. One thing more I find. While her face were cold, it were not cold as the surrounding air. 'How does this come?' asks Jules de Grandin of Jules de Grandin; but answer there was none at all.

"As my dear Trowbridge and I leave that house of death I see the portrait of a gentleman who much resembled our host, but who wore a uniform such as the British army once wore. Yet not quite. There was a difference there, but what it was I can not say then.

"I ask Monsieur Drigo who the painted gentleman was, and he say, 'He are my grandfather.'

"That night I do much thinking; finally I believe I have the thread of this mystery in my hands. I put together my knowledge and this is what I have:

"The uniform that painted gentleman wore are not of the British army, but of the British India Company. So. Now, he was a man in early middle life, this painted gentleman who wear the insignia of an artilleryman on his uniform, and, judging by his grandson's apparent age, he should have lived about the time of the American Civil War. Very good, what was happening in India, where this painted gentleman lived, then? I think some more; then, 'Ah,' Jules de Grandin tell Jules de Grandin, 'Jules de Grandin, you are one great stupid head; it was in 1857 that the Sepoy troops revolted against the English in India.'

"Yes? And what then? For once in history those English did act with sense. They meted to those Indian rebels with such measure as the rebels gave to them. For the atrocities of Nana Sahib they took logical vengeance by tying those rebels to the mouths of cannon and — *pouf!* it was soon over when the cannoneers fired their guns.

"So far, so good. What then? Those Indians are a vengeful race. They harbor hatred through many generations. This much I know. Something else I know, too. In India they sometimes, for money, will hypnotize a man — or, perchance, a woman — and bury him, to all appearances dead, in the earth for so long a time that corn planted above his grave will take root and grow several inches high. I have seen that with my own two eyes. Also I remember how one Colonel Ainsworth, an English gentleman who commanded some of the cannon from which those mutineers were blown to death, had apparently died in his English home in 1875, *but came to life in the family vault ten days later.*

"Almost he went crazy from that experience, though he was at length rescued. Two years later he suffered the same terrible fate. He was buried for dead, and came back to life again. And each time, before he had his seeming death, he had encountered a Hindoo in the road. At last he could stand the strain no more; but shot himself really dead rather than face the terror of a third living burial.

"Now, the people who wrote down the strange case of Colonel Ainsworth did but note that he had met Hindoos before he seemingly died; but, apparently, they attached no importance to these meetings. I do otherwise; for when I search my memory I find that of the officers who commanded the British guns at the Sepoys' executions, nearly all died violent or sudden deaths. How do we know how many of them were buried alive, but not rescued as Colonel Ainsworth was? Eh? Also I remember from the records that many of the descendants of those officers had died mysteriously or suddenly, sometimes both.

"*Morbleu,*' I tell myself, 'Jules de Grandin, I think maybe — perhaps we have discover something!'

"I bet with myself, therefore, that this poor dead lady will not rest easy in her grave. Dead she may be, *cher* Trowbridge has so certified; but if she were not first dead in fact — the Brazilians do not believe in embalming their dead, and the embalmer's instruments not therefore have made certain that she is dead altogether. Very well, then; wait and see.

"Next day my friend Trowbridge tell me her grave was robbed. I go to watch them open it, and find the tombs in that cemetery are old passages underground. She is not in her grave, I see that; but she might be somewhere in the cemetery, nevertheless. I learn, by asking what my friend Trowbridge would call silly questions, that the grave space

where this lady was buried once belonged to a family called Bouvier. Old Monsieur Bouvier, who live and die many years ago, had a morbid fear of being buried alive, so he had a special tomb constructed in such manner that if he come to life underground he can slide back a panel of stone as you would open a door, and walk home to his family. This old tomb is still standing above the spot where this unfortunate dead lady have been buried. ‘Maybe,’ I tell myself, ‘maybe something have happen in that cemetery while no one was watching.’

“Already I have made inquiries and find that two strange Negroes have been in town since some days before this poor lady died. But though they lived in the Negro quarter they had nothing to do with the other colored people. Query: were they Negroes or were they not Negroes, and if not, what were they? Hindoo, perhaps? I think yes.

“What then? The girl’s mantilla has been found above ground; her body has not been found below. Perhaps they play cat-and-mouse with her, sending her forth from her grave at night like a very vampire, perhaps to injure her father or others whom she had loved in life. I decide I will see.

“I seek out that Monsieur Lesterton, who is the *juge d’instruction* — how do you say? county prosecutor? — and tell him all.

“He is a lawyer in a million, that one. Instead of saying, ‘Talk to the Marines about it,’ he nod his head and tell me I may have as many gendarmes as I wish to help me with my plan.

“Tonight I go with friend Trowbridge and watch beside that old Monsieur Bouvier’s tomb. Presently that poor girl who is found fast in the death which is not death comes forth, walking over her own grave.

“Jules de Grandin is no fool. He, too, can hypnotize, and what a man can do he can undo, likewise, if he be clever. I order her to wake up. I flash my light in her eyes and I bring her to consciousness, then to natural sleep, as she was before the Hindoos’ power make her appear dead. I turn her over to Friend Trowbridge to make all well while I and the

gendarmes search for those men who are the masters of death.

“We find them hidden in an old tomb, far underground. One of them I have the felicity of killing when he would resist arrest. The other is shot by a trooper when he would fly, but ere his life ran out with his blood he tells me he and his companion have followed Monsieur Drigo from India to Africa and from Africa to America. Two days before she ‘died’ Mademoiselle Ramalha is met by these men as she walks in the country. They hypnotize her and order her to ‘die’ in forty-eight hours — to die and be buried, then come forth from her grave each night at midnight and visit her father’s house. *Voilà*, that fellow, he too, died; but not before I had the truth.”

“But how did you make him confess, de Grandin?” I asked. “Surely his conscience did not trouble him, and if he knew he was dying he had nothing to fear from you.”

“Eh, did he not?” de Grandin answered with an elfish grin. “Ah, but he did! The pig is unclean to those people. If they do but so much as touch a *porc* they do lose their caste. I did promise that fellow that if he did not tell me all, and tell the truth, right away, immediately, at once, I would see he was buried in the same coffin with a pig’s carcass and that his grave should be wet with the blood of a slaughtered swine every full moon. *Pardieu*, you should have seen him make haste to tell me all before he died!”

He turned toward Drigo; “Mademoiselle Ramalha has little to fear in the future, *Monsieur*,” he promised. “The agents of vengeance have failed, and I do not think they will make another attempt upon her.

“Meanwhile, Friend Trowbridge, the morning breaks and the shadows flee away. Let us bid Monsieur Drigo good-night and hasten home.

“*Cordieu!*” he chuckled as we climbed into my waiting motor, “had I stayed beside Monsieur Drigo’s wine a half-hour longer I should not have been able to leave at all. As it is, Trowbridge, my friend, I see two of you sitting beside me!”

The Dead Hand

JULES DE GRANDIN passed his coffee cup across the breakfast table for its third replenishment. "It seems, my friend," he told me with a serio-comic grimace, "as if I exercise some sort of malign influence upon your patients. Here I have been your guest but two short weeks and you all but lose Mademoiselle Drigo and the so excellent Madame Richards is dead altogether."

"I'd hardly blame you for Mrs. Richards' death," I comforted as I refilled his cup. "She'd suffered from mitral stenosis for the past two years, and the last time I examined her I was able to detect a diastolic murmur without my stethoscope. No, her trouble dated back some time before your advent, de Grandin."

"You relieve my conscience," he replied. "And now you go to offer your condolences to the family? May I accompany you? Always, I have found, there is opportunity for those who will to learn something."

"*Nom d'un nom*, but it is the good Sergeant Costello!" he exclaimed as a heavy-set man closed the door of the Richards mansion and strode across the wide veranda. "*Eh bien*, my friend, do not you remember me?" He stretched both slender, well kept hands to the big Irishman. "Surely, you have not forgotten —"

"I'll say I ain't," the big detective denied with a welcoming grin. "You sure showed us some tricks in the Kalmar case, sir. Belike you'd like to give us a lift with this one?" He jerked a thumb toward the house he had just quit. "It's a bughouse in there, Dr. de Grandin."

"Ha, do you say so?" de Grandin's small eyes lit up expectantly. "You interest me. Assuredly you shall have such help as I can provide. Come let us enter; together we shall shake the facts from this mystery of yours as a mother shakes the stolen cookies from her *enfant's* blouse, by blue!"

Willis Richards, financial nabob of our small sub-metropolitan community, stood on the hearth rug of his library, a living testimonial to the truth of the axiom that death makes all men equals. For all his mop of white hair, his authoritative manner and imposing embonpoint, he was only a bereft and bewildered old man, unable to realize that in his wife's death he had encountered something not to be remedied by his signature on a five-figured check.

"Well, Sergeant," he asked with a pitiful attempt at his usual brusque manner, as he recognized Costello at de Grandin's elbow, "have you found out anything?"

"No, sir," the policeman confessed, "but here's Dr. de Grandin of Paris, France, and he can help us out if anyone can. He's done some mighty fine work for us before, and—"

"A French detective!" Richards scoffed. "D'ye need to get a foreigner to help you find some stolen property? Why—"

"Monsieur!" de Grandin's angry protest brought the irate financier's expostulation to an abrupt halt, "you do forget yourself. I am Jules de Grandin, occasionally connected with the *Service de Sûreté*, but more interested in the solution of my cases than in material reward."

"Oh," Mr. Richards' disgust deepened, "an amateur, eh? Costello, I'm ashamed of you, bringing a dabbler into my private affairs. By George, I'll telephone the Blynn Agency and take the whole case out o' your hands!"

"One moment, Mr. Richards," I broke in, relying on my position as family physician to lend strength to my statement. "This gentleman is Dr. Jules de Grandin of the Sorbonne, one of Europe's foremost criminologists and one of the world's greatest scientists. Criminal investigation is a phase of his work, just as military service was a phase of George Washington's; but you can no more compare him with professional detectives than you can compare Washington with professional soldiers."

Mr. Richards looked from de Grandin to me, then back again. "I'm sorry," he confessed, extending his hand to the little Frenchman, "and I shall be very grateful for any help that you can give me, sir."

"To be entirely frank," he motioned us to seats and began pacing the floor restlessly, "Mrs. Richards' death was not quite so natural as Dr. Trowbridge believes. Though it's true she had been suffering from heart disease for some time, it was not heart disease alone that caused her death. She was scared to death. Literally."

"I returned from New York, where I'd been attending a banquet of my alumni association, about two o'clock day before yesterday morning. I let myself in with my latch key and went directly to my room, which adjoined my wife's. I was beginning to undress when I heard her call, and ran into her bedroom just in time to see her fall to the floor, clutching at her throat and trying to say something about a hand."

"Ah?" de Grandin regarded our host with his sharp cat-stare. "And then, Monsieur?"

"And then I saw — well, fancied I saw — something drift across the room, about level with my shoulders, and go out the window. I ran over to my wife, but when I reached her

she was dead.”

The little Frenchman made small deprecating sounds while he looked at his well cared for nails, but otherwise he made no comment.

Richards gave him an annoyed look as he continued. “It was not till this morning that I discovered all my wife’s jewels and about twenty thousand dollars worth of unregistered securities had disappeared from the wall safe in her room.

“Of course,” he concluded, “I didn’t really see anything in the air when I ran from my room. That’s palpably absurd.”

“Quite obviously,” I agreed.

“Sure,” Costello nodded.

“Not at all,” de Grandin denied, shaking his head vigorously. “It is entirely possible your eyes did not deceive you, Monsieur. Tell us, what was it you saw?”

Mr. Richards’ annoyance deepened to exasperation. “It looked like a hand,” he snapped. “A hand with four or five inches of wrist attached to it, *and no body*. D’ye mean to tell me I saw anything like that?”

“*Quod erat demonstrandum*,” the Frenchman replied softly.

“What say?” demanded Richards testily.

“I said this is a truly remarkable case, Monsieur.”

“Well, d’ye want to take a look at my wife’s room?” Mr. Richards turned to lead the way upstairs, but again de Grandin shook his head.

“Not at all, Monsieur. The good Sergeant Costello has already seen it, he can tell me all I need to know. Me, I shall look elsewhere for the confirmation of a possible theory.”

Mr. Richards’ white thatch fairly bristled. “I’ll give you forty-eight hours to accomplish something — you and Costello. Then I’ll call up the Blynn Agency and see what real detectives can do for me.”

“You are more than generous in your allowance, Monsieur,” de Grandin replied icily.

To me, as we left the house, he confided, “I should greatly enjoy pulling that one’s fat nose, Friend Trowbridge.”

“Can you come over to my house at once, Doctor?” a voice hailed me as de Grandin and I entered my office.

“Why, what’s the matter, Mr. Kinnan?” I asked as I recognized the visitor.

“Huh! What isn’t the matter, Doctor? My wife’s been in hysterics since this morning, and I’m not sure I shouldn’t ask you to commit me to the asylum.”

“*Pardieu*, Monsieur,” de Grandin exclaimed, “this statement, he is vastly interesting, but not particularly enlightening. You will explain yourself, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Explain? What d’ye mean? How am I going to explain a thing I know’s impossible? At twenty minutes after five this morning my wife and I saw something that wasn’t there, and saw it take the Lafayette cup, to boot!”

“*Sacré nom d’un petit porc!*” de Grandin swore. “What is it that you say? You saw a thing that was not there and saw it take a cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette? *Non, non, non!* Not you, but I am of the deranged mind. Friend Trowbridge, look to me. I hear remarks this gentleman has not made!”

In spite of his own trouble Kinnan laughed at the little Frenchman’s tragic face. “I’ll be more explicit,” he promised. “The baby was fretful the entire early part of last evening, and we didn’t get to sleep till well after midnight. Along about five this morning he woke up on another rampage, and my wife and I went to the nursery to see what we could do. Our maid had gone to New York for the night, and as usual there wasn’t a drop of milk ready for the youngster, so I started to pasteurize some for him in the dining room chafing dish. I can place the time exactly, for the library clock has been running erratically of late and only yesterday I’d gotten it so it ran just ten minutes fast. Well, that clock had just struck half-past five when — like an echo of the gong — there came a crash at the window, and the pane was shattered, right before our eyes.”

“U’m?” observed de Grandin noncommittally.

“Right before our eyes, gentlemen. By a hammer.”

“Ah?” de Grandin’s interest in the narrative seemed something less than breathless.

“And whether you believe me or not, that hammer was held in a hand — a woman’s hand — and that was all! No arm, no body; just a hand — a hand that smashed that windowpane with a hammer and floated through the air as if it were attached to an invisible body, right across the room to the cabinet where the Lafayette cup was. It unlatched the cabinet door, took the cup out and floated out the window with it. How’s that for a pipe-dream? The only trouble with it is it’s true!”

“Ah? Ah-ha-ha?” de Grandin exclaimed on a rising accent.

“Oh, I don’t expect you to believe me. I’d say anyone who told me such a wild tale was a candidate for the bughouse, but —”

“*Au contraire, Monsieur*,” de Grandin denied, “I do believe you. For why? Because, *mordieu*, that same hand-without-body was seen at Monsieur Richards’ house the night his wife died.”

“Eh? The devil!” This time it was Kinnan who looked skeptical. “You say someone else saw that hand. Wh — why, they couldn’t!”

“Of course not,” agreed Jules de Grandin evenly.

“Nevertheless, they did, and there is reason to suspect it made away with jewellery and securities. Now tell me, if you please, this Lafayette cup, what was it?”

“It’s a silver wine goblet that belonged to my great, great-grandfather, sir. Intrinsicly I don’t suppose it worth more than thirty or forty dollars, but it’s valuable to us as an heirloom because Lafayette drank out of it while he was on his second visit to this country. I’ve been offered up to a thousand dollars for it by collectors.”

De Grandin beat his fingertips together in a nervous tattoo. “This are a most unusual burglar we have here, *mes amis*. He has a hand, but no body; he enters sick ladies’ bedrooms and frightens them to death; he breaks honest men’s windows with a hammer and steals away the cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette while they heat milk for their babies. *Cordieu*, he will bear investigation, this one!”

“You don’t believe me,” Kinnan declared, half truculently, half shamefacedly.

“Have I not said I do?” the Frenchman answered almost angrily. “When you have seen such things as I have seen, Monsieur — *parbleu*, when you have seen one half as much! — you will learn to believe many things that fools declare impossible.

“This hammer” — he rose, almost glaring at Kinnan, so intense with his stare — “Where is he? I would see him, if you please.”

“It’s over at the house,” our visitor replied, “lying right where it fell when the hand dropped it. Neither Dorothy nor I would touch it for a farm.”

“Tremendous, gigantic, magnificent!” de Grandin ejaculated, nodding vigorously as he shot out each adjective. “Come, my friends, let us hasten, let us fly. Trowbridge, my old friend, you shall attend the so excellent Madame Kinnan while I go upon the trail of this bodiless burglar, and it shall be a matter of remarkableness if I do not find him. *Morbleu*, *Monsieur le Fantôme*, when you slay poor Madame Richards with fright, that is one thing; when you steal Monsieur Kinnan’s cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette, that is also one thing, but when you think to thumb your invisible nose at Jules de Grandin — *parbleu*, that is entirely something else! We shall see who makes a monkey out of whom, and that without unnecessary delay.”

The hammer proved to be an ordinary one, with nickel head and imitation ebony handle, such as could be bought at any hardware store, but de Grandin pounced on it like a famished tom-cat on a mouse.

“But this is wonderful, this is superb!” he almost cooed as he swathed the implement in several layers of paper and stowed it tenderly in the pocket of his great coat.

“Trowbridge, my friend,” he threw me one of his quick, enigmatic smiles, “do you attend the good Madame Kinnan.

I have important duties to perform elsewhere. If possible I shall return for dinner, and if I do I pray that you will have your amiable cook prepare for me one of her so delicious apple tarts. If I should be delayed” — his little blue eyes twinkled for a moment with frosty laughter — “I shall eat that tart for my breakfast tomorrow, like a good Yon-kee.”

Dinner was long since over, and the requested apple tart had been reposing on the pantry shelf for several hours when de Grandin popped from a taxicab like a jack-in-the-box from its case and rushed up the front steps, the waxed ends of his little blond mustache twitching like the whiskers of an excited cat. “Quick, quick, Friend Trowbridge,” he commanded as he laid a bulky paper parcel on the office desk, “to the telephone! Call that Monsieur Richards, that rich man who so generously allowed me forty-eight hours to recover his lost treasures, and that Monsieur Kinnan, whose so precious cup of the Marquis de Lafayette was stolen — call them both and bid them come here right away, at once, immediately!

“*Mordieu!*” He strode across the office with a step that was half run, half jig, “This Jules de Grandin, he is the sly, clever one. Never is the task imposed too great for him. No, of a certainty!”

“What the devil’s biting you?” I asked as I rang up the Richards house.

“*Non, non,*” he waved my question aside, lit a cigarette, and flung it away almost unpuffed. “Wait, I entreat you; only wait until those others come, then you shall hear about my monstrous cleverness!”

The Richards limousine, like its owner impressive in both size and upholstery, was panting before my door in half an hour, and Kinnan drove up in his modest sedan almost at the same time. Sergeant Costello, looking mystified, but concealing his wonder with the inborn reticence of the professional policeman, came into the office close on Kinnan’s heels.

“What’s all this nonsense, Trowbridge?” Mr. Richards asked. “Why couldn’t you come over to my house instead of dragging me out this hour o’ night?”

“Tut, tut, Monsieur,” de Grandin cut him short, running the admonitions so close together that they sounded like the exhaust of a miniature motor boat. “Tut, tut, Monsieur, is it not worth a short trip in the cold to have these back?” From a brown-paper parcel he produced a purple velvet case which he snapped open dramatically, disclosing an array of scintillating gems.

“These, one assumes, were once the property of Madame your wife?”

“Great Scott!” gasped Richards, reaching for the jewels. “Why, you got ’em!”

“But naturally, Monsieur.” The Frenchman deftly drew the jewellery out of Richard’s reach. “And also I have these.” From another parcel he drew a sheaf of engraved stock certificates. “You said twenty thousand dollars’ worth, I believe? *Bien*. There are here just twenty-one thousand dollar certificates, according to my count.

“Monsieur Kinnan,” he bowed to the other visitor, “permit that I restore to you the cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette.” The Lafayette cup was duly extracted from another package and handed to its owner.

“And now,” de Grandin lifted an oblong pasteboard box of the sort used for shoes and held it toward us as a prestidigitator might hold the hat from which he was about to extract a rabbit, “I will ask you to give me the close attention. *Regardez, s’il vous plaît*. Is it not this you gentlemen saw in your respective houses?”

As he withdrew the box lid we beheld lying on a bed of crumpled tissue paper what appeared to be the perfectly modeled reproduction of a beautiful hand and wrist. The thumb and fingers, tipped with long, almond-shaped nails, were exquisitely slender and graceful, and the narrow palm, where it showed above the curling digits, was pink and soft-looking as the underside of a La France rose petal. Only the smear of collodion across the severed wrist told us we gazed on something which once pulsed with life instead of a marvelously exact reproduction.

“Is this not it?” he repeated, glancing from the lovely hand to Richards and Kinnan in turn.

Each nodded a mute confirmation, but each forbore to speak, as though the sight of the eerie, lifeless thing before him had put a seal of silence on his lips.

“*Très bon*.” He nodded vigorously. “Now, attend me, if you please: when Monsieur Kinnan told me of the hammer which broke his window, I decided the road by which to trace this bodiless burglar was mapped out on that hammer’s handle. *Pourquoi?* Because this hand which frightens sick ladies to death and breaks windowpanes is one of three things. First” — he ticked off on his fingers — “it may be some mechanical device. In that case I shall find no traces. But then again it may be the ghost-hand of someone who once lived, in which case, again, it is one of two things: a ghost hand, *per se*, or the reanimated flesh of one who is dead. Or, perchance, it is the hand of someone who can make the rest of him invisible.

“Now, then, if it is a ghost hand, either true ghost or living-dead flesh, it is like other hands, it has ridges and valleys and loops and whorls, which can be traced and recognized by fingerprint experts. Or, if a man can, by some process all unknown to us, make all of him except his hand invisible, why, then, his hand, too, must leave fingerprints. *Hein?*

“‘Now, Jules de Grandin,’ I say to me, ‘is it not highly probable that one who steals jewels and stocks and bonds and the cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette, has stolen things before, perhaps been apprehended and fingerprinted?’

“‘*Parbleu*, it may be even as you say, Jules de Grandin,’ I reply to me.

“Thereupon I take that hammer from Monsieur Kinnan’s house and go with him to police headquarters. ‘*Monsieur le Préfet*,’ I say to the commissioner, ‘I would that you permit your identification experts to examine this hammer, and tell me, of their kindness, whose fingerprints appear thereon.’

“*Bien*. He is an amiable gentleman, the commissioner, and he gives the order as requested. In due time comes the report. The handle of that hammer bears the manual autograph of one Katherine O’Brien, otherwise known to the police as Catherine Levoy, and also as Catherine Dunstan. The police have a *dossier* for her. She was in turn a shoplifter, a decoy woman for some badger-game gentlemen, a forger and the partner of one Professor Mysterio, a theatrical hypnotist. Indeed, they tell me, she was married to this professor *à l’Italienne*, and with him she travelled the country, sometimes giving exhibitions, sometimes indulging in crime, as, for instance, burglary and pocket-picking.

“Now, about a year ago, while she and the professor were exhibiting themselves at Coney Island, this lady died. Her partner gave her a remarkable funeral; but the ceremonies were marred by one untoward incident — while her body lay in the mortuary some miscreant climbed through the window and removed one of her hands. In the dead of night he severed from the lovely body of that wicked woman the hand that had so often made away with others’ property. He made away with it, nor could the efforts of the police trace him, or it, to his place of hiding.

“Meanwhile, this Professor Mysterio, he who was the woman’s partner, has retired from the stage and lives here in New Jersey on the fortune he has amassed.

“‘New Jersey, New Jersey,’ I say to me when I hear this. ‘Why, this is New Jersey!’

“So the good Sergeant Costello and I make a survey. We find that this *ci-devant* professor lives out on the Andover Road where he does nothing for a livelihood but smoke a pipe and drink whisky. ‘Come, let us take him in,’ the Sergeant says to me.

“Now, while we ride out to the professor’s house I do much thinking. Hypnotism is thought, and thought is a thing — a thing which does not die. If this deceased woman had been habituated to obeying mental commands of this Professor Mysterio — had been accustomed to obey those orders with all parts of her body as soon as they were given — had she not formed a habit-pattern of obedience?

Trowbridge, my friend, you are a physician, you have seen men die. You know that the suddenly killed man falls in an attitude which had been characteristic in life, is it not so?"

I nodded agreement.

"Very well, then. I ask me if it is not possible that the hand this professor had commanded so many times in life can not be made to do his bidding after death? *Mon Dieu*, the idea is novel, but not impossible for that reason! Did not that so superb Monsieur Poe hint at some such thing in his story of the dying man who remained alive because he was hypnotized? Assuredly.

"So, when we get to the professor's house Costello points his pistol at the gentleman and says, 'I make you arrested,' and meanwhile I search the place.

"In it I find Monsieur Richards' jewellery and certificates, also the cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette. I also find much else, including this hand of a dead woman which is not itself dead. *Dieu de Dieu!* When I go to take it from its case it attack me like a living thing, and Costello have to promise he will punch Professor Mysterio in the nose before he order it to be quiet. And it obeyed his voice! *Mordieu*, when I see that I have the flesh of geese all over me!"

"Rot!" Richards flung the comment like a missile. "I don't know what sort o' hocus-pocus made that hand move, but if you expect me to believe any such nonsense as this stuff you've been telling you've got the wrong pig by the ear. I shouldn't be surprised if you and this Professor What's-His-Name were in cahoots, and you got cold feet and left him holding the bag!"

I stared aghast at the man. De Grandin's vanity was as colossal as his ability, and though he was as gentle as a woman in ordinary circumstances, like a woman he was capable of sudden flares of vixenish temper in which his regard for human life became no greater than his concern for a troublesome fly.

The little Frenchman turned to me, his face as pale as a dead man's, the muscles of his jaws working. "Friend Trowbridge you will act for me, of course?" he asked in a low, husky voice. "You will — *ha!*"

With the ejaculation he dodged suddenly, almost falling to the floor in his haste to avoid the flashing white object that dashed at his face.

Nor was his dodge a split-second too soon. Like the lid of a boiling kettle, the top of the shoe box had lifted, and the slim quiescent hand that lay within leaped through the opening and hurtled across intervening space like a quarrel from a crossbow. All delicate, firm-muscled fingers outspread, it swooped like a hawk, missed de Grandin by the barest fraction of an inch, and fastened itself, snapping like a strong springed steel trap, in the puffy flesh of Willis Richards' neck.

"Ah — *ulp!*" The startled financier gasped as he stumbled backward, tearing futilely at the eldritch thing which sank its long and pointed nails into his purpling skin. "Ah — God, it's choking me!"

Costello rushed to him and strove with all his strength to drag the clutching hand away. He might as well have tried to wrench apart the clasp of a chrome-steel handcuff.

"*Non, non,*" De Grandin shouted, "not that way, Sergeant. It is useless!"

Leaping to my instrument case he jerked out an autopsy knife and dashed his shoulder against the burly detective, almost sending him sprawling. Next instant, with the speed and precision of an expert surgeon, he was dissecting the deadly white fingers fastened in Richards' dewlap.

"*C'est complete,*" he announced matter-of-factly as he finished his grisly task. "A restorative, if you please, Friend Trowbridge, and an antiseptic dressing for his wounds. The nails may not have been sterile."

Wheeling, he seized the telephone and dialed police headquarters. "*Allo, Monsieur le Geôlier,*" he greeted when his call was put through. "You have one Professor Mysterio in confinement there, yes? But certainly, he is booked upon the suspicion — the what you call him? open charge? How is he, what is it he does?"

A pause, then: "Ah, you say so? I thought as much. Many thanks, Monsieur."

He put the telephone back in its cradle, and faced us again. "My friends," he announced, "the professor is no more. Two minutes ago he was heard to cry out in a loud, distinct voice, 'Katie, kill the Frenchman; I command you. Kill him!' When they rushed to his cell they found him hanging from the grating of the door by his waist-belt. The fall had snapped his neck, and he was dead as a herring.

"*Eh bien,*" he shook himself like a spaniel emerging from the water, "it was a lucky thing for me I saw that box lid lift itself when the dead hand obeyed its dying master's last command. None of you would have thought of the knife, I fear, before the thing had strangled my life away. As it is, I acted none too soon for Monsieur Richards' good."

Still red in the face, but regaining his self-possession under my ministrations, Mr. Richards sat up in his chair. "If you'll give me my property I'll be getting out o' this hell-house," he announced gruffly, reaching for the jewels and securities de Grandin had placed on the desk.

"Assuredly, Monsieur," the Frenchman agreed. "But first you will comply with the law, *n'est-ce-pas?* You have offered a reward of five thousand dollars for your property's return. Make out two checks, if you will be so kind, one for half the amount to Sergeant Costello, the other half for me."

"I'm hanged if I do," Richards demurred. "Why should a man have to buy back his own stuff?"

Sergeant Costello rose ponderously to his feet and gathered the parcels containing Mr. Richards' belongings into his capacious hands. "Law's law," he announced decisively. "There'll be no bonds or jools returned till that reward is paid, sir."

"All right, all right," Richards agreed, reaching for his checkbook. "I'll pay it, but it's the damndest hold-up I've ever had pulled on me."

"H'm," growled Costello as the door banged to behind the banker, "if I ever catch that bird parkin' by a fireplug or exceedin' the speed limit, he'll see a hold-up that *is* a hold-up. I'll give him every summons in me book an' holler for a fresh pad."

"*Tenez*, my friends, think of the swine no more," de Grandin ordered. "In France, had a man so insulted me, I should have called him out and run him through the body. But that one? *Pouf!* Gold is his life's blood. I hurt him far more by forcing the reward from him than if I had punctured his fat skin a dozen times.

"Meanwhile, Friend Trowbridge" — his small blue eyes snapped with the heat-lightning of his sudden smile — "there waits in the pantry that delicious apple tart prepared by your so amiable cook. Sergeant, Monsieur Kinnan, will you not join us? A wedge of apple tart and a cold mug of beer — *morbleu*, it makes a feast fit for an emperor!"

The House of Horror

“**M**ORBLEU, Friend Trowbridge, have a care,” Jules de Grandin warned as my lurching motor car almost ran into the brimming ditch beside the rain-soaked road.

I wrenched the steering wheel viciously and swore softly under my breath as I leaned forward, striving vainly to pierce the curtains of rain which shut us in.

“No use, old fellow,” I confessed, turning to my companion, “We’re lost; that’s all there is to it.”

“Ha,” he laughed shortly, “do you just begin to discover that fact, my friend? *Parbleu*, I have known it this last half-hour.”

Throttling my engine down, I crept along the concrete roadway, peering through my streaming windshield and storm curtains for some familiar landmark, but nothing but blackness, wet and impenetrable, met my eyes.

Two hours before, that stormy evening in 192—, answering an insistent ’phone call, de Grandin and I had left the security of my warm office to administer a dose of toxin anti-toxin to an Italian laborer’s child who lay, choking with diphtheria, in a hut at the workmen’s settlement where the new branch of the railroad was being put through. The cold, driving rain and the Stygian darkness of the night had misled me when I made the detour around the railway cut, and for the past hour and a half I had been feeling my way over unfamiliar roads as futilely as a lost child wandering in the woods.

“*Grace à Dieu*,” de Grandin exclaimed, seizing my arm with both his small, strong hands, “a light! See, there it shines in the night. Come, let us go to it. Even the meanest hovel is preferable to this so villainous rain.”

I peeped through a joint in the curtains and saw a faint, intermittent light flickering through the driving rain some two hundred yards away.

“All right,” I acquiesced, climbing from the car, “we’ve lost so much time already we probably couldn’t do anything for the Vivianti child, and maybe these people can put us on the right road, anyway.”

Plunging through puddles like miniature lakes, soaked by the wind-driven rain, barking our shins again and again on invisible obstacles, we made for the light, finally drawing up to a large, square house of red brick fronted by an imposing white-pillared porch. Light streamed out through the fanlight over the white door and from the two tall windows flanking the portal.

“*Parbleu*, a house of circumstance, this,” de Grandin commented, mounting the porch and banging lustily at the polished brass knocker.

I wrinkled my forehead in thought while he rattled the knocker a second time. “Strange, I can’t remember this place,” I muttered. “I thought I knew every building within thirty miles, but this is a new one...”

“Ah bah!” de Grandin interrupted. “Always you must be casting a wet blanket on the parade, Friend Trowbridge. First you insist on losing us in the midst of a *sacré* rain-storm, then when I, Jules de Grandin, find us a shelter from the weather, you must needs waste time in wondering why it is you know not the place. *Morbleu*, you will refuse shelter because you have never been presented to the master of the house, if I do not watch you, I fear.”

“But I ought to know the place, de Grandin,” I protested. “It’s certainly imposing enough to ...”

My defense was cut short by the sharp click of a lock, and the wide, white door swung inward before us.

We strode over the threshold, removing our dripping hats as we did so, and turned to address the person who opened the door.

“Why ...” I began, and stared about me in open-mouthed surprise.

“Name of a little blue man!” said Jules de Grandin, and added his incredulous stare to mine.

As far as we could see, we were alone in the mansion’s imposing hall. Straight before us, perhaps for forty feet, ran a corridor of parquetry flooring, covered here and there by rich-hued Oriental rugs. White-paneled walls, adorned with oil paintings of imposing-looking individuals, rose for eighteen feet or so to a beautifully frescoed ceiling, and a graceful curving staircase swept upward from the farther end of the room. Candles in cut glass sconces lighted the high-ceilinged apartment, the hospitable glow from a log fire burning under the high white marble mantel lent an air of homely coziness to the place, but of anything living, human or animal, there was no faintest trace or sign.

Click! Behind us, the heavy outer door swung to silently on well-oiled hinges and the automatic lock latched firmly.

“Death of my life!” de Grandin murmured, reaching for the door’s silver-plated knob and giving it a vigorous twist. “*Par la moustache du diable*, Friend Trowbridge, it is locked! Truly, perhaps it had been better if we had remained

outside in the rain!”

“Not at all, I assure you, my dear sir,” a rich mellow voice answered him from the curve of the stairs. “Your arrival was nothing less than providential, gentlemen.”

Coming toward us, walking heavily with the aid of a stout cane, was an unusually handsome man attired in pajamas and dressing gown, a sort of nightcap of flowered silk on his white head, slippers of softest Morocco on his feet.

“You are a physician, sir?” he asked, glancing inquiringly at the medicine case in my hand.

“Yes,” I answered. “I am Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, from Harrisonville, and this is Dr. Jules de Grandin, of Paris, who is my guest.”

“Ah,” replied our host, “I am very, very glad to welcome you to Marston Hall, gentlemen. It so happens that one — er — my daughter, is quite ill, and I have been unable to obtain medical aid for her on account of my infirmities and the lack of a telephone. If I may trespass on your charity to attend my poor child, I shall be delighted to have you as my guests for the night. If you will lay aside your coats” — he paused expectantly. “Ah, thank you” — as we hung our dripping garments over a chair — “you will come this way, please?”

We followed him up the broad stairs and down an upper corridor to a tastefully furnished chamber where a young girl — fifteen years of age, perhaps — lay propped up with a pile of diminutive pillows.

“Anabel, Anabel, my love, here are two doctors to see you,” the old gentleman called softly.

The girl moved her fair head with a weary, peevish motion and whimpered softly in her sleep, but gave no further recognition of our presence.

“And what have been her symptoms, if you please, *Monsieur*?” de Grandin asked as he rolled back the cuffs of his jacket and prepared to make an examination.

“Sleep,” replied our host, “just sleep. Some time ago she suffered from influenza; lately she has been given to fits of protracted slumber from which I can not waken her. I fear she may have contracted sleeping sickness, sir. I am told it sometimes follows influenza.”

“H’m.” De Grandin passed his small, pliable hands rapidly over the girl’s cheeks in the region of the ears, felt rapidly along her neck over the jugular vein, then raised a puzzled glance to me. “Have you some, laudanum and aconite in your bag, Friend Trowbridge?” he asked.

“There’s some morphine,” I answered, “and aconite; but no laudanum.”

“No matter,” he waved his hand impatiently, bustling over to the medicine case and extracting two small phials from it. “No matter, this will do as well. Some water, if you

please, *Monsieur*,” he turned to the father, a medicine bottle in each hand.

“But, de Grandin” — I began, when a sudden kick from one of his slender, heavily-shod feet nearly broke my shin — “de Grandin, do you think that’s the proper medication?” I finished lamely.

“Oh, *mais oui*, undoubtedly,” he replied. “Nothing else would do in this case. Water, if you please, *Monsieur*,” he repeated, again addressing the father.

I stared at him in ill-disguised amazement as he extracted a pellet from each of the bottles and quickly ground them to powder while the old gentleman filled a tumbler with water from the porcelain pitcher which stood on the chintz-draped wash-stand in the corner of the chamber. He was as familiar with the arrangement of my medicine case as I was, I knew, and knew that my phials were arranged by numbers instead of being labeled. Deliberately, I saw, he had passed over the morphine and aconite, and had chosen two bottles of plain, unmedicated sugar of milk pills. What his object was I had no idea, but I watched him measure out four teaspoonfuls of water, dissolve the powder in it, and pour the sham medication down the unconscious girl’s throat.

“Good,” he proclaimed as he washed the glass with meticulous care. “She will rest easily until the morning, *Monsieur*. When daylight comes we shall decide on further treatment. Will you now permit that we retire?” He bowed politely to the master of the house, who returned his courtesy and led us to a comfortably furnished room farther down the corridor.

“See here, de Grandin,” I demanded when our host had wished us a pleasant good-night and closed the door upon us, “what was your idea in giving that child an impotent dose like that ...?”

“S-s-sh!” he cut me short with a fierce whisper. “That young girl, *mon ami*, is no more suffering from encephalitis than you or I. There is no characteristic swelling of the face or neck, no diagnostic hardening of the jugular vein. Her temperature was a bit subnormal, it is true — but upon her breath I detected the odor of chloral hydrate. For some reason, good I hope, but bad I fear, she is drugged, and I thought it best to play the fool and pretend I believed the man’s statements. *Pardieu*, the fool who knows himself no fool has an immense advantage over the fool who believes him one, my friend.”

“But...”

“But me no buts, Friend Trowbridge; remember how the door of this house opened with none to touch it, recall how it closed behind us in the same way, and observe this, if you will.” Stepping softly, he crossed the room, pulled aside the

chintz curtains at the window and tapped lightly on the frame which held the thick plate glass panes. “*Regardez vous,*” he ordered, tapping the frame a second time.

Like every other window I had seen in the house, this one was of the casement type, small panes of heavy glass being sunk into latticelike frames. Under de Grandin’s directions I tapped the latter, and found them not painted wood, as I had supposed, but stoutly welded and bolted metal. Also, to my surprise, I found the turnbuckles for opening the casement were only dummies, the metal frames being actually securely bolted to the stone sills. To all intents, we were as firmly incarcerated as though serving a sentence in the state penitentiary.

“The door ...” I began, but he shook his head.

Obedying his gesture, I crossed the room and turned the handle lightly. It twisted under the pressure of my fingers, but, though we had heard no warning click of lock or bolt, the door itself was as firmly fastened as though nailed shut.

“Wh — why,” I asked stupidly, “what’s it all mean, de Grandin?”

“*Je ne sais quoi,*” he answered with a shrug, “but one thing I know: I like not this house, Friend Trowbridge. I ...”

Above the hissing of the rain against the windows and the howl of the sea-wind about the gables, there suddenly rose a scream, wire-edged with inarticulate terror, freighted with utter, transcendental anguish of body and soul.

“*Cordieu!*” He threw up his head like a hound hearing the call of the pack from far away. “Did you hear it, too, Friend Trowbridge?”

“Of course,” I answered, every nerve in my body trembling in horripilation with the echo of the hopeless wail.

“*Pardieu,*” he repeated, “I like this house less than ever, now! Come, let us move this dresser before our door. It is safer that we sleep behind barricades this night, I think.”

We blocked the door, and I was soon sound asleep.

“Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend” — de Grandin drove a sharp elbow into my ribs — “wake up, I beseech you. Name of a green goat, you lie like one dead, save for your so abominable snoring!”

“Eh?” I answered sleepily, thrusting myself deeper beneath the voluminous bedclothes. Despite the unusual occurrences of the night I was tired to the point of exhaustion, and fairly drunk with sleep.

“Up; arise, my friend,” he ordered, shaking me excitedly. “The coast is clear, I think, and it is high time we did some exploring.”

“Rats!” I scoffed, disinclined to leave my comfortable

couch. “What’s the use of wandering about a strange house to gratify a few unfounded suspicions? The girl might have been given a dose of chloral hydrate, but the chances are her father thought he was helping her when he gave it. As for these trick devices for opening and locking doors, the old man apparently lives here alone and has installed these mechanical aids to lessen his work. He has to hobble around with a cane, you know.”

“Ah!” my companion assented sarcastically. “And that scream we heard, did he install that as an aid to his infirmities, also?”

“Perhaps the girl woke up with a nightmare,” I hazarded, but he made an impatient gesture.

“Perhaps the moon is composed of green cheese, also,” he replied. “Up, up and dress; my friend. This house should be investigated while yet there is time. Attend me: But five minutes ago, through this very window, I did observe *Monsieur* our host, attired in a raincoat, depart from his own front door, and without his cane. *Parbleu,* he did skip, as agilely as any boy, I assure you. Even now he is almost at the spot where we abandoned your automobile. What he intends doing there I know not. What I intend doing I know full well. Do you accompany me or not?”

“Oh, I suppose so,” I agreed, crawling from the bed and slipping into my clothes. “How are you going to get past that locked door?”

He flashed me one of his sudden smiles, shooting the points of his little blond mustache upward like the horns of an inverted crescent. “Observe,” he ordered, displaying a short length of thin wire. “In the days when a woman’s hair was still her crowning glory, what mighty deeds a lady could encompass with a hairpin! *Pardieu,* there was one little *grisette* in Paris who showed me some tricks in the days before the war! Regard me, if you please.”

Deftly he thrust the pliable loop of wire into the key’s hole, twisting it tentatively back and forth, at length pulling it out and regarding it carefully. “*Très bien,*” he muttered as he reached into an inside pocket, bringing out a heavier bit of wire.

“See,” he displayed the finer wire, “with this I take an impression of that lock’s tumblers, now” — quickly he bent the heavier wire to conform to the waved outline of the lighter loop — “*voilà,* I have a key!”

And he had. The lock gave readily to the pressure of his improvised key, and we stood in the long, dark hall, staring about us half curiously, half fearfully.

“This way, if you please,” de Grandin ordered; “first we will look in upon *la jeunesse,* to see how it goes with her.”

We walked on tiptoe down the corridor, entered the

chamber where the girl lay, and approached the bed.

She was lying with her hands folded upon her breast in the manner of those composed for their final rest, her wide, periwinkle-blue eyes staring sightlessly before her, the short, tightly curled ringlets of her blonde, bobbed hair surrounding her drawn, pallid face like a golden nimbus encircling the ivory features of a saint in some carved ikon.

My companion approached the bed softly, placing one hand on the girl's wrist with professional precision. "Temperature low, pulse weak," he murmured, checking off her symptoms. "Complexion pale to the point of lividity — ha, now for the eyes; sleeping, her pupils should have been contracted, while they should now be dilate — *Dieu de Dieu!* Trowbridge, my friend, come here.

"Look," he commanded, pointing to the apathetic girl's face. "Those eyes — *grand Dieu*, those eyes! It is sacrilege, nothing less."

I looked into the girl's face, then started back with a half-suppressed cry of horror. Asleep, as she had been when we first saw her, the child had been pretty to the point of loveliness. Her features were small and regular, clean-cut as those of a face in a cameo, the tendrils of her light-yellow hair had lent her a dainty, ethereal charm comparable to that of a Dresden china shepherdess. It had needed but the raising of her delicate, long-lashed eyelids to give her face the animation of some laughing sprite playing truant from fairyland.

Her lids were raised now, but the eyes they unveiled were no clear, joyous windows of a tranquil soul. Rather, they were the peepholes of a spirit in torment. The irises were a lovely shade of blue, it is true, but the optics themselves were things of horror. Rolling grotesquely to right and left, they peered futilely in opposite directions, lending to her sweet, pale face the half-ludicrous, wholly hideous expression of a bloating frog.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, turning from the deformed girl with a feeling of disgust akin to nausea; "What a terrible affliction!"

De Grandin made no reply, but bent over the girl's still form, gazing intently at her malformed eyes. "It is not natural," he announced. "The muscles have been tampered with, and tampered with by someone who is a master hand at surgery. Will you get me your syringe and some strychnine, Friend Trowbridge? This poor one is still unconscious."

I hastened to our bedroom and returned with the hypodermic and stimulant, then stood beside him, watching eagerly, as he administered a strong injection.

The girl's narrow chest fluttered as the powerful drug

took effect, and the pale lids dropped for a second over her repulsive eyes. Then, with a sob which was half moan, she attempted to raise herself on her elbow, fell back again, and, with apparent effort, gasped, "The mirror, let me have the mirror! Oh, tell me it isn't true; tell me it was a trick of some sort. Oh, the horrible thing I saw in the glass couldn't have been I. Was it?"

"*Tiens, ma petite,*" de Grandin replied, "but you speak in riddles. What is it you would know?"

"He — he" — the girl faltered weakly, forcing her trembling lips to frame the words — "that horrible old man showed me a mirror a little while ago and said the face in it was mine. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!"

"Eh? What is this?" de Grandin demanded on a rising note. "'He'? 'Horrible old man'? Are you not his daughter? Is he not your father?"

"No," the girl gasped, so low her denial was scarcely audible. "I was driving home from Mackettsdale last — oh, I forget when it was, but it was at night — and my tires punctured. I — I think there must have been glass on the road, for the shoes were cut to ribbons. I saw the light in this house and came to ask for help. An old man — oh, I thought he was so nice and kind! — let me in and said he was all alone here and about to eat dinner, and asked me to join him. I ate some — some — oh, I don't remember what it was — and the next thing I knew he was standing by my bed, holding a mirror up to me and telling me it was my face I saw in the glass. Oh, please, *please*, tell me it was some terrible trick he played on me. I'm not truly hideous, am I?"

"*Morbleu!*" de Grandin muttered softly, tugging at the ends of his mustache. "What is all this?"

To the girl he said: "But of course not. You are like a flower, *Mademoiselle*. A little flower that dances in the wind. You ..."

"And my eyes, they aren't — they aren't" — she interrupted with piteous eagerness — "please tell me they aren't ..."

"*Mais non, ma chère,*" he assured her. "Your eyes are like the *pervenche* that mirrors the sky in springtime. They are..."

"Let — let me see the mirror, please," she interrupted in an anxious whisper. "I'd like to see for myself, if you — oh, I feel all weak inside ..." She lapsed back against the pillow, her lids mercifully veiling the hideously distorted eyes and restoring her face to tranquil beauty.

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin breathed. "The chloral re-asserted itself none too soon for Jules de Grandin's comfort, Friend Trowbridge. Sooner would I have gone to the rack than have shown that pitiful child her face in a mirror."

"But what's it all mean?" I asked. "She says she came

here, and..."

"And the rest remains for us to find out, I think," he replied evenly. "Come, we lose time, and to lose time is to be caught, my friend."

De Grandin led the way down the hall, peering eagerly into each door we passed in search of the owner's chamber, but before his quest was satisfied he stopped abruptly at the head of the stairs. "Observe, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered, pointing a carefully manicured forefinger to a pair of buttons, one white, one black, set in the wall. "Unless I am more mistaken than I think I am, we have here the key to the situation — or at least to the front door."

He pushed vigorously at the white button, then ran to the curve of the stairs to note the result.

Sure enough, the heavy door swung open on its hinges of cast bronze, letting gusts of rain drive into the lower hall.

"*Pardieu*," he ejaculated, "we have here the open sesame; let us see if we possess the closing secret as well! Press the black button, Trowbridge, my friend, while I watch."

I did his bidding, and a delighted exclamation told me the door had closed.

"Now what?" I asked, joining him on the stairway.

"U'm," he pulled first one, then the other end of his diminutive mustache meditatively; "the house possesses its attractions, Friend Trowbridge, but I believe it would be well if we went out to observe what our friend, *le vieillard horrible*, does. I like not to have one who shows young girls their disfigured faces in mirrors near our conveyance."

Slipping into our raincoats we opened the door, taking care to place a wad of paper on the sill to prevent its closing tightly enough to latch, and scurried out into the storm.

As we left the shelter of the porch a shaft of indistinct light shone through the rain, as my car was swung from the highway and headed toward a depression to the left of the house.

"*Parbleu*, he is a thief, this one!" de Grandin exclaimed excitedly. "*Holà, Monsieur!*" He ran forward, swinging his arms like a pair of semaphores. "What sort of business is it you make with our *moteur*?"

The wailing of the storm tore the words from his lips and hurled them away, but the little Frenchman was not to be thwarted. "*Pardieu*," he gasped, bending his head against the wind-driven rain, "I will stop the scoundrel if — *nom d'un coq*, he has done it!"

Even as he spoke the old man flung open the car's forward door and leaped, allowing the machine to go crashing down a low, steep embankment into a lake of slimy swamp-mud.

For a moment the vandal stood contemplating his work, then burst into a peal of wild laughter more malignant than

any profanity.

"*Parbleu*, robber, *Apache!* you shall laugh from the other side of your mouth!" de Grandin promised, as he made for the old man.

But the other seemed oblivious of our presence. Still chuckling at his work, he turned toward the house, stopped short as a sudden heavy gust of wind shook the trees along the roadway, then started forward with a yell of terror as a great branch, torn bodily from a towering oak tree came crashing toward the earth.

He might as well have attempted to dodge a meteorite. Like an arrow from the bow of divine justice, the great timber hurtled down, pinning his frail body to the ground like a worm beneath a laborer's brogan.

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin announced matter-of-factly, "observe the evil effects of stealing motor cars."

We lifted the heavy bough from the prostrate man and turned him over on his back. De Grandin on one side, I on the other, we made a hasty examination, arriving at the same finding simultaneously. His spinal column was snapped like a pipestem.

"You have some last statement to make, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked curtly. "If so, you had best be about it, your time is short."

"Y—yes," the stricken man replied weakly. "I—I meant to kill you, for you might have hit upon my secret. As it is, you may publish it to the world, that all may know what it meant to offend a Marston. In my room you will find the documents. My — my pets — are — in — the — cellar. She — was — to — have — been — one — of — them."

The pauses between his words became longer and longer, his voice grew weaker with each labored syllable. As he whispered the last sentence painfully there was a gurgling sound, and a tiny stream of blood welled up at the corner of his mouth. His narrow chest rose and fell once with a convulsive movement, then his jaw dropped limply. He was dead.

"Oh ho," de Grandin remarked, "it is a hemorrhage which finished him. A broken rib piercing his lung. U'm? I should have guessed it. Come, my friend, let us carry him to the house, then see what it was he meant by that talk of documents and pets. A pest upon the fellow for dying with his riddle half explained! Did he not know that Jules de Grandin can not resist the challenge of a riddle? *Parbleu*, we will solve this mystery, *Monsieur le Mort*, if we have to hold an autopsy to do so!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, hush, de Grandin," I besought, shocked at his heartlessness. "The man is dead."

“Ah bah!” he returned scornfully. “Dead or not, did he not steal your motor car?”

We laid our gruesome burden on the hall couch and mounted the stairs to the second floor. With de Grandin in the lead we found the dead man’s room and began a systematic search for the papers he had mentioned, almost with his last breath. After some time my companion unearthed a thick, leather-bound portfolio from the lower drawer of a beautiful old mahogany highboy, and spread its wide leaves open on the white-counterpaned bed.

“Ah,” he drew forth several papers and held them to the light, “we begin to make the progress, Friend Trowbridge. What is this?”

He held out a newspaper clipping cracked from long folding and yellowed with age. It read:

ACTRESS JILTS SURGEON’S CRIPPLED
SON ON EVE OF WEDDING

Declaring she could not stand the sight of his deformity, and that she had engaged herself to him only in a moment of thoughtless pity, Dora Lee, well-known variety actress, last night repudiated her promise to marry John Biersfield Marston, Jr., hopelessly crippled son of Dr. John Biersfield Marston, the well-known surgeon and expert osteologist. Neither the abandoned bridegroom nor his father could be seen by reporters from the *Planet* last night.

“Very good,” de Grandin nodded, “we need go no farther with that account. A young woman, it would seem, once broke her promise to marry a cripple, and, judging from this paper’s date, that was in 1896. Here is another, what do you make of it?”

The clipping he handed me read as follows:

SURGEON’S SON A SUICIDE

Still sitting in the wheel-chair from which he has not moved during his waking hours since he was hopelessly crippled while playing polo in England ten years ago, John Biersfield Marston, son of the famous surgeon of the same name, was found in his bedroom this morning by his valet. A rubber hose was connected with a gas jet, the other end being held in the young man’s mouth.

Young Marston was jilted by Dora Lee, well-known vaudeville actress, on the day before the date set for their wedding, one month ago. He is reported to have been extremely low-spirited since his desertion by his fiancée.

Dr. Marston, the bereaved father, when seen by reporters from the *Planet* this morning, declared the actress was responsible for his son’s death and announced his intention of holding her accountable. When asked if legal proceedings were contemplated, he declined further information.

“So?” de Grandin nodded shortly. “Now this one, if you please.”

The third clipping was brief to the point of curtness:

WELL-KNOWN SURGEON RETIRES

Dr. John Biersfield Marston, widely known throughout this section of the country as an expert in operations concerning the bones, has announced his intention of retiring from practice. His house has been sold, and he will move from the city.

“The record is clear so far,” de Grandin asserted, studying the first clipping with raised eyebrows, “but — *morbleu*, my friend, look, look at this picture. This Dora Lee, of whom does she remind you? Eh?”

I took the clipping again and looked intently at the illustration of the article announcing young Marston’s broken engagement. The woman in the picture was young and inclined to be overdressed in the voluminous, fluffy mode of the days before the Spanish-American War.

“U’m, no one whom I know ...” I began, but halted abruptly as a sudden likeness struck me. Despite the towering pompadour arrangement of her blonde hair and the unbecoming straw sailor hat above the coiffure, the woman in the picture bore a certain resemblance to the disfigured girl we had seen a half-hour before.

The Frenchman saw recognition dawn in my face, and nodded agreement. “But of course,” he said. “Now, the question is, is this young girl whose eyes are so out of alignment a relative of this Dora Lee, or is the resemblance a coincidence, and if so, what lies behind it? *Hein?*”

“I don’t know,” I admitted, “but there must be some connection...”

“Connection? Of course there is a connection,” de Grandin affirmed, rummaging deeper in the portfolio. “A-ah! What is this? *Nom d’un nom*, Friend Trowbridge, I think I smell the daylight! Look!”

He held a full page story from one of the sensational New York dailies before him, his eyes glued to the flowing type and crude, coarse-screened half-tones of half a dozen young women which composed the article.

“WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE MISSING GIRLS?” I read in boldfaced type across the top of the page.

“*Are sinister, unseen hands reaching out from the darkness to seize our girls from palace and hovel, shop, stage and office?*” the article asked rhetorically. “*Where are Ellen Munro and Dorothy Sawyer and Phyllis Bouchet and three other lovely, light-haired girls who have walked into oblivion during the past year?*”

I read to the end the sensational account of the girls’

disappearances. The cases seemed fairly similar; each of the vanished young women had failed to return to her home and had never been accounted for in any manner, and in no instance, according to the newspaper, had there been any assignable reason for voluntary departure.

“*Parbleu*, but he was stupid, even for a journalist!” de Grandin asserted as I completed my inspection of the story. “Why, I wager even my good Friend Trowbridge has already noticed one important fact which this writer has treated as though it were as commonplace as the nose on his face.”

“Sorry to disappoint you, old chap,” I answered, “but looks to me as though the reporter had covered the case from every possible angle.”

“Ah? So?” he replied sarcastically. “*Morbleu*, we shall have to consult the oculist in your behalf when we return home, my friend. Look, look I beseech you, upon the pictures of these so totally absent and unaccounted for young women, *cher ami*, and tell me if you do not observe a certain likeness among them, not only a resemblance to each other, but to that Mademoiselle Lee who jilted the son of Dr. Marston? Can you see it, now I have pointed it out?”

“No — wh — why, yes — yes, of course!” I responded, running my eye over the pictures accompanying the story. “By the Lord Harry, de Grandin, you’re right; you might almost say there is a family resemblance between these girls! You’ve put your fingers on it, I do believe.”

“*Hélas*, no!” he answered with a shrug. “I have put my finger on nothing as yet, my friend. I reach, I grope, I feel about me like a blind man tormented by a crowd of naughty little boys, but nothing do the poor fingers of my mind encounter. *Pah!* Jules de Grandin, you are one great fool! Think, think, stupid one!”

He seated himself on the edge of the bed, cupping his face in his hands and leaning forward till his elbows rested on his knees.

Suddenly he sprang erect, one of his elfish smiles passing across his small, regular features. “*Nom d’un chatrouge*, my friend, I have it — I have it!” he announced. “The pets — the pets that old stealer of motor cars spoke of! They are in the basement! *Pardieu*, we will see those pets, *cher* Trowbridge; with our four collective eyes we will see them. Did not that so execrable stealer declare she was to have been one of them? Now, in the name of Satan and brimstone, whom could he have meant by ‘she’ if not that unfortunate child with eyes like *la grenouille*? Eh?”

“Why ...” I began, but he waved me forward.

“Come, come; let us go,” he urged. “I am impatient, I am restless, I am not to be restrained. We shall investigate and see for ourselves what sort of pets are kept by one who

shows young girls their deformed faces in mirrors and — *Parbleu!* — steals motor cars from my friends.”

Hurrying down the main stairway, we hunted about for the cellar entrance, finally located the door and, holding above our heads a pair of candles from the hall, began descending a flight of rickety steps into a pitch-black basement, rock-walled and, judging by its damp, moldy odor, unfloored save by the bare, moist earth beneath the house.

“*Parbleu*, the dungeons of the *château* at Carcassonne are more cheerful than this,” de Grandin commented as he paused at the stairs’ foot, holding his candle aloft to, make a better inspection of the dismal place.

I suppressed a shudder of mingled chill and apprehension as I stared at the blank stone walls, unpierced by windows or other openings of any sort, and made ready to retrace my steps. “Nothing here,” I announced. “You can see that with half an eye. The place is as empty as ...”

“Perhaps, Friend Trowbridge,” he agreed, “but Jules de Grandin does not look with half an eye. He uses both eyes, and uses them more than once if his first glance does not prove sufficient. Behold that bit of wood on the earth yonder. What do you make of it?”

“U’m — a piece of flooring, maybe,” I hazarded.

“Maybe yes, maybe no,” he answered. “Let us see.”

Crossing the cellar, he bent above the planks, then turned to me with a satisfied smile. “Flooring does not ordinarily have ringbolts in it, my friend,” he remarked bending to seize the iron ring which was made fast to the boards by a stout staple.

“Ha!” As he heaved upward the planks came away from the black earth, disclosing a board-lined well about three feet square and of uncertain depth. An almost vertical ladder of two-by-four timbers led downward from the trap-door to the well’s impenetrable blackness.

“*Allons*, we descend,” he commented, turning about and setting his foot on the topmost rung of the ladder.

“Don’t be a fool,” I advised. “You don’t know what’s down there.”

“True” — his head was level with the floor as he answered — “but I shall know, with luck, in a few moments. Do you come?”

I sighed with vexation as I prepared to follow him.

At the ladder’s foot he paused, raising his candle and looking about inquiringly. Directly before us was a passageway through the earth, ceiled with heavy planks and shored up with timbers like the lateral workings of a primitive mine.

“Ah, the plot shows complications,” he murmured,

stepping briskly into the dark tunnel. “Do you come, Friend Trowbridge?”

I followed, wondering what manner of thing might be at the end of the black, musty passage, but nothing but fungus-grown timbers and walls of moist, black earth met my questing gaze.

De Grandin preceded me by some paces, and, I suppose, we had gone fifteen feet through the passage when a gasp of mingled surprise and horror from my companion brought me beside him in two long strides. Fastened with nails to the timbers at each side of the tunnel were a number of white, glistening objects, objects which, because of their very familiarity, denied their identity to my wondering eyes. There was no mistaking the things; even a layman could not have failed to recognize them for what they were. I, as a physician, knew them even better. To the right of the passage hung fourteen perfectly articulated skeletons of human legs, complete from foot to ilium, gleaming white and ghostly in the flickering light of the candles.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed.

“*Sang du diable!*” Jules de Grandin commented. “Behold what is there, my friend,” he pointed to the opposite wall. Fourteen bony arms, complete from hand to shoulder-joint, hung pendulously from the tunnel’s upright timbers.

“*Pardieu,*” de Grandin muttered, “I have known men who collected stuffed birds and dried insects; I have known those who stored away Egyptian mummies — even the skulls of men long dead — but never before have I seen a collection of arms and legs! *Parbleu,* he was *caduc* — mad as a hatter, this one, or I am much mistaken.”

“So these were his pets?” I answered. “Yes, the man was undoubtedly mad to keep such a collection, and in a place like this. Poor fellow ...”

“*Nom d’un canon!*” de Grandin broke in; “what was that?”

From the darkness before us there came a queer, inarticulate sound, such as a man might make attempting to speak with a mouth half-filled with food, and, as though the noise had wakened an echo slumbering in the cavern, the sound was repeated, multiplied again and again till it resembled the babbling of half a dozen overgrown infants — or an equal number of full grown imbeciles.

“Onward!” Responding to the challenge of the unknown like a warrior obeying the trumpet’s call to charge, de Grandin dashed toward the strange noise, swung about, flashing his candle this side and that, then:

“*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*” he almost shrieked. “Look, Friend Trowbridge, look and say that you see what I see, or have I, too, gone mad?”

Lined up against the wall was a series of seven small wooden boxes, each with a door composed of upright slats before it, similar in construction to the coops in which country folk pen brooding hens — and no larger. In each of the hutches huddled an object, the like of which I had never before seen, even in the terrors of nightmare.

The things had the torsos of human beings, though hideously shrunken from starvation and encrusted with scales of filth, but there all resemblances to mankind ceased. From shoulders and waist there twisted flaccid tentacles of unsupported flesh, the upper ones terminating in flat, paddle-like flippers which had some remote resemblance to hands, the lower ones ending in almost shapeless stubs which resembled feet, only in that each had a fringe of five shriveled, unsupported protuberances of withered flesh.

On scrawny necks were balanced caricatures of faces, flat, noseless chinless countenances with horrible crossed or divergent eyes, mouths widened almost beyond resemblance to buccal orifices and — horror of horrors! — elongated, split tongues protruding several inches from the lips and wagging impotently in vain efforts to form words.

“Satan, thou art outdone!” de Grandin cried as he held his candle before a scrap of paper decorating one of the cages after the manner of a sign before an animal’s den at the zoo. “Observe!” he ordered, pointing a shaking finger at the notice.

I looked, then recoiled, sick with horror. The paper bore the picture and name of Ellen Munro, one of the girls mentioned as missing in the newspaper article we had found in the dead man’s bedroom.

Beneath the photograph was scribbled in an irregular hand: “*Paid 1-25-97.*”

Sick at heart we walked down the line of pens. Each was labeled with the picture of a young and pretty girl with the notation, “*Paid,*” followed by a date. Every girl named as missing in the newspaper was represented in the cages.

Last of all, in a coop somewhat smaller than the rest, we found a body more terribly mutilated than any. This was marked with the photograph and name of Dora Lee. Beneath her name was the date of her “payment,” written in bold red figures.

“*Parbleu,* what are we to do, my friend?” de Grandin asked in an hysterical whisper. “We can not return these poor ones to the world, that would be the worst form of cruelty; yet — yet I shrink from the act of mercy I know they would ask me to perform if they could speak.”

“Let’s go up,” I begged. “We must think this thing over, de Grandin, and if I stay here any longer I shall faint.”

“*Bien,*” he agreed, and turned to follow me from the cavern of horrors.

“It is to consider,” he began as we reached the upper hall once more. “If we give those so pitiful ones the stroke of mercy we are murderers before the law, yet what service could we render them by bringing them once more into the world? Our choice is a hard one, my friend.”

I nodded.

“*Morbleu*, but he was clever, that one,” the Frenchman continued, half to me, half to himself. “What a surgeon! Fourteen instances of Wyeth’s amputation of the hip and as many more of the shoulder — and every patient lived, lived to suffer the tortures of that hell-hole down there! But it is marvelous! None but a madman could have done it.

“Bethink you, Friend Trowbridge. Think how the mighty man of medicine brooded over the suicide of his crippled son, meditating hatred and vengeance for the heartless woman who had jilted him. Then — snap! went his great mentality, and from hating one woman he fell to hating all, to plot vengeance against the many for the sin of the one. And, *cordieu*, what a vengeance! How he must have laid plans to secure his victims; how he must have worked to prepare that hell-under-the-earth to house those poor, broken bodies which were his handiwork, and how he must have drawn upon the great surgical skill which was his, even in his madness, to transform those once lovely ones into the visions of horror we have just beheld! Horror of horrors! To remove the bones and let the girls still live!”

He rose, pacing impatiently across the hall. “What to do? What to do?” he demanded, striking his open hands against his forehead.

I followed his nervous steps with my eyes, but my brain was too numbed by the hideous things I had just seen to be able to respond to his question.

I looked hopelessly past him at the angle of the wall by the great fireplace, rubbed my eyes and looked again. Slowly, but surely, the wall was declining from the perpendicular.

“De Grandin,” I shouted, glad of some new phenomenon to command my thoughts, “the wall — the wall’s leaning!”

“Eh, the wall?” he queried. “*Pardieu*, yes! It is the rain; the foundations are undermined. Quick, quick, my friend! To the cellars, or those unfortunate ones are undone!”

We scrambled down the stairs leading to the basement, but already the earth floor was sopping with water. The well

leading to the madman’s sub-cellar was more than half full of bubbling, earthy ooze.

“Mary, have pity!” de Grandin exclaimed. “Like rats in a trap, they did die. God rest their tired souls” — he shrugged his shoulders as he turned to retrace his steps — “it is better so. Now, Friend Trowbridge, do you hasten aloft and bring down that young girl from the room above. We must run for it if we do not wish to be crushed under the falling timbers of this house of abominations!”

The storm had spent itself and a red, springtime sun was peeping over the horizon as de Grandin and I trudged up my front steps with the mutilated girl stumbling wearily between us. We had managed to flag a car when we got out.

“Put her to bed, my excellent one,” de Grandin ordered Nora, my housekeeper, who came to meet us enveloped in righteous indignation and an outing flannel nightgown. “*Parbleu*, she has had many troubles!”

In the study, a glass of steaming whisky and hot water in one hand, a vile-smelling French cigarette in the other, he faced me across the desk. “How was it you knew not that house, my friend?” he demanded.

I grinned sheepishly. “I took the wrong turning at the detour,” I explained, “and got on the Yerbyville Road. It’s just recently been hard-surfaced, and I haven’t used it for years because it was always impassable. Thinking we were on the Andover Pike all the while, I never connected the place with the old Olmsted Mansion I’d seen hundreds of times from the road.”

“Ah, yes,” he agreed, nodding thoughtfully, “a little turn from the right way, and — pouf! — what a distance we have to retrace.”

“Now, about the girl upstairs,” I began, but he waved the question aside.

“The mad one had but begun his devil’s work on her,” he replied. “I, Jules de Grandin, will operate on her eyes and make them as straight as before, nor will I accept one penny for my work. Meantime, we must find her kindred and notify them she is safe and in good hands.

“And now” — he handed me his empty tumbler — “a little more whisky, if you please, Friend Trowbridge.”

Ancient Fires

“**T**IENS, Friend Trowbridge, this is interesting.” Jules de Grandin passed the classified page of the *Times* across the breakfast table and indicated one of the small advertisements with the polished nail of his well-groomed forefinger. “Regard this *avis*, if you please, and say if I am not the man.”

Fixing my reading glasses firmly on my nose, I perused the notice he pointed out:

WANTED — A man of more than ordinary courage to undertake confidential and possibly dangerous mission. Great physical strength not essential, but indomitable bravery and absolute fearlessness in the face of seemingly supernatural manifestations are. This is a remarkable work and will require the services of a remarkable man. A fee up to \$10,000 will be paid for the successful prosecution of the case.

X.L. Selfridge, Attorney, Jennifer Building.

De Grandin’s round blue eyes shone with elated anticipation as I put down the paper and regarded him across the cloth. “*Morbleu*, is it not an apple from the tree of Divine Providence?” he demanded, twisting the ends of his diminutive blond mustache ferociously. “A remarkable man for a remarkable work, do they say? *Cordieu*, but Jules de Grandin is that man, nor do I in any wise imply perhaps! You will drive me down to that so generous *soliciteur*, Friend Trowbridge, and we shall together collect from him this ten thousand dollars, or may I never hear the blackbirds whistle in the trees of St. Cloud again.”

“Sounds like some bootlegger advertising for a first lieutenant,” I discouraged, but he would not be gainsaid.

“We shall go, we shall most certainly go to see this remarkable lawyer who offers a remarkable fee to a remarkable man,” he, insisted, rising and dragging me from the table. “*Morbleu*, my friend, excitement is good, and gold is good, too; but gold and excitement together — *la, la*, they are a combination worthy of any man’s love! Come, we shall go right away, at once, immediately.”

We went. Half an hour later we were seated across a flat-topped mahogany desk, staring at a thin, undersized little man with an oversized bald head and small, sharp, bird-like black eyes.

“This seems incredibly good, gentlemen,” the little lawyer assured us when he had finished examining the credentials de Grandin showed. “I had hoped to get some ex-service man — some youngster who hadn’t gotten his fill of adventure in the great war, perhaps — or possibly some

student of psychic phenomena — but — my dear sir!” — he beamed on my friend — “to secure a man of your standing is more than I had dared hope. Indeed, I did not suspect such characters existed outside book covers.”

“*Parbleu, Monsieur l’Avoué*,” de Grandin replied with one of his impish smiles, “I have been in what you Americans call some tight places, but never have I been shut up in a book. Now, if you will be so good as to tell us something of this so remarkable mission you wish undertaken —” He paused, voice and eyebrows raised interrogatively.

“To be sure” — the attorney passed a box of cigars across the desk — “you’ll probably consider this a silly sort of case for a man of your talents but — well, to get down to brass tacks, I’ve a client who wants to sell a house.”

“Ah?” de Grandin murmured noncommittally. “And we are to become indomitably fearless real estate brokers, perhaps?”

“Not quite,” the lawyer laughed, “nothing quite as simple as that. You see, Redgables is one of the finest properties in the entire lake region. It lies in the very heart of the mountains, with a commanding view, contains nearly three thousand acres of good land, and, in fact, possesses nearly every requisite, of an ideal country estate or a summer hotel or sanatorium. Normally, it’s worth between three and four hundred thousand dollars; but, unfortunately, it possesses one drawback — a drawback which makes its market value practically nil. It’s haunted.”

“Eh, do you say so?” De Grandin sat up very straight in his chair and fixed his unwinking stare on the attorney. “*Parbleu*, it will be a redoubtable ghost whom Jules de Grandin can not eject for a fee of two hundred thousand francs! Say on, my friend; I burn with curiosity.”

“The house was built some seventy-five years ago when that part of New York State was little better than a wilderness,” the attorney resumed. “John Aglinberry, son of Sir Rufus Aglinberry, and the great-uncle of my client, was the builder. He came to this country under something of a cloud — pretty well estranged from his family — and built that English manor house in the midst of our hills as a refuge from all mankind, it seems.

“As a young man he’d served with the British army in India, and got mixed up in rather a nasty scandal. Went *ghazi* — fell in love with a native girl and threatened to marry her. There was a devil of a row. His folks used influence to have him dismissed from the service and cut off

his allowance to force him back to England. After that they must have made life pretty uncomfortable for him, for when he inherited a pile of money, from a spinster aunt, he packed up and came to America, building that beautiful house out there in the woods and living like a hermit the rest of his life.

“The girl’s family didn’t take matters much easier than Aglinberry’s, it seems. Something mysterious happened to her before he left India — I imagine he’d have stayed there in spite of hell and high water, if she’d lived.

“Somehow, the Aglinberry fortune petered out. John Aglinberry’s younger brothers both came to this country and settled in New York, working at one thing and another till he died. They inherited the property share and share alike under our law; but it never did them any good. Neither of them was ever able to live in it, and they never could sell it. Something — mind you, I’m not saying it was a ghost — but something damned unpleasant, nevertheless, has run off every tenant who’s ever attempted to occupy that place.

“My client is young John Aglinberry, great-nephew of the builder, and last of the family. He hasn’t a cent to bless himself with, except the potential value of Redgables.

“That’s the situation, gentlemen; a young man, heir to a baronetcy, if he wished to go to England to claim it, poorer than a church mouse, with a half-million dollar property eating itself up in taxes and no way to convert it into a dime in cash till he can find someone to demonstrate that the place isn’t devil-ridden. Do you understand why we’re willing to pay a ten thousand dollar fee — contingent on the success of re-establishing Redgables’ good name?”

“*Tiens, Monsieur,*” de Grandin exclaimed, grinding the fire from his half-smoked cigar, “we do waste the time. I am all impatience to try conclusions with this property-destroying ghost who keeps your so deserving client out of the negotiation of his land and me from a ten thousand dollar fee. *Morbleu,* this is a case after my own heart! When shall we start for this so charming estate which is to pay me ten thousand dollars for ridding it of its specter tenants?”

John Aglinberry, chiefly distinguished by a wide, friendly grin, met us at the railway station which lay some five miles from Redgables, and extended a warm handclasp in greeting. “It’s mighty good of you gentlemen to come up here and give me a lift,” he exclaimed as he shepherded us along the platform and helped stow our traps into the unkempt tonneau of a Ford which might have seen better days, though not recently. “Mr. Selfridge ’phoned me yesterday morning, and I hustled up here to do what I could to make you comfortable. I doubt you’d have been able to get any of the village folks to drive you over to the place — they’re as frightened of it as they would be of a mad dog.”

“But, *Monsieur,*” de Grandin expostulated, “do you mean to say you have been in that house by yourself this morning?”

“Uh-huh, and last night, too,” our host replied. “Came up here on the afternoon train yesterday and tidied things up a bit.”

“And you saw nothing, felt nothing, heard nothing?” de Grandin persisted.

“Of course not,” the young man answered impatiently. “There isn’t anything to see or feel, or hear, either, if you except the usual noises that go with a country place in springtime. There’s nothing wrong with the property, gentlemen. Just a lot of silly gossip which has made one of the finest potential summer resorts in the county a drug on the market. That’s why Mr. Selfridge and I are so anxious to get the statement of gentlemen of your caliber behind us. One word from you will outweigh all the silly talk these yokels can blab in the next ten years.”

De Grandin cast me a quick smile. “He acknowledges our importance, my friend,” he whispered. “Truly, we shall have to walk fast to live up to such a reputation.”

Further conversation was cut short by our arrival at the gates of our future home. The elder Aglinberry had spared no expense to reproduce a bit of England in the Adirondacks. Tall posts of stone flanked the high iron gate which pierced the ivy-mantled wall surrounding the park, and a wide graveled driveway, bordered on each side by a wall of cedars, led to the house, which was a two-story Tudor structure with shingles of natural red cedar from which the place derived its name. Inside, the house bore out the promise of its exterior. The hall was wide and stone-paved, wainscoted with panels of walnut and with a beamed ceiling of adz-hewn cedar logs and slabs. A field-stone fireplace, almost as large as the average suburban cottage’s garage, pierced the north wall, and the curving stairs were built with wide treads and balustraded with hand-carved walnut. A single oil painting, that of the elder John Aglinberry, relieved the darkness of the wall facing the stairway.

“But, *Monsieur,* this is remarkable,” de Grandin asserted as he gazed upon the portrait. “From the resemblance you bear your late kinsman you might easily be taken for his son — yes *pardieu,* were you dressed in the archaic clothes of his period, you might be himself!”

“I’ve noticed the resemblance, too,” young Aglinberry smiled. “Poor old Uncle John, gloomy-looking cove, wasn’t he! Anyone would think all his friends were dead and he was making plans to visit the village undertaker himself.”

The Frenchman shook his head reprovingly at the younger man’s facetiousness. “Poor gentleman,” he murmured, “he had cause to look sad. When you, too, have

experienced the sacrifice of love, you may look saddened, my friend.”

We spent the remainder of the afternoon surveying the house and surrounding grounds. Dinner was cooked on a portable camp outfit over blazing logs in the hall fireplace, and about nine o’clock all three of us mounted the stairs to bed. “Remember,” de Grandin warned, “if you hear or see the slightest intimation of anything which is not as it should be, you are to ring the bell beside your bed, my friend. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall sleep like the cat, with one eye open and claws alert.”

“Not a chance,” our host scoffed. “I slept here last night and never saw or heard anything more supernatural than a stray rat, and mighty few of those.”

I might have slept half an hour or twice that long when a gentle nudge brought me wide awake and sitting bolt upright in bed. “Trowbridge, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin’s voice came through the darkness from across the room, “rise and follow; I think I hear Monsieur Aglinberry’s alarm bell!”

I slipped a bathrobe over my pyjamas and took the loaded automatic and flashlight from under my pillow. “All right,” I whispered, “I’m ready.”

We stole down the hall toward our host’s room, and de Grandin paused beside the door. Clearly we made out the sound of an untroubled sleeper’s heavy breathing. “Guess you’ve been hearing things, de Grandin,” I chuckled in a low voice, but he held up one slender hand in warning.

“P-s-st, be still!” he commanded. “Do not you hear it, too, my friend? Hark!”

I listened with bated breath, but no sound save the occasional ghostly creak of a floor-board came to my ears, then —

Faint, so faint it might have been mistaken for the echo of an imagined sound, had it not been for its insistence, I heard the light, far-away-sounding tinkle-tinkle of bells. “Tink-a-tink, a-tink-a-tink; tink-a-tink, a-tink-a-tink” they sounded, scarcely louder than the swishing of silk, every third and fifth beat accentuated in an endless “circular” rhythm; but their music did not emanate from the room beyond the door. Rather, it seemed to me, the tiny, fairylike ringing came up the stairway from the hall below.

My companion seemed struck by the same thought, for he crept past me toward the stairhead, his soft-soled slippers making no more noise against the hardwood floor than the beating of a moth’s wings against the night air.

Close behind him I slipped, my gun and flashlight held in instant readiness, but at sight of his eager, strained face as he paused at the top of the stair I forgot my weapons and stole forward to peep over his shoulder.

A shutter must have come unfastened at one of the small, high windows in the hall, for a patch of dim moonlight, scarcely more than three feet in diameter, lay upon the floor directly beneath the portrait of the elder Aglinberry, and against the circle of luminance a thin, almost impalpable wreath of smoke seemed drifting before a draft of air from the fireplace. I looked again. No, it was not smoke, it was something with a defined outline. It was — it was a wisp of muslin, air-light and almost colorless in its sheerness, but cloth, nevertheless. And now, as I gazed unbelievably, something else seemed slowly taking form in the moonlight. A pair of narrow, high-arched feet and tapering, slender ankles, unclothed except for a double loop of bell-studded chains, were mincing and gyrating on flexible toes, while, fainter than the feet, but still perceptible, the outline of a body as fair as any that ever swayed to the tempo of music showed against the black background of the darkened hall like a figure dimly suggested in an impressionistic painting. Round and round, in a dazing but incredibly graceful dance the vision whirled, the hem of the muslin skirt standing outward with the motion of the pirouetting feet, the tiny, golden bells on the chain anklets sending out their faerie music.

“*Morbleu!*” de Grandin whispered softly to himself. “Do you see it, also, Friend Trowbridge?”

“I —” I began in a muted voice, but stopped abruptly, for a puff of passing breeze must have closed the shutter, cutting off the moonbeam as a theatrical spotlight is shut off by a stage electrician. The illusion vanished instantly. There was no elfin, dancing form before the painted likeness of old John Aglinberry, no sound of clinking anklets in the old house. We were just a pair of sleep-disheveled men in bathrobes and pyjamas standing at a stairhead and staring foolishly into the darkness of a deserted hallway.

“I thought I saw —” I began again, but again I was interrupted, this time by the unmistakable clatter of the hand-bell in Aglinberry’s room.

We raced down the corridor to him and flung open the door. “Monsieur Aglinberry!” de Grandin gasped, “did it — did anything come into your room? Dr. Trowbridge and I —”

The young man sat up in bed, grinning sheepishly at us in the double beam of our flashlights. “I must be getting a case of nerves,” he confessed. “Never had the jumps like this before. Just a moment ago I fancied I felt something touch my lips — like the tip of a bat’s wing, it was, soft as velvet, and so light I could scarcely feel it; but it woke me up, and I grabbed the bell and began ringing, like a fool. Funny, too” — he glanced toward the window — “it couldn’t have been a bat, for I took particular pains to nail mosquito netting over that window this morning. It’s — why, it’s *torn!*”

Sure enough, the length of strong netting which our host had thoughtfully tacked across the windows of both our room and his as a precaution against early spring insects, was rent from top to bottom as though by a knife. "H'm," he muttered, "it *might* have been a bat, at that."

"To be sure," de Grandin agreed, nodding so vigorously that he resembled a Chinese mandarin, "it might, as you say, *Monsieur*, have been a bat. But I think you would sleep more safely if you closed the window." Crossing the room he drew the casement to and shot the forged iron bolt into place. "*Bon soir*, my friend" — he bowed formally at the doorway — "a good night, and be sure you leave your window closed."

"Would you gentlemen like to look at the property down by the lake?" Aglinberry asked as we finished our breakfast of bacon and eggs, coffee and fried potatoes the following morning.

"Assuredly," de Grandin replied as he donned topcoat and cap, slipping his ever-ready automatic pistol into his pocket, "a soldier's first caution should be to familiarize himself with the terrain over which he is to fight."

We marched down a wide, curving drive bordered by pollarded willows, toward the smooth sheet of water flashing in the early morning sunlight.

"We have one of the finest stands of native hardwood to be found anywhere in this part of the country," Aglinberry began, waving his stick toward an imposing grove to our right. "Just the timber alone is worth — well, of all the copper-riveted nerve!" he broke off angrily, hastening his pace and waving his cane belligerently. "See there? Some fool camper has started a fire in those woods. Hi, there, you! Hi, there; what're you doing?"

Hurrying through the trees we came upon a little clearing where a decrepit, weather-blistered van was drawn up beside a small spring, two moth-eaten-appearing horses tethered to a nearby tree and several incredibly dirty children wrestling and fighting on the short grass. A man in greasy corduroys lay full length on the ground, a black slouch hat pulled over his eyes, while another lounged in the doorway of the van. Two women in faded shawls and headkerchiefs and an amazing amount of pinchbeck jewelry were busily engaged, one in hewing down underbrush to replenish the camp fire, the other stirring some sort of savory mess in a large, smoke-blackened kettle which swung over the blazing sticks.

"What the devil do you mean by building a fire here?" Aglinberry demanded angrily as we came to a halt. "Don't you know you're likely to start a blaze in these woods? Go down to the lake if you want to camp; there's no danger of burning things up there."

The women looked at him in sullen silence, their fierce black eyes smoldering angrily under their straight black brows; but the man lying beside the fire was not minded to be hustled from his comfortable couch.

"Too mucha stone by da lake," he informed Aglinberry lazily, raising the hat from his face, but making no other move toward obeying the summons to quit. "Too mucha stone an' sand. I lika dissa grass to lay on. I stay here. See?"

"By George, we'll see about that!" replied our irate host. "You'll stay here, will you? Like hell you will!" Stepping quickly to the fire, he shouldered the crouching woman out of his path and scattered the blazing sticks from under the kettle with a vigorous kick of his heavy boot, stamping the flame from the brands and kicking earth over the embers. "Stay here, will you?" he repeated. "We'll see about that. Pull your freight, and pull it in a hurry, or I'll have the whole gang of you arrested for trespass."

The reclining gipsy leaped to his feet as though propelled by a spring. "You tella me pulla da freight? You keek my fire out? *You*? Ha, I show you somet'ing!" His dirty hand flew to the girdle about his greasy trousers, and a knife's evil flash showed in the sunlight. "You t'ink you make da fool of Nikolai Brondovitch? I show you!"

Slowly, with a rolling tread which reminded me of a tiger preparing to leap, he advanced toward Aglinberry, his little, porcine eyes snapping vindictively, his bushy eyebrows bent into an almost straight line with the ferocity of his scowl.

"*Eh, bien, Monsieur le Bohémien*," Jules de Grandin remarked pleasantly, "were I in your shoes — and very dirty shoes they are, too — I would consider what I did before I did it." The gipsy turned a murderous scowl on him and stopped short in his tracks, his narrow eyes contracting to mere slits with apprehension. The Frenchman had slipped his pistol from his pocket and was pointing its uncompromising black muzzle straight at the center of the Romany's checked shirt.

"Meester," the fellow pleaded, sheathing his knife hurriedly and forcing his swarthy features into the semblance of a smile, "I maka da joke. I not mean to hurt your frand. I poor man, trying to make honest living by selling horses. I not mean to scare your frand. We taka da camp offa hees lan' right away."

"*Pardieu*, my friend, I think you will," de Grandin agreed, nodding approvingly. "You will take your so filthy wagon, your horses, your women and your brats from off this property. You leave at once, immediately, right away!" He waved his blue steel pistol with an authoritative gesture. "Come; I have already, waited too long; try not my patience, I beseech you."

Muttering imprecations in their unintelligible tongue and showering us with looks as malignant as articulate curses,

the gipsies broke camp, under our watchful supervision, and we followed them down the grass grown drive toward the lake front. We watched them off the land, then proceeded with our inspection of the estate.

Redgables was an extensive property and we spent the better part of the day exploring its farther corners. By nightfall all three of us were glad to smoke a sociable pipe and turn in shortly after dinner.

I was lying on my back, staring straight upward to the high ceiling of our chamber and wondering if the vision of the night before had been some trick of our imaginations, when de Grandin's sharp, strident whisper cut through the darkness and brought me suddenly wide-awake. "Trow-bridge," he murmured, "I hear a sound. Someone is attempting entrance!"

I lay breathless a moment, straining my ears for any corroboration of his statement, but only the sougling of the wind through the evergreens outside and the occasional rasp of a bough against the house rewarded my vigil. "Rats!" I scoffed. "Who'd try to break into a house with such a reputation as this one's? Why, Mr. Selfridge told us even the tramps avoided the place as if it were a plague-spot."

"Nevertheless," he insisted as he drew on his boots and pulled a topcoat over his pyjamas, "I believe we have uninvited guests, and I shall endeavor to mend their manners, if such they be."

There was nothing to do but follow him. Downstairs, tiptoe, our flashlights held ready and our pistols prepared for emergency, we stole through the great, dark hall, undid the chain-fastener of the heavy front door, and walked softly around the angle of the house.

At de Grandin's direction, we kept to the shadow of the tall, black-branched pine trees which grew near the house, watching the moonlit walls of the building for any evidence of a housebreaker.

"It is there the young Aglinberry sleeps," de Grandin observed in a low voice as he indicated a partly opened casement on the second floor, its small panes shining like nacre in the rays of the full moon. "I observe he has not obeyed our injunctions to close his sash in the night-time. *Morbleu*, that which we did see last night might have been harmless, my friend, but, again, it might have been — ah, my friend, look; *look!*"

Stealthily, silently as a shadow, a stooped form stole around the corner of the wall, paused huddled in a spot of darkness where the moonbeams failed to reach, then slowly straightened up, crept into the light, and began mounting the rough rubblestone side of the house, for all the world like some great, uncanny lizard from the preadamite days. Clinging to the protuberances of the rocks with clawlike

hands, feeling for footholds in the interstices where cement had weathered away, the thing slowly ascended, nearer and yet nearer Aglinberry's unlatched window.

"*Dieu de Dieu*," de Grandin muttered, "if it be a phantom, our friend Aglinberry is in misfortune, for 'twas he himself who left his window unfastened. If it be not a ghost — *parbleu*, it had better have said its paternosters, for when he puts his head in that window, I fire!" I saw the glint of moonlight, on the blue steel of his pistol barrel as he trained it on the climbing thing.

Inch by inch the creature — man or devil — crept up the wall, reached its talon hands across the stone sill, began drawing itself through the casement. I held my breath, expecting the roar of de Grandin's pistol each second, but a sudden gasp of astonishment beside me drew my attention from the creeping thing to my companion.

"Look, Friend Trowbridge, *regardez, s'il vous plait!*" he bade me in a tremulous whisper, nodding speechlessly toward the window into which the marauder was disappearing like a great, black serpent into its lair. I turned my gaze toward the window again and blinked my eyes in unbelief.

An odd luminescence, as if the moon's rays had been focused by a lens, appeared behind the window opening. It was like a mirror of dull silver, or a light faintly reflected from a distance. Tiny bits of impalpable dust, like filings from a silversmith's rasp, seemed floating in the air, whirling, dancing lightly in the converging moon rays, circling about each other like dust-motes seen in a sun-shaft through a darkened room, driving together, *taking form*. Literally out of moonlight, a visible, discernible something was being made. Spots of shadow appeared against the phosphorescent gleam, alternate high-lights and shadows became apparent, limning the outlines of a human face, a slender, oval face with smoothly-parted hair sleekly drawn across a high, broad forehead; a face of proud-mouthed, narrow-nosed beauty such as the highest-caste women of the Rajputs have.

A moment it seemed suspended there, more like the penumbra of a shadow than an actual entity, then seemed to surge forward, to lose its sharpness of outline, and blend, mysteriously, with the darkness of the night-prowler's form, as though a splash of mercury were suddenly thrown upon a slab of carbon.

A moment the illusion of light-on-darkness held, then a scream of wire-edged terror, mingled with mortal pain, shuddered through the quiet night as a lightning flash rips across a thunder cloud. The climber loosed both hands from the window sill, clawed frantically at the empty air above him, then hurtled like a plummet to the earth, almost at our feet.

Our flashlights shot their beams simultaneously on the fallen man's face as we reached his side, revealing the features of Nikolai Brondovitch, the gipsy Aglinberry had ordered off the place that morning.

But it was a different face from that the Romany had displayed when threatening Aglinberry or attempting to conciliate de Grandin. The eyes were starting from their sockets, the mouth hung open with an imbecile, hang-jawed flaccidity. And on the gipsy's lean, corded throat was a knotted swelling, as though a powerful clamp had seized and crushed the flesh together, shutting off breath and blood in a single mighty grasp. Both de Grandin and I recognized the thing before us for what it was — trust a physician to recognize it! Death is unique, and nothing in the world counterfeits it. The scoundrel had died before his body touched the ground.

"*Nom d'un nom!*" de Grandin murmured wonderingly, "And did you also see it, Friend Trowbridge?"

"I saw something," I answered, shuddering at the recollection.

"And what did you see?" his words came quickly, like an eager lawyer cross-examining a reluctant witness.

"It — it looked like a woman's face," I faltered, "but—"

"*Nom de Dieu*, Yes," he agreed, almost hysterically, "a woman's face — a face with no body beneath it! *Parbleu*, my friend, I think this adventure is worthy of our steel. Come, let us see the young Aglinberry."

We hurried into the house and up the stairs, hammering on our host's door, calling his name in frenzied shouts.

"Eh, what's up?" his cheery voice responded, and next moment he unfastened the door and looked at us, a sleepy grin mantling his youthful face. "What's the idea of you chaps breaking a fellow's door down at this time o' night?" he wanted to know. "Having bad dreams?"

"*Mon — Monsieur!*" de Grandin stammered, his customary aplomb deserting him. "Do you mean — have you been *sleeping*?"

"Sleeping?" the other echoed. "What do you think I went to bed for? What's the matter, have you caught the family ghost?" He grinned at us again.

"And you have heard nothing, seen nothing — you do not know an entrance to your room was almost forced?" de Grandin asked incredulously.

"An entrance to my room?" the other frowned in annoyance, looking quizzically from one of us to the other. "Say, you gentlemen had better go back to bed. I don't know whether I'm lacking in a sense of humor or what my trouble is, but I don't quite get the joke of waking a man up in the middle of the night to tell him that sort of cock-and-bull story."

"*Nom d'un chou-fleur!*" De Grandin looked at me and

shook his head wonderingly. "He has slept through it all, Friend Trowbridge!"

Aglinberry bristled with anger. "What're you fellows trying to do, string me?" he demanded hotly.

"Your hat, your coat, your boots, *Monsieur!*" de Grandin exclaimed in reply. "Come outside with us; come and see the vile wretch who would have slaughtered you like a pig in the shambles. Come and behold, and we shall tell you how he died."

By mutual consent we decided to withhold certain details of the gipsy's death from the coroners jury next day, and a verdict to the effect that the miscreant had come to his death while attempting to "break and enter the dwelling house of one John Aglinberry in the night-time, forcibly, feloniously aud against the form of the statute in such case made and provided" was duly returned.

The gipsy was buried in the Potter's Field and we returned to our vigil in the haunted house.

Aglinberry was almost offensively incredulous concerning the manner of the gipsy's death. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed when we insisted we had seen a mysterious, faintly luminous face at the window before the would-be housebreaker hurtled to his death. "You fellows are so fed up on ghost-lore that you've let this place's reputation make you see things — things which weren't there."

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin assured him with injured dignity, "it is that you speak out of the conceit of boundless ignorance. When you have seen one-half — *pardieu*, one-quarter or one-eighth — the things I have seen, you will learn not to sneer at whatever you fail to understand. As that so magnificent Monsieur Shakespeare did say, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

"Probably," our host interrupted, smothering a yawn, "but I'm content to let em stay there. Meantime, I'm going to bed. Goodnight." And up the stairs he marched, leaving us to share the warmth of the crackling pitch-pine fire.

De Grandin shook his head pityingly after the retreating youngster. "He is the perfect type of that Monsieur Babbitt," he confided. "Worldly, materialistic, entirely devoid of imagination. *Parbleu*, we have them in France, too! Did they not make mock of Pasteur, *le grand*, when he announced his discoveries to a skeptical world? Most assuredly. Like the poor, the materialist we have always with us. — Ha! what is that! Do you hear it, Trowbridge, my friend?"

Faintly, so faintly it was like the half-heard echo of an echo, the fine, musical jangle of tiny bells wafted to us through the still, cold air of the dark old house.

“In there, ’twas in the library it sounded!” the Frenchman insisted in an excited whisper as he leaped to his feet and strode across the hall. “Your light, Friend Trowbridge; quick, your light!”

I threw the beam of my electric torch about the high-walled, sombre old reading room, but nothing more ghostly than the tall walnut book cases, empty of books and laden only with dust these many years, met our eyes. Still the soft, alluring chime sounded somewhere in the shadows, vague and indefinite as the cobwebbed darkness about us, but insistent as a trumpet call heard across uncounted miles of night.

“*Morbleu*, but this is strange!” de Grandin asserted, circling the room with quick, nervous steps. “Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend, as we live, those bells are calling us, calling — ah, *cordieu*, they are here!”

He had halted before a carved panel under one of the old bookcases and was on his hands and knees, examining each figure of the conventionalized flowers and fruits which adorned its surface. With quick, questing fingers he felt the carvings, like a cracksman feeling out the combination of a safe. “*Nom d’un fromage*, I have it!” he called in lilting triumph as he bore suddenly down upon a bunch of carved grapes and the panel swung suddenly inward upon invisible hinges. “Trowbridge, *mon ami*, regardez vous!”

Peering into the shallow opening left by the heavy, carved plank, we beheld a package carefully wrapped in linen, dust-covered and yellowed with age.

“Candles, if you please, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin commanded as he bore our find in triumph to the hall. “We shall see what secret of the years these bells have led us to.” He sank into his armchair and began unwinding the linen bands.

“Ah? And what is this?” He unreeled the last of the bandages and displayed a small roll of red morocco leather, a compact little case such as an elder generation of men carried with them for supplying needles, buttons, thread and other aids to the womanless traveler. Inside the wallet was a length of tough, age-tanned parchment, and attached to it by a loop of silk was a single tiny hawk-bell of gold, scarcely larger than a bead, but capable of giving off a clear, penetrating tinkle as the parchment shook in de Grandin’s impatient hands.

I looked over his shoulder in fascinated interest, but drew back with disappointment as I saw the vellum was covered with closely-written scrawls somewhat resembling shorthand.

“U’m!” de Grandin regarded the writing a moment, then tapped his even, white teeth with a meditative forefinger. “This will require much study, Friend Trowbridge.” he murmured. “Many languages have I studied, and my brain

is like a room where many people speak together — out of the babel I can distinguish but few words unless I bear my attention on some one talk. This” — he tapped the crinkling parchment — “is Hindustani, if I mistake not; but to translate it will require more time than these candles will burn. Nevertheless, we shall try.”

He hurried to our bedroom, returning in a moment with a pad of paper and a fresh supply of candles. “I shall work here for a time,” he announced, reseating himself before the fire. “It will be long before I am prepared for bed, and it may be well for you to seek repose. I shall make but poor company these next few hours.”

I accepted the dismissal with an answering grin and, taking my candle, mounted the stairs to bed.

“*Eh bien*, my friend, you do sleep like the dead — the righteous dead who have no fear of purgatory!” de Grandin’s voice roused me the following morning.

The bright spring sunshine was beating into our chamber through the open casement, and a puff of keen breeze fluttered the trailing bed-clothes, but my friend’s face rivaled the brilliance of the breaking day. “*Triomphe!*” he exclaimed, brandishing a sheaf of papers above his blond head. “It is finished, it is complete, it is done altogether entirely. Attend me, my friend, listen with care, for you are not like to hear such a tale soon again:

Lord of my life and master of my heart: This day is the fulfilment of the fate overhanging the wretched woman who has unworthily been honored by your regard, for this night I was bidden by my father to choose whether I would be married by the priests to the god Khandoka, and become a temple bayadere — and my lord well knows what the life of such an one is — or go to the shrine of Omkar, God of Destruction, to become *kurban*. I have chosen to make the leap, my lord, for there is no other way for Amari.

We have sinned, thou against thy people and I against mine, in that we did dare defy *varna* and love, when such a love is forbidden between the races. *Varna* forbids it, the commands of thy people. and mine forbid it, and yet we loved. Now our brief dream of *kailas* is broken as the mists of morning break and fly before the scarlet lances of the sun, and thou returnest to thy people; Amari goes to her fate.

By the leap I assure my sinful spirit of a resting place in *kailas*, for to the *kurban* all sins are forgiven, even unto that of taking the life of a Brahmin or giving herself in love to one of another race; but she who retreats from the leap commits a sin with each step so great that a thousand reincarnations can not atone for it.

In this life the walls of *varna* stand between us, but, perchance, there may come a life when Amari inhabits the body of a woman of the sahib’s race, or my lord and master may be clothed in the flesh of one of Amari’s people. These things it is not given Amari to know, but this she knows full well: Throughout the seven cycles of time which shall

endure through all the worlds and through all eternity, when worlds and the gods themselves shall have shuddered into dust, Amari's heart is ever and always inclined to the sahib, and the walls of death or the force of life shall not keep her from him. Farewell, master of Amari's breath, perchance we shall meet again upon some other star, and our waking spirits may remember the dream of this unhappy life. But ever, and always, Amari loves thee, sahib John."

"Yes?" I asked as he finished reading. "And then?"

"*Parbleu*, my friend, there was no then!" he answered. "Listen, you do not know India. I do. In that so depraved country they do consider that the woman who goes to the bloody shrine of the god Omkar and hurls herself down from a cliff upon his bloody altar attains to sainthood. It was that which this poor one meant when she did speak of 'the leap' in her farewell note to her white lover. *Kurban* is the word in their so detestable language for human sacrifice, and when she speaks of attaining *kailas* she refers to their heathenish word for heaven. When she says *varna* stood between them she did mean caste. *Cordieu* — you English, you Americans! Always you drive yourselves crazy with thoughts of what should and what should not be done, *Nom d'un coq!* Why did not this Monsieur Aglinberry the elder take this Hindoo woman to wife, if he loved her, and thumb his nose at her brown-skinned relatives and his fair-eyed English kin as well? 'Tis what a Frenchman would have done in like case. But no, he must needs allow the woman he loved to hurl herself over a cliff for the edification of a crowd of monkey-faced heathen who are undoubtedly stewing in hell at this moment; while he ran overseas to America and built him a mansion in the wilderness. A mansion, *pardieu!* A mansion without the light of love in its rooms or the footfalls of little children on its floors. *Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu*, a mansion of melancholy memories, it is! *À bas* such a people! They deserve *la prohibition*, nothing better!" He walked back and forth across the room in a fury of disgust, snapping his fingers and scowling ferociously.

"All right," I agreed, laughing in spite of myself, "we'll grant all you say; but where does that get us as regards Redgables? If the ghost of this Hindoo girl haunts this house, how are we going to lay it?"

"How should I know?" he returned peevishly. "If the ancient fires of this dead woman's love burn on the cold hearth of this *sacré* house, who am I to put them out? Oh, it is too pitiful, too pitiful; that such a love as theirs should have been sacrificed on the altar of *varna* — caste!"

"Hullo, hullo, up there!" came a cheery hail from the hall below. "You chaps up yet? Breakfast is ready, and we've got callers. Come down."

"Breakfast!" de Grandin snorted disgustedly. "He talks of

breakfast, in a house where the ghost of murdered love dwells! But" — he turned an impish grin on me — "I hope he has compounded some of those so delicious flap-the-jacks for us, even so."

"Dr. de Grandin, this is Dr. Wiltsie," Aglinberry introduced as we descended to the hall. "Dr. Trowbridge, Dr. Wiltsie. Wiltsie is superintendent of a sanatorium for the feeble-minded over there" — he waved his arm in a vague gesture — "and when he heard Dr. de Grandin was in the neighborhood, he came over for a consultation. It seems — oh, you tell him your troubles, Wiltsie."

Dr. Wiltsie was a pleasant-looking young man with a slightly bald head and large-lensed, horn-rimmed spectacles. He smiled agreeably as he hastened to comply with Aglinberry's suggestion. "Fact is, doctor," he began as de Grandin piled his plate high with "flap-the-jacks," "we've got a dam' peculiar case over at Thornwood. It's a young girl who's been in our charge for the past twelve years — ever since she was ten years old. The poor child suffered a terrible fright when she was about six, according to the history we have of her case — horses of the carriage in which she and her mother were riding ran away, threw 'em both out, killed the mother and — well, when they picked the youngster up she was just one of God's little ones. No more reason than a two-months-old baby.

"Her family's rich enough, but she has no near relatives, so she's been in our care at Thornwood, as I said, for the past twelve years. She's always been good as gold, scarcely any trouble at all, sitting on the bed or the floor and playing with her fingers or toes, like an infant, most of the time; but lately she's been acting up like the devil. Fact. Tried to brain the nurse with a cup three nights ago, and made a break at one of the matrons yesterday morning. From a simple, sweet-tempered little idiot she's turned into a regular hell-cat. Now, if she'd been suffering from ordinary dementia, I'd —"

"Very good, very good, my friend," de Grandin replied as he handed his plate to Aglinberry for further replenishment. "I shall be delighted to look at your patient this morning. *Parbleu*, a madhouse will be a pleasant contrast to this never enough to be execrated place!"

"He likes my house," Aglinberry commented to Dr. Wiltsie with a sardonic grin as we rose and prepared to go to the sanatorium.

Thornwood Sanatorium was a beautiful, remodeled private country home, and differed in no wise from the nearby estates except that the park about the house was enclosed in a high stone wall topped with a *chevaux-de-frise* of barbed wire.

“How’s Mary Ann, Miss Underwood?” Wiltsie asked as we entered the spacious central hall and paused at the door of the executive office.

“Worse, doctor,” replied the competent-looking young woman in nurse’s uniform at the desk. “I’ve sent Mattingly up to her twice this morning, but the dosage has to be increased each time, and the medicine doesn’t seem to hold as well.”

“H’m,” Wiltsie muttered noncommittally, then turned to us with an anxious look. “Will you come to see the patient, gentlemen? You, too, Aglinberry, if you wish. I imagine this’ll be a new experience for you.”

Upstairs, we peered through the small aperture in the door barring the demented girl’s room. If we had not been warned of her condition, I might easily have taken the young woman asleep on the neat, white cot for a person in perfect health. There was neither the emaciation nor the obesity commonly seen in cases of dementia, no drawing of the face, not even a flaccidity of the mouth as the girl lay asleep.

Her abundant dark hair had been clipped short as a discouragement to the vermin which seem naturally to gravitate to the insane in spite of their keepers’ greatest care, and she was clothed in a simple muslin nightdress, cut modestly at the neck and without sleeves. One cheek, pale from confinement, but otherwise flawless, lay pillowed on her bent arm, and it seemed to me the poor girl smiled in her sleep with the wistfulness of a tired and not entirely happy child. Long, curling lashes fringed the ivory lids which veiled her eyes, and the curving brows above them were as delicately pencilled and sharply defined as though drawn on her white skin with a camel’s hair brush.

“*La pauvre enfant!*” de Grandin murmured compassionately, and at the sound of his voice the girl awoke.

Gone instantly was the reposeful beauty from her face. Her lips stretched into a square like the mouth of one of those old Greek tragic masks, her large, brown eyes glared fiercely, and from her gaping red mouth issued such a torrent of abuse as might have brought a blush to the face of the foulest fishwife in Billingsgate.

Wiltsie’s face showed a dull flush as he turned to us. “I’m dashed if I can understand it,” he admitted “She goes on this way for hours on end, now.”

“Eh, is it so?” de Grandin responded. “And what, may I ask, have you been doing for this condition? It appears more like delirium than like dementia, my friend.”

“Well, we’ve been administering small doses of brandy and strychnine, but they don’t seem to have the desired effect, and the doses have to be increased constantly.”

“Ah!” — de Grandin’s smile was slightly satirical — “and has it never occurred to you to employ hypnotics?

Hyoscine by example?”

“By George, it didn’t!” Wiltsie confessed. “Of course, hyoscine would act as a cerebral sedative, but we’d never thought of using it.”

“Very well, I suggest you employ a hypodermic injection of hyoscine hypobromide,” de Grandin dismissed the case with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders, but Aglinberry, moved by that curiosity which is akin to fascination felt by the normal person regarding the insane, looked past him at the raving girl inside the cell.

An instant change came over her. From a cursing, blaspheming maniac, the girl became a quiet, sorrowful-looking child, and on her suddenly calmed face was such a look of longing as I have seen children undergoing strict diet give some particularly toothsome and forbidden dainty.

Young Aglinberry suppressed a shudder with difficulty. “Poor, child,” he muttered, “poor, poor little girl, to be so lovely and so hopeless!”

“*Oui, Monsieur,*” de Grandin agreed moodily as we went down the stairs, “you do well to pity her, for the intelligence — the very soul of her — has been dead these many years; only her body remains alive, and — *pitié de Dieu* — what a life it is! Ah, if only some means could be found to graft the healthy intelligence animating a sick body into that so healthy, body of hers, what an economy!” He lapsed into moody silence, which remained unbroken during our drive back to Redgables.

The sun had gone down in a blaze of red against the western sky, and the pale new moon was swimming easily through a tumbling surf of a bank of foaming cirrus clouds when the deep-throated, belling bay of a hound came echoing to us from the grounds outside the old house. “*Grand Dieu!*” de Grandin leaped nervously from his chair. “What is that? Do they hunt in this country while the mating season is but blossoming into flower among the wild things?”

“No, they don’t,” Aglinberry answered testily. “Someone has let his dogs out on my land. Come on let’s chase ’em off. I won’t have ’em poaching on the game here like that.”

We trailed out of the hall and walked quickly toward the sound of the baying, which rose fuller and fuller from the region of the lake. As we neared the dogs, the sound of human voices became audible. “That you, Mr. Aglinberry?” a man called, and the flash of an electric torch showed briefly among the new-leafed thickets by the waterfront.

“Yes,” our host answered shortly. “Who the devil are you, and what are you doing here?”

“We’re from Thornwood, sir,” the man answered, and we saw the gleam of his white hospital uniform under his dark topcoat. “The crazy girl, Mary Ann, got away about an hour

ago, and we're trailing her with the hounds. She went completely off her head after you left this morning, and fought so they couldn't give her the hypo without strapping her. After the injection she quieted down, but when the matron went to her room with dinner she suddenly woke up, threw the woman against the wall so hard she almost cracked her ribs, and got clean away. She can't have gotten far, though, running over this broken country in her bare feet."

"Oh, hell!" Aglinberry stormed, striking a bush beside the path a vicious slash with his stick. "It's bad enough to have my place overrun with gypsies and gossiped about by all the country yaps in the county, but when lunatics get to making a hangout of it, it's too much!"

"Hope you find her," he flung back over his shoulder as he turned toward the house. "And for the Lord's sake, if you do get her, keep her at Thornwood. I don't want her chasing all over *this* place!"

"*Monsieur*—" de Grandin began, but Aglinberry cut him short.

"Yes, I know what you'll say," he broke in, "you want to tell me a ghost-woman will protect me from the lunatics, just as she did from the gipsy, don't you?"

"No, my friend," de Grandin began with surprising mildness, "I do not think you need protection from the poor mad one, but—" He broke off with his sentence half spoken as he stared intently at an object hurrying toward us across a small clearing.

"Good God!" Aglinberry exclaimed. "It's she! The crazy girl!"

Seemingly gone mad himself, he rushed toward the white-robed figure in the clearing, brandishing his heavy stick. "I'll handle her," he called back, "I don't care how violent she is; I'll handle her!"

In another moment he was half-way across the cleared space, his thick walking stick poised for a blow which would render the maniac unconscious.

Any medical student with the most elementary knowledge of insanity could have told him a lunatic is not to be cowed by violence. As though the oaken cudgel had been a wisp of straw, the maniac rushed toward him, then stopped a scant dozen feet away and held out her tapering arms.

"John," she called softly, a puzzling, exotic thickness in her pronunciation. "John, *sahib*, it is I!"

Aglinberry's face was like that of a man suddenly roused from sound slumber. Astonishment, incredulity, joy like that of a culprit reprieved as the hangman knots the noose about his neck, shone on his features. The threatening club fell with a soft thud to the turf, and he gathered the madwoman's slender body to his breast, covering her upturned face with kisses.

"Amari, my Amari; Amari, my beloved!" he crooned in a soft, sobbing voice. "Oh, my love, my precious, precious love. I have found you; I have found you at last!"

The girl laughed lightly, and in her laughter there was no hint or taint of madness, "Not Amari, Mary Ann in this life, John," she told him, "but yours, John *sahib*, whether we stand beside the Ganges or the Hudson, beloved through all the ages."

"Ah, got her, sir?" The hospital attendants, a pair of bloodhounds tugging at the leash before them, broke through the thicket at the clearing's farther side. "That's right, sir; hold her tight till we slip the straitjacket on her."

Aglinberry thrust the girl behind him and faced the men. "You can't have her," he announced uncompromisingly. "She's mine."

"Wha — what?" the attendant stammered, then turned toward the underbrush and called to some invisible companion. "Hey, Bill, come 'ere; there's two of 'em!"

"You can't have her," Aglinberry repeated as two more attendants reinforced the first pair. "She's going to stay with me — always."

"Now, look here, sir," the leader of the party argued, "that girl's a dangerous lunatic; she nearly killed a matron this evenin', an' she's been regularly committed to Thornwood Sanatorium. We've tracked her here, an' we're goin' to take her back."

"Over the dead corpse of Jules de Grandin," the Frenchman interrupted as he pressed forward. "*Parbleu*, me, I am in authority here. I shall be responsible for her conduct."

The man hesitated a moment, then shrugged his shoulders. "It's your funeral if anything happens on account o' this," he warned. "Tomorrow Dr. Wiltsie will start legal proceedings to get her back. You can't win."

"Ha, can I not?" the little Frenchman's teeth gleamed in the moonlight. "My friend, you do not know Jules de Grandin. There is no lunacy commission in the world to which I can not prove her sanity. I do pronounce her cured, and the opinion of Jules de Grandin of the Sorbonne is not to be lightly sneezed upon, I do assure you!"

To Aglinberry he said: "Pick her up, my friend; pick her up and bear her to the house, lest the stones bruise her tender feet. Dr. Trowbridge and I will follow and protect you. *Parbleu*" — he glared defiantly about him — "me, I say nothing shall separate you again. Lead on!"

"For heaven's sake, de Grandin," I besought as we followed Aglinberry and the girl toward the house, "what does this all mean?"

"*Morbleu*," he nodded solemnly at me, "it means we have won ten thousand dollars, Friend Trowbridge. No more will

the ghost of that so pitiful Hindoo woman haunt this house. We have earned our fee."

"Yes, but —" I pointed mutely toward our host as he strode through the moonlight with the girl in his arms.

"Ah — that?" he laughed a silent, contented laugh. "That, my friend, is a demonstration that the ancient fires of love die not, no matter how much we heap them with the ashes of hate and death.

"The soul of Amari, the sacrificed Hindoo girl, has come to rest in the body of the lunatic, Mary Ann, just as the soul of John Aglinberry the elder was reborn into the body of his namesake and double, John Aglinberry the younger. Did not the deceased Indian girl promise that she would some day come back to her forbidden lover in another shape? *Parbleu*, but she has fulfilled her vow! Always have the other members of Aglinberry's family been unable to live in this house, because they were of the clan who had helped separate the elder lovers.

"Now, this young man, knowing nothing of his uncle's intimate affairs, but bearing in his veins the blood of the older Aglinberry, and on his face the likeness of the uncle, too, must have borne within his breast the soul of the disappointed man who ate out his heart in sorrow and loneliness in this house which he had builded in the American woods. And the spirit of Amari, the Hindoo, who has kept safe the house from alien blood and from the members of her soulmate's family who would have robbed him of his inheritance, did find near at hand the healthy

body of a lunatic whose soul — or intelligence, if you please — had long since sped, and entered thereinto to dwell on earth again. Did you not see sanity and longing looking out of her eyes when she beheld him in the madhouse this morning, my friend? Sanity? But yes, it was recognition, I tell you!

"Her violence? 'Twas but the clean spirit of the woman fighting for mastery of a body long untenanted by an intelligence. Were you to attempt to play a long-disused musical instrument, Trowbridge, my friend, you could make but poor work of it first, but eventually you would be able to produce harmony. So it is in this case. The spirit sought to use a long-disused brain, and at first, the music she could make was nothing but noise. Now, however, she has seen the mastery of her instrument, and henceforth the body of Mary Ann will function as that of a healthy young woman. I, Jules de Grandin, will demonstrate her sanity to the world, and you, my friend, shall help me. Together we shall win, together we shall make certain that these lovers thwarted in one life, shall complete this cycle in happiness.

"*Eh bien*," he twisted the end of his blond mustache and set his hand at a rakish angle on the side of head, "it is possible that somewhere in space there waits for me the spirit of a woman whom I have loved and left in another life. I wonder, when she comes, if I, like the lucky young Aglinberry yonder, shall 'wake, and remember, and understand?'"

The Great God Pan

“BUT OF COURSE, my friend,” Jules de Grandin conceded as he hitched his pack higher on his shoulders and leaned forward against the grade of the wooded hill, “I grant you American roads are better than those of France; but look to what inconvenience these same good roads put us. Everything in America is arranged for the convenience of the motorist — the man who covers great distances swiftly. Your roads are the direct result of motorized transportation for the million, and, consequently, you and I must tramp half the night and very likely sleep under the stars, because there is no inn to offer shelter.

“Now in France, where roads were laid out for stage-coaches hundreds of years before your Monsieur Ford was dreamed of, there is an abundance of resting places for the pedestrian. Here —” He spread his hands in an eloquent gesture of deprecation.

“Oh, well,” I comforted, “we started out on a hiking trip, you know, and we’ve had mighty fine weather so far. A night in the open won’t do us any harm. That cleared place at the top of the hill looks like a good spot to make camp.”

“Eh, yes, I suppose so,” he acquiesced as he breasted the crown of the hill and paused for breath. “*Parbleu*,” he gazed about him, “I fear we trespass, Friend Trowbridge! This is no natural glade, it has been cleared for human habitation. Behold!” He waved his arm in a commanding gesture.

“By George, you’re right!” I agreed in disappointment as I surveyed the clearing.

“The trees — beech, birch and poplar — had been cut away for the space of an acre or more, and the stumps removed, the cleared land afterward being sown with grass as smooth and well cared for as a private estate’s lawn. Twenty yards ahead a path of flat, smooth stones was laid in the sod, running from a dense thicket of dwarf pine and rhododendron across the sward to a clump of tall, symmetrical cedars standing almost in the center of the clearing. Through the dark, bearded boughs of the evergreens we caught the fitful gleam of lights as the soft summer-evening breeze swayed the branches.”

“Too bad,” I murmured; “guess we’ll have to push on a little farther for our bivouac.”

“*Mille cochons, non!*” de Grandin denied. “Not I. *Parbleu*, but my feet faint from exhaustion, and my knees cry out for the caress of Mother Earth with a piety they have not known these many years! Come, let us go to the proprietor of that mansion and say, ‘*Monsieur*, here are two worthy gentleman tramps who crave the boon of a night’s

lodging and a meal, also a bath and a cup of wine, if that so entirely detestable Monsieur Volstead has allowed you to retain any.’ He will not refuse us, my friend. *Morbleu*, a man with the charity of a Senegalese idol would not turn us away in the circumstances! I shall ask him with tears in my voice — *pardieu*, I shall weep like a lady in the cinema; I shall wring my hands and entreat him! Never fear, my friend, we shall lodge in yonder house this night, or Jules de Grandin goes supperless to a bed of pine-needles.”

“Humph, I hope your optimism is justified,” I grunted as I followed him across the close-cropped lawn to the stone path and marched toward the lights in the cedars.

We had progressed a hundred feet or so along the path when a sudden squealing cry, followed by a crashing in the thicket at the clearing edge, stopped us in our tracks. Something fluttering and white, gleaming like a ghost in the faint starlight, broke through the bushes, and a soft slapping noise, as though someone were beating his hands lightly and quickly together, sounded as the figure approached us.

“Oh, sirs, run, run for your lives, it — it’s *Pan!*” the girl called in a frightened voice as she came abreast of us. “Run, run, if you want to live; *he’s* there, I tell you! I saw his face among the leaves!”

One of de Grandin’s small, slender hands rose with an involuntary gesture to stroke his little blond mustache as he surveyed our admonisher. She was tall and built with a stately, statuesque beauty which was doubly enhanced by the simple white linen garment which fell in straight lines from her lovely bare shoulders to her round, bare ankles. The robe was bound about the waist with a corded girdle which crossed above her breast, and was entirely sleeveless, though cut rather high at the neck, exposing only a few inches of white throat. Her feet, narrow and high-arched, and almost as white as the linen of her robe, were innocent of any covering, and I realized that the slapping sound I had heard was the impact of her bare soles on the stones of the path as she ran.

“*Tiens, Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin declared with a bow, “you are as lovely as Pallas Athene herself. Who is it has dared frighten you? *Cordieu*, I shall do myself the honor of twisting his unmannerly nose!”

“No, no!” the girl besought in a trembling voice. “Do not go back, sir, *please!* I tell you Pan — the Great God Pan, Himself — is in those bushes. I went to bathe in the fountain a few minutes ago, and as I came from the water I — I saw his face grinning at me between the rhododendron bushes!

It was only for a second, and I was so frightened I did not look again, but — oh, let us go to the house! Hurry, hurry, or we may see him in good earnest, and —” She broke off with a shudder and turned from us, walking hurriedly, but with consummate grace, toward the knot of cedars before us.

“*Sacré nom!*” de Grandin murmured as he fell in behind her. “Is it that we have arrived at a home for the feeble-minded, Friend Trowbridge, or is this beautiful one a goddess from the days of old? *Nom d’un coq*, she speaks the English like an American, but her costume, her so divine beauty, they are things of the days when Pygmalion hewed living flesh from out the lifeless marble!”

The murmur of feminine voices, singing softly in unison, came to us as we made our way through the row of cedar trees and approached the house. The building was almost square, as well as we could determine in the uncertain light, constructed of some sort of white or light-colored stone, and fronted by a wide portico with tall pillars topped with Doric capitals. The girl ran lightly up the three wide steps leading to the porch, her bare feet making no sound on the stone treads, and we followed her, wondering what sort of folk dwelt in this bit of classic Greece seemingly dropped from some other star in the midst of the New Jersey woods.

“*Morbleu!*” de Grandin exclaimed softly in wonderment as we paused at the wide, doorless entrance. Inside the house, or temple, was a large apartment, almost fifty feet square, paved with alternate slabs of white and grey-green stone. In the center stood a square column of black stone, some three feet in height, topped by an urn of some semi-transparent substance in which a light glowed dimly. The place was illuminated by a series of flaring torches hung in rings let into the walls, their uncertain, flickering light showing us a circle of ten young women, dressed in the same simple classic costume as that worn by the girl we had met outside, kneeling about the central urn, their faces bowed modestly toward the floor, white arms raised above their heads, hands bent inward toward the center of the room. As we stood at gaze the girl who had preceded us hurried soundlessly across the checkered pavement and sank to her knees, inclining her shapely head and raising her arms in the same position of mute adoration assumed by the others.

“Name of a sacred pig!” de Grandin whispered. “We have here the votaries, but the hierophant, where is he?”

“There, I think,” I answered, nodding toward the lighted urn in the pavement’s center.

“*Parbleu*, yes,” my companion assented, “and a worthy one for such a class, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

Standing beside the central altar, if such it could be

called, was a short, pudgy little man, clothed in a short *chiton* of purple cloth bordered about neck, sleeves and bottom with a zig-zag design of gold braid. His bald head, gleaming in the torchlight, was crowned with a wreath of wild laurel, and a garland of roses hung about his fat, creased neck like an overgrown Hawaiian *lei*. Clapsed in the crook of his left elbow was a zither, or some similar musical instrument, while a little stick, ending in a series of curved teeth, something like the fingers of a Japanese back-scratcher, was clapsed in his dimpled right hand.

“Come, my children,” the comic little man exclaimed in a soft, unctuous voice, “let us to our evening worship. Beauty is love, love beauty; that is all ye know and all ye need to know. Come, Chloë, Thisbe, Daphne, Clytie, let us see how well you know the devotion of beauty!”

He waved his stick like a monarch gesturing with his scepter, and drew its claw-tipped end across the strings of his zither, striking a chord, whereat the kneeling girls began singing, or, rather, humming, a lilting, swinging tune vaguely reminiscent of Mendelssohn’s *Spring Song*, and four of their number leaped nimbly to their feet, ran lightly to the center of the room, joined hands in a circle and began a dance of light, lithe grace.

Faster and faster their white feet whirled in the convolutions of the dance, their graceful arms weaving patterns of living beauty as they swung in time to the measures of the song. They formed momentary tableaux of sculptural loveliness, only to break apart instantly into quadruple examples of individual posturing such as would have set an artist mad with delight.

The music ceased on a long-drawn, quavering note, the four dancers ran quickly back to their positions in the circle, and dropped again to their knees, extending their arms above their heads and bending their supple hands inward.

“It is well,” the fat little man pronounced oracularly. “The day is done; let us to our rest.”

The girls rose with a subdued rustling of white garments and separated into whispering, laughing groups, while the little man posed more pompously than ever beside the lighted urn.

“*Tiens*, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin whispered with a chuckle, “do you behold how this bantam would make a peacock of himself? He is vain, this one. Surely, we shall spend the night here!

“*Monsieur*,” he emerged from the shadow of the doorway and advanced toward the absurd figure posturing beside the urn, “we are two weary travelers, lost in the midst of these woods, without the faintest notion of the direction of the nearest inn. Will you not, of your so splendid generosity, permit that we spend the night beneath your roof?”

“Eh, what’s that?” the other exclaimed with a start as he

beheld the little Frenchman for the first time. “What d’ye want? Spend the night here? No, no; I can’t have that. Get my school talked about. Couldn’t possibly have it. Never have any men in this place.”

“Ah, but *Monsieur*,” de Grandin replied smoothly, “you do forget that you are already here. If it were but a question of having male guests at this so wonderful school of the arts, is not the reputation of the establishment already ruined? Surely a gentleman with so much of the appeal to beauty as *Monsieur* unquestionably possesses would cause much gossip if he were not so well known for his discretion. And, *Monsieur*’s discretion being already so firmly established, who would dare accuse him of anything save great-heartedness if he did permit two wanderers — and medical men in the bargain — to remain overnight in his house? Permit me, *Monsieur*; I am Dr. Jules de Grandin, of the Sorbonne, and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, of Harrisonburg, New Jersey, both entirely at your good service, *Monsieur*.”

The little fellow’s fat face creased in a network of wrinkles as he regarded de Grandin with a self-satisfied smirk. “Ah, you appreciate the pure beauty of our school?” he remarked with almost pathetic eagerness. “I am Professor Judson — Professor Herman Judson, sir — of the School of the Worship of Beauty. These — ah — young ladies whom you have seen here tonight are a few of my pupils. We believe that the old ideals — the old thought — of ancient Greece is a living, motivating thing today, just as it was in centuries gone by. We assert sir, that the religion of beauty which actuated the Greeks is still a living, vital thing. We believe that the old gods are not dead; but come to those who woo them with the ancient rite of song and the dance. In fine, sir, we are pagans — apostles of the religion of neo-paganism!”

He drew himself up to his full height, which could not have exceeded five feet six inches, and glared defiantly at de Grandin, as though expecting a shocked protest at his announcement.

The Frenchman’s smile became wider and blander than ever. “Capital, *Monsieur*,” he congratulated. “Anyone with the eye of a blind man could see that you are the very personality to head such an incontestably sensible school of thought. The expertness with which your pupils perform their dances shows that they have a teacher worthy of all your claims. We do felicitate you most heartily, *Monsieur*. Meantime” — he slipped the pack from his shoulders and lowered it to the pavement — “you will undoubtedly permit that we shall pass the night here? No?”

“We-ell,” the professor’s doubt gave way slowly, “you seem to be more appreciative than the average modern barbarian. Yes, you may remain here overnight; but you

must be off in the morning — early in the morning, mind you. Never do to have the neighbors seeing strange men coming from this place. Understand?”

“Perfectly, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin answered with a bow. “And, if we might make so bold, may we trespass on your hospitality for a bite — the merest morsel of food?”

“U’m, pay for it?” the other demanded dubiously.

“But assuredly,” de Grandin replied, producing a roll of bills. “It would cause us the greatest anguish, I do assure you, if it were ever said that we accepted the hospitality of the great Professor ’Erman Judson without making adequate return.”

“Very well,” the professor assented, and hurried through a door at the farther end of the apartment, returning in a few minutes with a tray of cold roast veal, warm, ripe apples, a loaf of white bread and a jug of more than legally strong, sour wine.

“Ah,” de Grandin boasted as he washed down a sandwich with a draft of the acid liquor, “did I not tell you we should spend the night here, Friend Trowbridge?”

“You certainly made good your promise,” I agreed as I shoved the remains of my meal from me, undid my pack and prepared to pillow my head on my rolled-up jacket. “See you in the morning, old fellow.”

“Very good,” he agreed. “Meantime, I go out of doors to smoke a last cigarette before I join you in sleep.”

I might have slept an hour, perhaps a little more, when a sharp, insistent poke in my ribs woke me sufficiently to understand the words whispered fiercely in my ear. “Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend,” Jules de Grandin breathed so low I could scarcely make out the syllables. “This house, it is not all as it should be, I fear me.”

“Eh, what’s that?” I demanded sleepily, sitting up and blinking half comprehendingly at his dim outline in the semidarkness of the big room.

“S-s-sh, not so loud,” he cautioned, then leaned nearer, speaking rapidly: “Do you know from whence your English word ‘panic’ comes, my friend?”

“What?” I demanded in disgust. “Did you wake me up to discuss etymology — after a day’s hiking? Good Lord, man—”

“Be still!” he ordered sharply; then, inconsistently, “Answer me, if you please; whence comes that word?”

“Hanged if I know,” I replied, “and I’m hanged if I care a whoop, either. It can come from the Cannibal Islands, for all I —”

“Quiet!” he commanded, then hurried on: “In the old days when such things were, my friend, Pan, the god of Nature, was very real to the people. They believed, firmly, that whoso saw Pan after nightfall, that one died instantly.

Therefore, when a person is seized with a blind, unreasoning fear; even to this day, we say he has a panic. Of what consequence is this? Remember, my friend, the young lady whom we did meet as we approached this house told us she had seen Pan's face grinning at her from out the bushes as she bathed. Is it not so?"

"I guess so," I answered, putting my head back on my improvised pillow and preparing to sleep while he talked.

But he shook my shoulder with a sharp, imperative gesture. "Listen, my friend," he besought, "when I did go out of doors to smoke my cigarette, I met one of those beautiful young women who frequent this temple of the new heathenism, and engaged her in conversation. From her I learned much, and some of it sounds not good to my ears. For instance, I learn that this Professor Herman Judson is a much misunderstood man. Oh, but yes. The lawyers, they have misunderstood him many times. Once they misunderstood him so that he was placed in the state's prison for deceiving gullible women with fortune-telling tricks, Again he was misunderstood so that he went to the Bastille for attempting to secure some money which a certain deceased lady's heirs believed should have gone to them — which *did* go to them eventually."

"Well, what of it?" I growled. "That's no affair of ours. We're not a committee on the morals of dancing masters, are we?"

"Eh, are we not so?" he replied. "I am not entirely sure of that, my friend. I fear we, too, are about to misunderstand this Professor Judson. Some other things I find out from that young lady with the Irish nose and the Greek costume. This professor he has founded this school of dancing and paganism, taking for his pupils only young women who have no parents or other near relations, but much money. He is not minded to be misunderstood by heirs-at-law. What think you of that, *hein*?"

"I think he's got more sense than we gave him credit for," I replied.

"Undoubtedly," he agreed, "very much more; for also I discovered that *Monsieur le Professeur* has had his school regularly incorporated, and has secured from each of his pupils a last will and testament in which she does leave the bulk of her estate to the corporation."

"Well," I challenged, giving up hope of getting my sleep till he had talked himself out, "what of it? The man may be sincere in his attempt to found some sort of aesthete cult, and he'll need money, for the project."

"True, quite true," he conceded, nodding his head like a China mandarin, "but attend me, Friend Trowbridge; while we walked beneath the stars I did make an occasion to take that young lady's hand in mine, and —"

"You old rake!" I cut in, grinning, but he shut me off with

a snort of impatience.

"— and that was but a ruse to feel her pulse," he continued. "*Parbleu*, my friend, her heart did race like the engine of a *moteur*! Not with emotion for me — never think it, for I did talk to her like a father or uncle, well, perhaps more like a cousin — but because it is of an abnormal quickness. Had I a stethoscope with me I could have told more, but as it is I would wager a hundred dollars that she suffers a chronic myocarditis, and the prognosis of that ailment is always grave, my friend. Think you a moment — what would happen if that young girl with a defective heart should see what she took to be the face of the great god Pan peering at her from the leaves, as the lady we first saw declared she did? Remember, these children believe in the deities of old, my friend."

"By George!" I sat bolt upright. "Do you mean — you don't mean that—"

"No, my friend, as yet I mean nothing," he replied evenly, "but it would be well if we emulated the cat, and slept with one eye and both ears open this night. Perhaps" — he shrugged his shoulders impatiently — "who knows what we may see in this house where the dead gods are worshiped with song and the dance?"

A marble pavement is a poor substitute for a bed, even when the sleeper is thoroughly fatigued from a long day's tramp, and I slept fitfully, troubled by all manner of unpleasant dreams. The forms of lithe, classically draped young girls dancing about a fire-filled urn alternated with visions of goat-legged, grinning satyrs in my sleep as I rolled from side to side on my hard bed; but the sudden peal of devilish laughter, quavering sardonically, almost like the bleating of a goat, was the figment of no dream. I sat suddenly up, wide-awake, as a feminine scream, keen-edged with the terror of death, rent the tomblike stillness of the early morning, and ten white-draped forms came rushing in the disorder of abject fright into the room about us.

Torches were being lighted, one from another, and we beheld the girls, their tresses unloosed from the classic fillets which customarily bound them, their robes hastily adjusted, huddled fearfully in a circle about the glowing urn, while outside, in the moonless night, the echo of that fearful scream seemed wandering blindly among the evergreens.

"Professor, Professor!" one of the girls cried, wringing her hands in an agony of apprehension. "Professor, where are you? Chloë's missing, Professor!"

"Eh, what is it that you say?" de Grandin demanded, springing up and gazing questioningly about him. "What is this? One of your number missing! And the professor, too? *Parbleu*; me, I shall investigate this! Do you attend the young ladies, Friend Trowbridge. I, Jules de Grandin, shall

try conclusions with whatever god or devil accosts the missing one!"

"Wait a minute," I cautioned. "The professor will be here in a moment. You can't go out there now; you haven't any gun."

"Ha, have I not?" he replied sarcastically, drawing the heavy, blue-steel pistol from his jacket pocket. "Friend Trowbridge, there are entirely too many people of ill repute who desire nothing more than the death of Jules de Grandin to make it safe for me to be without a weapon at any time. Me, I go to investigate."

"Never mind, sir," the smooth, oily voice of Professor Judson sounded from the door at the rear of the room as he marched with short-legged dignity toward the altar. "Everything is all right, I assure you."

"My children," he turned to the frightened girls, "Chloë has been frightened at the thought of Pan's presence. It is true that the great god of all Nature hovers ever near his worshipers, especially at the dark of the moon, but there is nothing to fear."

"Chloë will soon be all right. Meantime, let us propitiate Pan by prayer and sacrifice. Thetis, bring hither a goat!" He turned his small, deep-set eyes on the young girl we had met as we entered the grounds, and waved a pudgy hand commandingly.

The girl went white to the lips, but with a submissive bow she hurried from the room, returning in a moment leading a half-grown black goat by a string, a long, sharp butcher-knife and a wide, shallow dish under her free arm.

She led the animal to the altar where the professor stood, gave the leading string into his hand and presented the sacrificial knife, then knelt before him, holding the dish beneath the terrified goat's head, ready to catch the blood when the professor should have cut the creature's throat.

It was as if some beady, madness-compelling fume had suddenly wafted into the room. For a single breathless moment the other girls looked at their preceptor and his kneeling acolyte with a gaze of fear and disgust, their tender feminine instincts rebelling at the thought of the warm blood soon to flow, then, as a progressive, contagious shudder seemed to run through them, one after another, they leaped wildly upward with frantic, frenzied bounds as though the stones beneath their naked feet were suddenly turned white-hot, beating their hands together, waving their arms convulsively above their heads, bending forward till their long, unbound hair cascaded before their faces and swept the floor at their feet, then leaping upward again with rolling, staring eyes and wantonly waving arms. With a maniac shriek one of them seized the bodice of her robe and rent it asunder, exposing her breasts, another tore her gown from hem to hips in half a dozen places, so that streamers of

tattered linen draped like ribbons about her rounded limbs as she sprang and crouched and sprang again in the abandon of her voluptuous dance.

And all the while, as madness seemed to feed on madness, growing wilder and more depraved each instant, they chanted in a shrill, hysterical chorus:

Upon thy worshipers now gaze,
Pan, Pan, Io Pan,
To thee be sacrifice and praise,
Pan, Pan, to Pan.
Give us the boon of the seeing eye,
That we may behold ere yet we die
The ecstasies of thy mystery,
Pan, Pan, PAN!

Repeated insistently, with maniacal fervor, the name "Pan" beat against the air like the rhythm of a tom-tom. Its shouted repetition seemed to catch the tempo of my heart-beats; despite myself I felt an urging, strong as an addict's craving for his drug, to join in the lunatic dance, to leap and shout and tear the encumbering clothing from my body as I did so.

The professor changed his grip from the goat's tether to its hind legs. He swung the bleating animal shoulder-high, so that as it held its head back its throat curved above the dish held by the girl, who twitched her shoulders and swayed her body jerkily in time to the pagan hymn as she knelt at his feet.

"Oh, Pan, great goat-god, personification of all Nature's forces, immortal symbol of the ecstasy of passion, to Thee we make the sacrifice; to Thee we spill the blood of this victim," the professor cried, his eyes gleaming brilliantly in the reflection of the torches and the altar fire. "Behold, goat of thy worshiper's flock, we —"

"Zut! Enough of this; *cordieu*, too much!" de Grandin's furious voice cut through the clamor as a fire-bell stills the noise of street traffic. "Hold your hand, accursed of heaven, or by the head of St. Denis, I scatter your brains in yonder dish!" His heavy pistol pointed unwaveringly at the professor's bald head till the terrified man unloosed his hold upon the squirming goat.

"To your rooms, my little ones," de Grandin commanded, his round, blazing eyes traveling from one trembling girl to another. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Evil communications corrupt good manners — *parbleu, Monsieur*, I do refer to you and no one else —" he glowered at the professor. "And you, Mademoiselle," he called to the kneeling girl, "do you put down that dish and have nothing to do with this sacrifice of blood. Do as I say. I, Jules de Grandin, command it!"

"Now, *Monsieur le Professeur*," he waved his pistol to

enforce his order, “do you come with me and explore these grounds. If we find your great god Pan I shall shoot his evil eyes from out his so hideous head. If we do not find him, *morbleu*, it were better for you that we find him, I damn think!”

“Get outa my house!” Professor Judson’s mantle of culture ripped away, revealing the coarse fibre beneath it; “I’ll not have any dam’ Frenchman comin’ around here an’—”

“Softly, *Monsieur*, softly; you will please remember there are ladies present,” de Grandin admonished, motioning toward the door with his pistol. “Will you come with me, or must I so dispose of you that you can not ran away until I return? I could most easily shoot through one of your fat legs.”

Professor Judson left the altar of Pan and accompanied de Grandin into the night. I do not know what took place out under the stars, but when the Frenchman returned some ten minutes later, he carried the inert form of the eleventh young woman in his arms, and the professor was not with him.

“Quickly, Friend Trowbridge,” he commanded as he laid the girl on the pavement, “give me some of the wine left from our supper. It will help this poor one, I think. Meantime” — he swung his fierce, unwinking gaze about the clustering circle of girls — “do you young ladies assume garments more fitted for this day and age, and prepare to evacuate this house of hell in the morning. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall remain here until the day, and tomorrow we notify the police that this place is permanently closed forever.”

It was a grim, hard task we had bringing the unconscious girl out of her swoon, but patience and the indomitable determination of Jules de Grandin finally induced a return of consciousness.

“Oh, oh, I saw Pan — Pan looked at me from the leaves!” the poor child sobbed hysterically as she opened her eyes.

“*Non, non, ma chère*,” de Grandin assured her. “’Twas but a papier-mâché mask which the so odious one placed in the branches of the bush to terrify you. Behold, I will bring it to you that you may touch it, and know it for the harmless thing it is!”

He darted to the doorway of the temple, returning instantly with the hideous mask of a long, leering face, grinning mouth stretched from pointed ear to pointed ear,

short horns rising from the temples and upward-slanting eyes glaring in fiendish malignancy. “It is ugly, I grant you,” he admitted, flinging the thing upon the pavement and grinding it beneath his heavily booted heel, “but see, the foot of one who fears them not is mightier than all the gods of heathendom. Is it not so?”

The girl smiled faintly and nodded.

De Grandin was out of the house at sunup, and returned before 9 o’clock with a fleet of motor cars hastily commandeered from a roadhouse garage which he discovered a couple of miles down the road. “Remember, *Mesdemoiselles*,” he admonished as the cars swung away from the portico of the temple with the erstwhile pupils of the School of Neopaganism, “those wills and testaments, they must be revoked forthwith. The detestable one, he has the present copies, but any will which you wish to make will revoke those he holds. Leave your money to found a vocal school for Thomas cats, or for a gymnasium for teaching young frogs to leap, but bequeath it to some other cause than this temple of false gods, I do implore you.”

“Ready, sport?” the driver of the car reserved for us demanded, lighting a cigarette and flipping the match toward the temple steps with a disdainful gesture.

“In one moment, my excellent one,” de Grandin answered as he turned from me and hurried into the house. “Await me, Friend Trowbridge,” he called over his shoulder; “I have an important mission to perform.

“What the dickens did you run back into that place for when the chauffeur was all ready to drive us away?” I demanded as we bowled over the smooth road toward the railway station.

He turned his unwinking cat’s stare on me a moment, then his little blue eyes sparkled with a gleam of elfin laughter. “*Pardieu*, my friend,” he chuckled, “that Professor Judson, I found a trunkful of his clothes in the room he occupied, and paused to burn them all. Death of my life, I did rout him from the premises in that Greek costume he wore last night, and when he returns he will find naught but glowing embers of his modern garments! What a figure he will cut, walking into a haberdasher’s clothed like Monsieur Nero, and asking for a suit of clothes. *La, la*, could we but take a motion picture of him, our eternal fortunes would be made!”

hurriedly, and seizing Butterbaugh's hand in both of his. "No need for further introductions, Friend Trowbridge. Who has not heard of that peerless savant, that archeologist second only to the great Boussard? The very great honor is entirely mine, *Monsieur*."

Professor Butterbaugh grinned a trifle sheepishly at the Frenchman's enthusiastic greeting, fidgeted with the monument company's letter and his glasses a moment, then reached for his hat and gloves. "Must be movin'," he ejaculated in his queer, disjointed way. "Got to get home before Alice gives me double-jointed fits. Keepin' dinner waitin', you know. Glad to've met you," he held out his hand almost diffidently to de Grandin, "mighty glad. Hope you an' Trowbridge can come over tomorrow. Got an unusual sort o' mummy I'm figurin' on startin' to unwrap tonight. Like to have you medics there when I expose the body."

"Ah?" de Grandin assented, helping himself to a cigarette. "This mummy, then, it is different —?"

"You bet it is," Butterbaugh assured him colloquially. "Don't believe there's another like it in the country. I've only seen one other of the kind — the one supposed to be Ra-nefer, in the British Museum, you know. It has no funerary statue, just linen and bitumen molded to conform to the body's contours. Had the devil's own time gettin' it out of Egypt, too. Arabs went on strike half a dozen times while we were diggin', Egyptian government tried to collar the body, an', to top the whole business, a gang o' swell-headed young Copts sent me a batch o' black-hand letters, threatenin' all sorts o' penalties unless I returned the thing to its tomb. Huh, catch me givin' up a relic literally worth its weight in gold to a crew o' half-baked Johnnies like that!"

"But, *Monsieur le Professeur*," de Grandin urged, his diminutive blond mustache bristling with excitement, "this letter, this tombstone order, it may have some relation —"

"Not a chance!" Butterbaugh scoffed. "Egypt's half-way 'round the world from here, and I've no more chance of runnin' foul o' those chaps in this town than I have of bein' bitten by a crocodile; but" — his lips tightened stubbornly and a faint flush deepened the sun-tanned hue of his face — "but if all the Egyptian secret societies from Ghizeh to Beni Hassan were camped on my front lawn, I'd start unwrappin' that mummy tonight. Yes, by Jingo, an' finish the job, too; no matter how much they howled!"

He glowered at us a moment as though he expected us to forbid him, jammed his knockabout hat over his ears, slapped his thigh pugnaciously with his motoring gloves and strode from the study, his back as stiffly straight as though a ramrod had been thrust down the collar of his Norfolk jacket.

"Something terrible has happened!"

"Eh, what's that?" I muttered stupidly into the transmitter of my bedside telephone, still too immersed in sleep to understand the import of the message coming over the wire.

"This is Alice Butterbaugh, Dr. Trowbridge," the fluttering voice repeated. "Alice Butterbaugh, Professor Butterbaugh's niece. Something dreadful has happened. Uncle Frank's dead!"

"Dead?" I echoed, swinging my feet to the floor. "Why, he was over to my house this evening, and —"

"Yes, I know," she interrupted. "He told me he stopped to show you that mysterious letter he got from the Elgrace company. He was well enough then, doctor, but — but — I think — *he was murdered!* Can you come right over?"

"Of course," I promised, hanging up the receiver and hustling into my clothes.

"De Grandin," I called, opening his door on my way to the bathroom to wash the lingering sleep from my eyes with a dash of cold water, "de Grandin, Professor Butterbaugh is dead — murdered, his niece thinks."

"*Mille tonneres!*" The Frenchman was out of his bed like a jack-in-the-box popping from its case. "The half of one little minute, Friend Trowbridge" — his silk pajamas were torn from his slender white body and he struggled furiously into a white crape union suit — "do you but wait until I have applied the water to my face, the brush to my hair and the wax to my mustache — *nom d'un cochon!* where is that wax?" He had drawn on socks, trousers and boots, as he talked, and was already before the washstand, a bath sponge, dripping with cold water, in one hand, a face towel in the other.

"Fly, my friend, hasten to the telephone and advise the good Sergeant Costello what has occurred," he admonished. "I would that he meets us at the professor's house. *Pardieu*, if some scoundrel has taken the life of that so great scholar, I, Jules de Grandin, will track him down and deliver him to justice — yes, though he takes refuge beneath the throne of Satan himself!"

Ten minutes later we were riding furiously, toward the sinking moon over the smooth macadam road which led to The Beeches.

Her pretty yellow hair in attractive disorder, an orchid negligée drawn over her filmy nightdress — and French-heeled satin mules of the same color on her little white feet, Alice Butterbaugh met us in the wide reception hall of The Beeches, a very much frightened and entirely inarticulate butler at her elbow.

"Oh, Dr. Trowbridge," she sobbed, seizing my arm in both her small hands, "I'm so glad you got here! I —" She started back, folding the negligée across her diaphanous

nightrobe as she became aware of de Grandin's presence.

"This is Dr. Jules de Grandin, my dear," I introduced. "He is a member of the faculty of the University of Paris, and has been stopping with me for a while. He will be of great assistance in case it develops your uncle met with foul play."

"How do you do, Dr. de Grandin?" Alice acknowledged, extending her hand. "I am sure you will be able to help us in our trouble."

"*Mademoiselle*," de Grandin bowed his sleek blond head as he pressed his lips to her fingers, "*commandez-moi: j' suis prêt*."

"And now" — his air of gallantry fell from him like a cloak as he straightened his shoulders — "will you be good enough to take us to the scene and tell us all?"

"I'd gone to bed," the girl began as she led the way toward her uncle's library. "Uncle Frank was terribly excited all afternoon after he received that letter, and when he came back from Harrisonville he was still boiling inwardly. I could hardly get him to eat any dinner. Just as soon as dinner was over he went to the library where he has been keeping the latest addition to his collection of mummies, and told me he was going to begin unpacking it."

"I went to bed about half-past eleven and called good-night to him through the library door as I passed. I went to sleep almost immediately, but something — I don't know what, but I'm sure it was not a noise of any kind — woke me up a few minutes after two. I lay there trying to get back to sleep until nearly three, then decided to go to the bathroom for a bromide tablet. As I walked down the passage I noticed a light shining out of the library door into the lower hall, so I knew the door must be open."

"Uncle never left the door unclosed when he was working, for he hated to have the servants look in at him, and they would stand in the passage and stare if they thought he doing anything with his mummies — it seemed to fascinate them. Knowing Uncle's habits, I thought he had gone to bed without shutting off the light, and went down to turn it out. When I got here I found—" She paused beside the door with averted eyes and motioned toward the room beyond.

Professor Butterbaugh lay on his back, staring with sightless, dead eyes at the glowing globes of the electric chandelier, his body straight and stiff, legs extended, arms lying at his sides, as though he had fallen backward from an upright position and remained immovable since his fall. Despite the post-mortem flaccidity of his features, his countenance retained something of the expression it must have worn when death touched him, and, gazing at his face, it seemed to me he looked more startled than frightened or angry. Nowhere was there evidence of any sort of struggle;

not so much as a paper was disturbed on the big, flat-topped desk beside which the dead scientist lay, and the only witness testifying to tragedy was the still, inert remnant of what had been one of the world's foremost Egyptologists some three or four hours before.

"Beg pardon, Miss Alice," the pale-faced man-servant, trousers and coat pulled over his night-clothes, tip-toed toward the professor's niece, "there's a gentleman outside, a Sergeant Costello, from the police department —"

"The police!" the girl's pallid face went paler still. "Wh — what are the police doing here — who told them?"

"I — I don't know, Miss," the serving man stammered.

"I did notify the good sergeant, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin announced, looking up from beside the professor's body.

"Send him to me at once, immediately, right away," he ordered the butler, and walked quickly to the door to greet the burly, red-headed Irishman.

"*Holà*, my friend," he called as the detective crossed the hall, "we have here a wicked business to investigate. Some miscreant has struck down your famous fellow townsman from the back, and —"

"H'm, from th' back, is it?" Costello replied, looking meditatively at Butterbaugh's supine form. "An' how d'ye make that out, Dr. de Grandin? Seems to me there's no marks o' violence on th' body at all, an' th' pore gentleman died from natural causes. Apoplexy, it was, belike. He was a peppery-tempered old divil, God rest his soul!"

"Apoplexy, yes," de Grandin agreed with a mirthless smile, "since apoplexy is only a general name for the condition more definitely called cerebral hemorrhage. Behold the cause of this apoplexy, my friend." Stooping, he raised the professor's head, pointing to the occipital region. Against the dead man's smoothly brushed iron-gray hair lay a stain of blood, scarcely larger than a twenty-five cent piece, and so meager in its moisture that the Turkish rug on which the head had rested showed hardly any discoloration. Parting the hair, de Grandin showed a small, smooth-edged wound about the caliber of an ordinary lead-pencil, a bit of whitish substance welling up to the very edge of the opening and all but stopping any blood-flow from inside the head.

"Gun?" Costello bent to examine the puncture.

"I do not think so," the Frenchman replied. "Had a shot been fired from a pistol at close range or a rifle from a distance the bullet would probably have gone out of the head, yet there is only one wound here. Had a firearm of low power, unable to drive the missile through the head, been used, the bone would have shattered at the point of entrance, yet here we have a clean-cut wound. No, my friend, this injury is the result of some hand-weapon. Besides, *Mademoiselle* Butterbaugh was in the house, as

were also the servants, yet none recalls having heard a shot fired.

“*Mademoiselle*,” he rose from his examination of the body, “you did mention that your uncle was unwrapping a certain mummy tonight. This mummy, where is it, if you please?”

“I — I don’t know,” the girl faltered. “I thought it was in here, but —”

“But it is not,” de Grandin supplied dryly. “Come, *mes amis*, let us search for this missing cadaver. There are times when the dead can tell us more than the living.”

We crossed the library, passed between a pair of heavy brocade curtains, and entered a smaller room walled with smooth plaster, its only furniture being a series of glass cases containing small specimens of Egyptiana and a rank of upright mummy cases standing straight and sentinel-like against the farther wall. “Howly mither!” Costello exclaimed, his native brogue cutting through his acquired American accent, as he pointed one hand toward one of the mummy cases, signing himself piously with the cross with the other.

The center figure in the rank of mummies stood in a case somewhat taller than its fellows, and, unlike the others, was not hidden from view by a coffin lid, for the cover from its case had fallen to the floor, disclosing the mummy to our gaze. The body had been almost entirely denuded of its bandages, the face, arms and lower portion of the legs having been freed, so that, had it been a living man instead of a corpse, neither walking nor the use of the arms would have been impeded by the linen bands which remained in place. This much I saw at a glance, but the cause of Costello’s outcry was not plain until I had looked a second time. Then I added my amazed gasp to the big Irishman’s exclamation, for in the right hand of the dead thing was firmly grasped a rod of polished wood tipped by a hawk’s head executed in metal, the bird’s beak being some three inches in length, curved and sharp as the hooked needles used by upholsterers to sew heavy fabrics. Upon the metal point of the beak was a faintly perceptible smear of blood, and a drop of the grisly liquid had fallen to the floor, making a tiny, dark-red stain at the mummy’s desiccated feet.

And on the mummy’s face, drawn by the embalming process into a sort of sardonic grin, was another reddish smear, as, though the dead thing had bent its lips to the wound inflicted by the instrument clutched in its dead hand.

“*Pardieu*, Friend Trowbridge, I think we need look no farther for the weapon which took Monsieur Butterbaugh’s life,” de Grandin commented, twisting the end of his mustache with a nervous gesture.

“Wuz this th’ mummy th’ professor wuz workin’ on?” Costello demanded, turning to the butler, who had followed

us to the door of the specimen room.

“Oh, my Gawd!” the servant exclaimed with a shudder as he beheld the armed and sneering cadaver standing in its case, one mummified foot slightly advanced, as though the thing were about to step into the room in search of fresh victims.

“Never mind th’ bawlin’,” Costello ordered; “answer me question. Wuz this th’ mummy Professor Butterbaugh wuz unwrappin, when — when it happened to him?”

“I don’t know, sir,” the servant quavered. “I never saw the thing before, an’, s’welp me Gawd, I never want to see it again. But I think it must be the one Dr. Butterbaugh had in mind, for there are five mummies there now, and this mornin’, when I came in to open the blinds, there were only four standin’ against the walls and one was layin’ on the floor over by the door.”

“Humph, guess this is th’ one, then,” Costello replied. “Go outside there an’ git th’ other servants. Tell ’em I want to question ’em, an’ *don’t tell what you’ve seen here*.”

De Grandin walked quickly to the grinning mummy and examined the pointed instrument in its hand minutely. “*Très bien*,” he murmured to himself, giving the relic room a final appraising glance.

“Aren’t you going to look into those other mummy cases?” I asked as he turned to leave.

“Not I,” he denied. “Let Sergeant Costello busy himself with them. Me, I have other matters of more importance to attend to. Come, let us examine the servants.”

The cook, a large and very frightened Negress, a diminutive and likewise badly frightened colored boy who tended the garden and acted as chauffeur, two white maids, both safely past the heyday of youth, and the butler composed the domestic staff of The Beeches. Costello marshaled them in line and began a series of searching questions, but de Grandin, after a single look at the crowd, approached the sergeant and excused himself, saying we would talk the matter over the following morning.

“Thank you, sor,” Costello acknowledged: “I take it kindly of ye to see that I got th’ first look-in on this case before anny of th’ newspaper boys had a chanst to spoil it. I’ll be comin’ over to your house tomorrow an’ we’ll go over all th’ evidence together, so we will.”

“*Très excellent*,” de Grandin agreed. “Good night, Sergeant. I am not sure, but I think we shall soon have these murderers beneath the lock and key of your so efficiently strong jail.”

“Murderers?” Costello echoed. “Ye think there wuz more ’n one of ’em, then, sor?”

“*Parbleu*, yes; I know it,” de Grandin responded. “Good night, *mon vieux*.”

“Well, Dr. de Grandin,” Sergeant Costello announced as he entered my office the following afternoon, “we’ve got about as far as we can with th’ case.”

“Ah,” de Grandin smiled pleasantly as he pushed a box of cigars across the table, “and what have you discovered, *cher Sergeant?*”

“Well, sor,” the Irishman grinned deprecatingly, “I can’t rightly say we’ve found out much of annythin’, precisely. F’r instance, we’ve found that somebody forged Professor Butterbaugh’s signature to th’ letter to th’ Elgrace Monument Works. We put it under a lens at headquarters today, an’ you can see where th’ name’s been traced as plain as daylight.”

“Yes,” de Grandin encouraged. “And have you any theory as to who forged that letter, or who killed the professor?”

“No, sor, we haven’t,” the detective confessed. “Between you an’ me, sor, that Miss Alice may know more about th’ business than she lets on. I wouldn’t say she wuz exactly glad to see me when I come last night, an’, an’ — well, she hasn’t been anny too helpful. This mornin’, when I wuz puttin’ th’ servants through their paces agin, to see if there wuz anny discrepancies between th’ stories they told last night an’ what they might be sayin’ this time, she ups an’ says, says she, ‘Officer,’ she says, ‘you’ve been over all that before,’ she says, ‘an’ I’ll not have my servants hu-milly-ated,’ she says, ‘by havin’ you ask ’em every few hours which one of ’em killed me uncle.’

“So I ups an’ says, ‘All right, Miss. I don’t suppose *you* have anny suspicions concernin’ who killed him?’ An’ she says, ‘Certainly *not!*’ just like that. An’ that wuz that, sor.

“Now, don’t you be gittin’ me wrong, Dr. de Grandin an’ Dr. Trowbridge. Miss Butterbaugh is a high-toned lady, an’ all that, an’ I’m not makin’ anny wise cracks about her bein’ guilty, or even havin’ guilty knowledge: but —”

The sharp staccato of my office ’phone cut his statement in half. “Hello?” I called tentatively, as I lifted the receiver.

“Sergeant Costello; I want to speak to Sergeant Costello,” an excited voice demanded. “This is Schultz speaking.”

“All right,” I replied, passing the instrument to the sergeant.

“Hello?” Costello growled, “Yes, Schultz, this is Costello, what’s — *what?* When? Oh, it did, did it? Yes, you bet your sweet life I’ll be right over, an’ you’d best git busy and cook up a sweet young alibi by th’ time I git there, too, young felly me lad!

“Gentlemen,” he turned a blank face to us, “that wuz Schultz, th’ uniformed man I’d left on duty at Th’ Beeches. He tells me that mummy — th’ one with th’ little pickax in its hand — has disappeared from th’ house, right before his eyes.”

“*Tous les démons!*” de Grandin cried, springing from his chair. “I expected this. Come, my friends; let us hasten, let us speed, let us fly! *Parbleu*, but the trail may not yet have grown cold!”

“I was making my rounds, as you told me, sir,” Patrolman Schultz explained to Sergeant Costello. “I’d been through the house and looked in on that queer-lookin’ mummy in the little room, and seen everything was in order, then I went out to the garage. Julius, the chauffeur, was telling me that he was going to quit his job as soon as the police investigation was done, ’cause he wouldn’t dare live here after what’s happened, and I was wondering if he was suffering from a guilty conscience, or what, so I stopped to talk to him and see what he’d say. I couldn’t a’ been outside more than fifteen minutes, all told, and I came right back in the house; but that mummy was clean gone when I got back.”

“Oh, it wuz, wuz it?” Costello answered sarcastically. “I don’t suppose you heard it hollerin’ for help while it wuz bein’ kidnaped, or annythin’ like that while you wuz out Sherlock Holmesin’ th’ chauffeur, did you? O’ course not! You wuz too busy, playin’ Ol’ King Brady to pay attention to your regular duties. Well, now, young felly, let me tell you somethin’. We’ll find that missin’ mummy, an’ we’ll find him toot sweet, as Dr. de Grandin would say, or badge number six hundred an’ eighty-seven will be turned in at headquarters tonight, d’ye git me?”

He turned on his heel and walked toward the house, leaving the crestfallen young patrolman staring helplessly after him.

We were about to follow him when the rattle of a Ford delivery wagon on the gravel driveway drew our attention. A young man in white apron and jacket jumped from the machine and approached the service porch, a basket of groceries on his arm.

“Sorry to keep your order waitin’,” he told the cook as he handed her the hamper and a duplicate sales slip for her signature, “but I liked to got kilt comin’ up th’ road about twenty minutes ago. I was drivin’ out th’ pike slow an’ easy when a big touring car shot outa th’ lane an’ crowded me into the ditch. If I hadn’t had my foot on th’ gas an’ been able to skedaddle outa th’ way before they ran me down I’d most likely a’ been killed, an’ maybe th’ cake-eater an’ Sheba in th’ other car, as well.”

“Where was it you had this so close escape?” de Grandin asked, approaching the youth with an ingratiating smile.

“Down th’ road a piece,” the other replied, nothing loth to dilate on his adventure. “You know, there’s a lane that skirts th’ edge of Professor Butterbaugh’s place an’ runs out to th’ pike near Twin Pines, There’s a tall hedge growin’ on

each side of th' lane where it comes out on th' pike, an' these folks musta been throwin' a neckin' party or sumpin up there, for they was runnin' in low — kind o' sneakin' along — not makin' a bit o' noise till they was within a few feet of th' main road, then they stepped on her for fair, an' come out into th' highway runnin' like a scairt dawg."

"Indeed?" de Grandin raised sympathetic eyebrows. "And did you notice the people in this car? They should be arrested for such actions."

"I'll say I noticed 'em," the grocery boy answered with an emphatic nod. "The sheik who was drivin' was one o' them lounge-lizards with patent leather hair, an' th' Jane was little an' dark, with big eyes an' a sort o' sneery look. She was holdin' sumpin in her lap; looked like it might o' been another girl's head, or sumpin. Anyways, it was all covered up with cloth. An' they didn't even excuse themselves for crowdin' me into the ditch — just went on down th' road toward Morristown like greased lightnin'."

De Grandin's little mustache was twitching with eagerness, like the whiskers of a tom-cat before a rat-hole, but his voice was casual as he asked "And did you notice the number of this car which so nearly wrecked you, *mon petit*?"

"Whassat?" the other replied suspiciously.

"Did you make note of their license plate?"

"You betcha," the lad produced a brown-paper-backed note-book, obviously intended for emergency orders from his patrons, and thumbed through its dog-eared leaves. "Yep, here it is — Y 453-677-5344. New Jersey plate."

"Ah, my excellent one, my incomparable little cabbage!" de Grandin restrained himself from kissing the white-aproned youth with the utmost difficulty. "My Napoleon among *épiciers* — behold, I shall make restitution for the fright these miscreants have given you!" From his trousers pocket he produced a billfold and extracted a five-dollar note, which he pressed into the delivery boy's hand. "Take it, my wise one," he urged, quite unnecessarily — "Take it and buy a plaything for one of your numerous sweethearts. *Pardieu*, such a well-favored youth must play the devil with the maidens' hearts, *n'est-ce-pas*?" He thrust a playful finger into the astonished youngster's ribs. "Sure," the other responded, pocketing the bill and backing away rather hastily. "Sure, I gotta jane; d'ye think I'm a dead one?"

"*Nom d'un coq*, quite otherwise; you do possess the eye of Argus and the sagacity of Solon, *mon brave*," de Grandin assured him, then, to me:

"Come, Trowbridge, my friend, let us fly with all celerity to the lane of which this so charming urchin has told us. Let us discover what we can see!"

We ran across the wide lawn to the tall, rank-growing privet hedge which marked the margin of the Butterbaugh

place, slipped through the shrubbery, and began walking slowly, down the unpaved roadway.

"*Nom de Dieu*, we have it!" the Frenchman exclaimed, pointing dramatically to the soft sand at our feet. "Behold, Friend Trowbridge, where a car, even as described by the youthful Solomon, has been driven up this path and turned about at this point. Also, observe how two pairs of feet, one shod in wide-soled shoes, the other in slippers with the French heels, have walked from that car to the hedge, and — here, do you not see it? — back again, *and with wider steps and deeper impressions in the earth*. *Parbleu*, my friend, our noses are to the earth. Anon we shall bring the quarry into view!"

Slipping through the hedge, he ran at top speed to the house, entered one of the open French windows and called excitedly for Costello.

"Quick, *mon vieux*," he urged when the sergeant came in answer to his repeated hails, "we must delay the expedition. I would that you broadcast by telephone an alarm to all towns and villages in the direction of Morristown to have a touring car bearing the New Jersey license Y 453-677-5344 stopped at all costs. It must be delayed, it must be held, it must be impeded until I arrive!"

Costello regarded him in open-mouthed wonder, but proceeded to telephone headquarters to post a general lookout for the wanted car.

"An' now, Dr. de Grandin, sor," he whispered, "if you'd be good enough to lend me a bit of a hand in questionin' these here servants, I believe we could git somethin' outa them. They're beginnin' to weaken."

"Ah, bah," de Grandin replied. "Waste not your breath on these innocent ones, my friend. We shall be within reaching distance of these criminals when that car has been apprehended. In truth, they did fit the description to a perfection."

"Description?" echoed the sergeant. "What description? Has someone been spillin' th' beans to you, sor?"

"Ha, yes, someone has talked to me, in silence," de Grandin replied. "There were at least two people in the library with Professor Butterbaugh when he was killed, and one of them, at least, had straight hair, smoothed down with some sort of unguent — hair, moreover, which had been cut about two weeks ago. This person must have been somewhat shorter than the professor, and must have stood immediately before him when he was struck down from behind —"

Sergeant Costello looked at him a moment in speechless wonder, then an ingratiating grin spread over his face. He rose, facing de Grandin with upraised forefinger, like an adult telling a fable to a dubious youngster. "An' th' wolf said to Little Red Riding Hood, 'Where are ye goin', me

prett-ty child,” he interrupted. “I’ve seen ye do a lot o’ things which I’d a’ thought wuz magic if I hadn’t seen ’em with me own two eyes, Dr. de Grandin,” he confessed, “but when ye go into a trance like that an’ begin fortune-tellin’ about how many people wuz present when th’ professor was kilt, an’ how long it had been since one of ’em had his hair cut, I’m havin’ to remind ye that it’s been many a year since I believed in fairy-tales, sor.”

“Fairy-tales, do you say?” de Grandin returned good-naturedly. “*Parbleu*, my friend, do not you know that the most improbable of the tales of the fairies is sober logic itself beside the seemingly impossible miracles which science performs each day? *Nom d’un porc*, a hundred years ago men were hanged as wizards for knowing not one-tenth as much as Jules de Grandin has forgotten these twenty years!

“Amuse yourself, *cher Sergent*. Question the servants to your heart’s content; but be ready to accompany me the minute that missing car is reported caught, I do entreat you.”

“It’s th’ Templeton police department speakin’, Dr. de Grandin,” Costello announced some three-quarters of an hour later as he looked up from the telephone. “Will ye be talkin’ to ’em, sor? Sure, I haven’t th’ ghost of an idea what it is you’re wantin’ with th’ young lad and lady that wuz ridin’ in th’ car ye wanted held up.”

“*Allo, allo!*” de Grandin barked into the telephone as he snatched the receiver from the sergeant’s hand. “This is Jules de Grandin speaking, *Monsieur le Chef*. You have the occupants of that car in custody? *Bien*, you do delight me! Charge? *Parbleu*, I had forgotten that you require a specific charge on which to hold persons in custody in this country. Tell me, *Monsieur*, you have searched that car, no?” A pause, during which he drummed nervously, on the telephone table with the tips of his slender white fingers, then:

“Ah, so? *Très bien*, I and Sergeant Costello, of the Harrisonville police, come on the wings of the wind to relieve you of your prisoners. Responsibility? But of course. Hold them, my friend. Place them under the double lock, with gendarmes at door and window, and I shall indubitably indemnify you against all responsibility. Only, I beseech you, hold them in safety until we arrive.”

He turned to us, his small blue eyes sparkling with excitement. “Come, my friends, come away; let us make haste to that commandant of police at Templeton. He has there the birds for our cage!”

We jumped into my waiting car and turned toward Templeton, Costello sitting in the tonneau, a black cigar at a rakish angle in his mouth, an expression of doubt on his face; de Grandin beside me, drumming on the leather

upholstery of the seat and humming excitedly to himself.

“What’s it all about, de Grandin?” I asked as, responding to his urging, I pressed my foot on the accelerator and drove the machine several miles beyond the legal speed.

“Mean? Mean?” he answered, turning a twitching face and dancing eyes on me. “Possess yourself in patience, my friend. Restrain your curiosity for only a few little minutes. Curb your inquisitiveness only so long as it takes this abominably slow *moteur* to convey us to that police chief at Templeton. Then — *parbleu!* — you shall know. Yes, *par la barbe du prophète*, you and the good Costello, too, shall know all — all!” He threw back his head and burst into a snatch of marching song:

“Elle rit, C’est tout l’ mal qu’elle sait faire,
Madelon, Madelon, Madelon!”

“We’ve got ’em locked in there,” the Templeton police chief told us when I brought my panting motor to a halt before the little town’s near graystone municipal building. “Far’s I can see, there’s no charge you can hold ’em on, legally, and there’s apt to be some trouble over this business.

“Sure, we found a mummy in the car” — in response to de Grandin’s eager question — “but I don’t know any law against transporting a mummy through the streets. Go in and talk to ’em, if you want to, but make it snappy, and remember; if there’s any comeback about a false arrest or anything like that, it’s strictly your funeral.”

“*Parbleu, Monsieur le Chef;*” de Grandin replied with a smile, “it is like to be a double funeral, with the State of New Jersey officiating, unless Jules de Grandin is more mistaken than he thinks he is!”

Two people, a young man of twenty-five or twenty-six and a young woman of about the same age, sat on the polished oak benches of the municipal council room which the Templeton police chief had turned into an improvised dungeon for their detention. The man was dressed with that precise attention to detail which characterizes the better-class foreigner, while the woman’s modish traveling costume was more reminiscent of the Rue de la Paix than of the dressmakers of America. Both were dark-skinned with the clear olive complexion of the South, black-eyed, and patrician of feature. And despite their air of hauteur, they were plainly ill at ease.

“This is an outrage!” the man burst forth in a perfectly accentless voice which proclaimed more plainly than faulty speech that the words he used were not of his mother tongue. “This is an outrage, sir. What right have you to hold us here against our will?”

De Grandin fixed him with a level stare, rigid and

uncompromising as a pointed bayonet. "And the murder of a respected citizen of this country, *Monsieur*," he asked, "is that, perhaps, not also an outrage?"

"What do you mean —?" the man began, but the Frenchman cut him off curtly.

"You and your companion did enter the house of Professor Francis Butterbaugh last night, or more definitely, early this morning," he replied, "and one of you did engage him in conversation while the other took the scepter of Isis from the wrappings of the mummy and struck him with it, — from behind. Do not lie to me, my Egyptian friend; your tongue may be false — *cordieu*, are you not a nation of liars? — but the hairs of your head tell the truth. *Parbleu*, you did not think that your victim would throw out his arm at the moment you murdered him and seize evidence which would put the rope of justice about your necks. You did not apprehend that I, Jules de Grandin, would be at hand to deliver you to the public executioner, *hein*?"

The prisoners stared at him in astonished silence. Then: "You have no proof that we were near Butterbaugh's house last night," the man answered, moving a step toward a sheeted object which lay on one of the council benches.

De Grandin smiled unpleasantly. "No proof, do you say?" he returned. "*Pardieu*, I have all the proof needed to put you both to a shameful death. I have — Trowbridge, Costello, stop him!"

He flung himself at the prisoner, who had rounded the end of the bench and reached suddenly toward the thing under the sheet, drawn forth a tiny, wriggling object, and pressed it quickly to his wrist.

"Too late," the man observed, holding out his hand to the woman beside him and sinking to the bench beside the sheeted object. "Dr. Jules de Grandin is too late!"

The young woman hesitated the fraction of a second as her fingers met those of her companion, then, with widening eyes, thrust her hand into the low-cut bosom of her dress, drew herself up very straight, and, as a slight shiver ran through her frame, dropped to the bench beside the man.

"*Dieu et le diable!*" de Grandin swore furiously. "You have cheated me! I — back, Friend Trowbridge, back, *Sergent*; there is death on the floor!"

He cannoned into me, sending me stumbling toward the row of council seats, poised himself on tiptoe, and leaped lithely into the air, coming down with both feet close together, grinding his heels savagely on the floor. Beneath the edge of his boot sole I made out the sharp-pointed, thrashing end of some small, cylindrical object.

"Five thousand years of life, in death, and now eternal death beneath the feet of Jules de Grandin." he announced, stepping back and revealing a short, black thing, scarcely thicker through its crushed body than an angle worm, and no

longer than a man's hand.

"What is it, sor?" Costello queried, looking at the still-writhing thing disclosed by the Frenchman's lifted foot.

"I blame you not for failing to recognize him, *cher Sergent*," the other replied; "the good St. Patrick did drive him and all his family from your native land some fifteen hundred years ago."

To me he said: "Friend Trowbridge, before you lies what remains of such a snake as did kill Cleopatra, no less. To discourage robbers from the graves of their great ones, I have heard, the Egyptians did sometimes secrete the comatose bodies of serpents among the wrappings of their mummies. I have often heard such tales, but never before have I seen evidence of their truth. Like the toad, and the frog, who are found within fossil rocks, the snake has the ability to live indefinitely in suspended animation. When these miscreants did expose this viper to the air he was revived, and I make no doubt they allowed him to live against just such a contingency as this.

"Do you desire more proof? Is not their double suicide a confession sufficient of guilt?" He turned questioning eyes from Costello to me, then glared at the prisoners shivering on the bench beside the sheeted object.

"What's this?" Costello demanded, striding to the seat where the man and woman sat and snatching the sheet from the form beside them.

"Howly St. Judas, 'tis th' grinnin' mummy itself!" he exclaimed as he bared the sardonically smiling features of the thing we had seen in Professor Butterbaugh's relic room the night of his murder.

"But of course," de Grandin replied, "what else! Did I not surmise an much when that young grocery man told us of the fleeing couple in the motor car? And did I not have you send out the alarm for the detention of that same car? And did I not particularly question the police chief of this city concerning the presence of a mummy in the motor when he did inform me that he had apprehended our fugitives? Most assuredly. Me, I am Jules de Grandin. I do not make mistakes."

He directed a quizzical gaze at the prisoners. "Your time grows short," he stated. "Will you confess now, or must I assure you that I shall cut your hearts from out your dead bodies and feed them to carrion crows? Remember, I am a medical man, and my request that I be allowed to perform an autopsy on you will unquestionably be honored. You will confess; or —" he waved an eloquent hand, the gesture expressing unpleasant possibilities,

The man twisted his thin lips in a mirthless grin. "You may as well know," he replied, "but we must be assured our ashes will be taken to Egypt for burial before I tell you anything."

The Frenchman raised his hand. "You have my assurance of that if you tell all, and my equal assurance that you shall be dissected as subjects of anatomical study if you do not," he promised. "Come, begin. Time presses and there is much to tell. Make haste."

"It does not matter who we are, you can find our names and residences from our papers," the prisoner began. "As to what we are, you have perhaps heard of the movement to revive the secret worship of the old gods of Egypt among those who trace their ancestry to the ancient rulers of the earth?"

De Grandin nodded shortly.

"We are members of that movement," the man continued, "We Copts possess the blood of Ramses, mighty ruler of the world of Tut-ankh-amen and Ra-nefer; our race was old and glorious when Babylon was a swamp and you Franks were only naked savages. Pagan Greek and pagan Roman, Christian Frank and Moslem Arab — all have swarmed in upon us, forcing their religions down our throats at the sword's point, but our hearts have remained constant to the gods we worshiped in the days of our greatness. For centuries a faithful few have done honor to Osiris and Isis, to Horus and Nut and Anubis and mighty, ram-headed Ra, father of gods and fashioner of men: but only in recent years, with the weakening of the Moslems' hated power, have we dared extend our organization. Today we have a complete hierarchy. I am a vowed servant of Osiris, my sister here is a dedicated priestess of Isis.

"That the barbarians of Europe and America should delve among the tombs of our illustrious dead and drag their sacred relics forth for fools to gape at has long been intolerable to us — as the violation of the tombs of Napoleon or Washington would be to French or Americans — but for years we have been forced to suffer these insults in silence. Before this robber, Butterbaugh, desecrated the tomb of Ankh-ma-amen" — he motioned toward the uncovered, grinning mummy on the bench beside him — "our priesthood had passed sentence of death on all who despoiled our burying places in future. The Englishman, Carnarvon, died by our orders; other tomb-robbers met their just deserts at our hands. Now you know why Butterbaugh was executed.

"We gave the thieving savage fair warning of our intent before he took the stolen body out of Egypt, but the English police — may Set burn them! — prevented our carrying out our sentence there, so we followed him to America. We had obtained a specimen of his signature in Cairo; it was easy to forge his name to the order for his tombstone.

"Last night my sister and I waited outside his house until his servants had gone to bed. We watched the thief gloating

over the body of our sacred dead, saw him unwind the sacerdotal wrappings from it, and while he was still at his ghoulish work we entered an open window and read him the death sentence pronounced on him by the council of our priests. The grave-robber ordered us from his house — threatened us with arrest and would have assaulted me, but my sister, who stood behind him, struck him dead with a single blow of the holy scepter of Isis which he had taken from the ceremonies of the body outraged by his profane hands.

"We restored the body of Ankh-ma-amen to its case and were about to take it to our car, that we might carry it back to its tomb in Egypt, when we heard someone moving about up-stairs and had to make our escape. We put the scepter of Isis in the hand of our ancestor, for it was to avenge his desecrated tomb that we put Butterbaugh to death. A smear of the robber's blood was on my sister's hand, and she wiped it off on Ankh-ma-amen's lips. It was poetic justice; our outraged countryman drank the blood of his ravisher!

"Today we returned and took our dead from the polluting atmosphere of Butterbaugh's house — while your stupid police looked on and saw nothing.

"How you discovered us we do not know, but may the lightnings of Osiris blast you; may Apepi, the serpent, crush your bones and the pestilence of Typhon wither your flesh! May —"

A convulsive shudder ran through him, he half rose from the bench, then slid forward limply, his hands clutching futilely at the withered hands of the mummy which grinned sardonically into his face.

I glanced hastily toward the girl, who had sat silent during her brother's narrative. Her jaw had dropped, her head sagged forward on her breast, and her eyes stared straight before her with the inane, fixed stare of the newly dead.

De Grandin studied the three bodies before us a long moment, then turned to Costello. "You will make what report is necessary, my friend?" he asked.

"Sure, I will, sor," the detective assented, "an' I got to hand it to ye for cleanin' up th' mystery so neat, too; but, beggin' your pardon, how d'ye intend makin' good on your promise to ship these here dead corpses back home?"

De Grandin smiled quickly. "Did you not hear him demand my promise to ship his *ashes* to Egypt?" he asked. "When the official formalities are concluded, we shall have them cremated."

"Excuse me for botherin' you, Dr. Jules de Grandin," Costello apologized as we concluded dinner at my house that evening, "but I ain't eddycated like you an' Dr. Trowbridge here, an' there's a lot o' things that's plain as ABC to you gentlemen that don't seem to mean nothin' at

all to me. Would you mind tellin' me how you figured this here case out so easy, an'" — his florid face went a shade redder — "an' excuse me for tryin' to git funny with you this afternoon when you wuz tellin' th' kind o' hair th' gink we must find had?"

"Yes, de Grandin," I urged, "tell us; I'm as much in the dark as Servant Costello."

"Glory be," the Irishman exclaimed fervently, "then I'm not the only dumb-bell in th' party!"

De Grandin turned his quick, elfish smile on each of us in turn, then knocked the ashes from his cigar into his coffee cup.

"All men have two eyes — unless they have one," he began, "and all see the same things; but not all do know what it is that they see.

"When we did go to that Professor Butterbaugh's house after he had been murdered, I did first observe the size, appearance and location of the wound whereof he died; next I did look very carefully about to see what autograph his murderers had left. Believe me, my friends, all criminals leave their visiting cards, if only the police can read them.

"*Très bien*, I did find that in the professor's right hand were clutched four or five short, black hairs — straight, glossy hairs, with traces of pomade still upon them.

"Now, at the *Faculté de Médecine Légal*, to which I have the honor to belong, we have spent much time in the study of such things. We know, for example, that in case of sudden death, especially where there has been injury done the nervous system, the body undergoes an instantaneous rigidity, making the dead hand grasp and firmly hold any object within its reach. Thus we have found soldiers, shot on the field of battle, firmly holding their rifles; suicides clutching the pistols with which they have ended their lives, or, occasionally, drowned bodies grasping grass, weeds or gravel. Also we have learned that fragments of clothing, hair or other foreign substances clutched in a dead man's hand — unless they be from his own attire or person — indicate the presence of some other person at the instant of death, and hence point to murder rather than suicide.

"Again, we have paid much attention to the evidence borne by the location of wounds. Friend Trowbridge," — he turned to me — "will you be so good as to take up that spoon, stand behind me, and make as though you would dash out my brains with it!"

Wonderingly, I picked up a spoon, placed myself behind him, and struck him quickly, though lightly, on the head.

"*Bon, très bon!*" he exclaimed. "Make careful note where your blow did fall, my friend. — Now, *Sergent*, will you do likewise?"

Costello obeyed, and I could not repress a start of surprise. The blow struck by Costello came into contact with

the Frenchman's sleek light hair less than an inch from where my spoon had struck.

"You see?" de Grandin grinned delightedly. "Almost always it is so. Wounds of the head from axes, hammers and the like are almost invariably found on the left parietal area if the assailant is in front, if he stands behind his victim the injury will usually be found on the right side of the occiput — where both of you unconsciously struck me.

"Very well. When I did examine Professor Butterbaugh's death wound I knew he was struck down from behind.

"Excellent, so far. But if he was killed from the back, how came those hairs grasped in his hand? He could not have reached behind to seize his murderer, the hairs would not have been so clutched had the murderer first confronted him, then rushed behind to strike the fatal blow, and that wound could not possibly have been given by one standing before him. *Voilà*, there were two persons, at least, present when the professor died.

"The weapon used we found in the hand of that mummy which did grin like the cats of Cheshire, and on his lips we found a smear of blood. That, coupled with the professor's experiences in Egypt, the so mysterious tombstone which he had not ordered, and which said, 'Beware the Wrath of the Gods,' and the fact that no robbery had been attempted — all convinced me it was a killing of revenge.

"*C'est beau!* I did examine those hairs under the microscope while my good Trowbridge slept that night. Their color and texture excluded the possibility of their belonging to the professor or to any of his servants, they could not have come from the mummy's head, for he was shaven-pated, and the condition of their ends — which was slightly rounded — showed they had been cut by a barber some two weeks hence.

"I say to me: 'Suppose some person have come from Egypt to kill this Professor Butterbaugh; suppose he have come on the sea some three or four weeks; suppose, again, he are a wealthy, fastidious man, what would be one of the first things he would do when he came to shore?'

"I answer: '*Parbleu*, he would undoubtedly have his hair cut!'

"'Correct,' I reply. 'And could he arrange to kill the professor and order a tombstone in two weeks?'

"'He could,' I respond.

"Very well. I have argued so far with myself and decided we must look for two people, one of them, at least, with brunette hair which have been cut some two weeks ago, both of them, probably, dark-skinned, because they are probably Egyptian, but not black, because the hair say he belong to a white man.

"Where shall we find these murderers in a nation of one hundred million people of many different complexions?

“I do not know; but I shall try,’ I promise me, and then — *cordieu!* — and then we meet that so charming lad from the grocery shop who tells us of the couple in the speeding car and of the young woman who holds some wrapped-up thing in her lap.

“The mummy is missing, these people speed, there are wheel tracks and footprints of a most suspicious kind in the lane by the professor’s house — Friend Trowbridge and I have seen them — *parbleu*, why are not these two runaways the persons we seek?

“We did seek them, my friends, and we did find them; and though that ancient snake did cheat your executioner, we did exact their lives in payment for that of Professor Butterbaugh.”

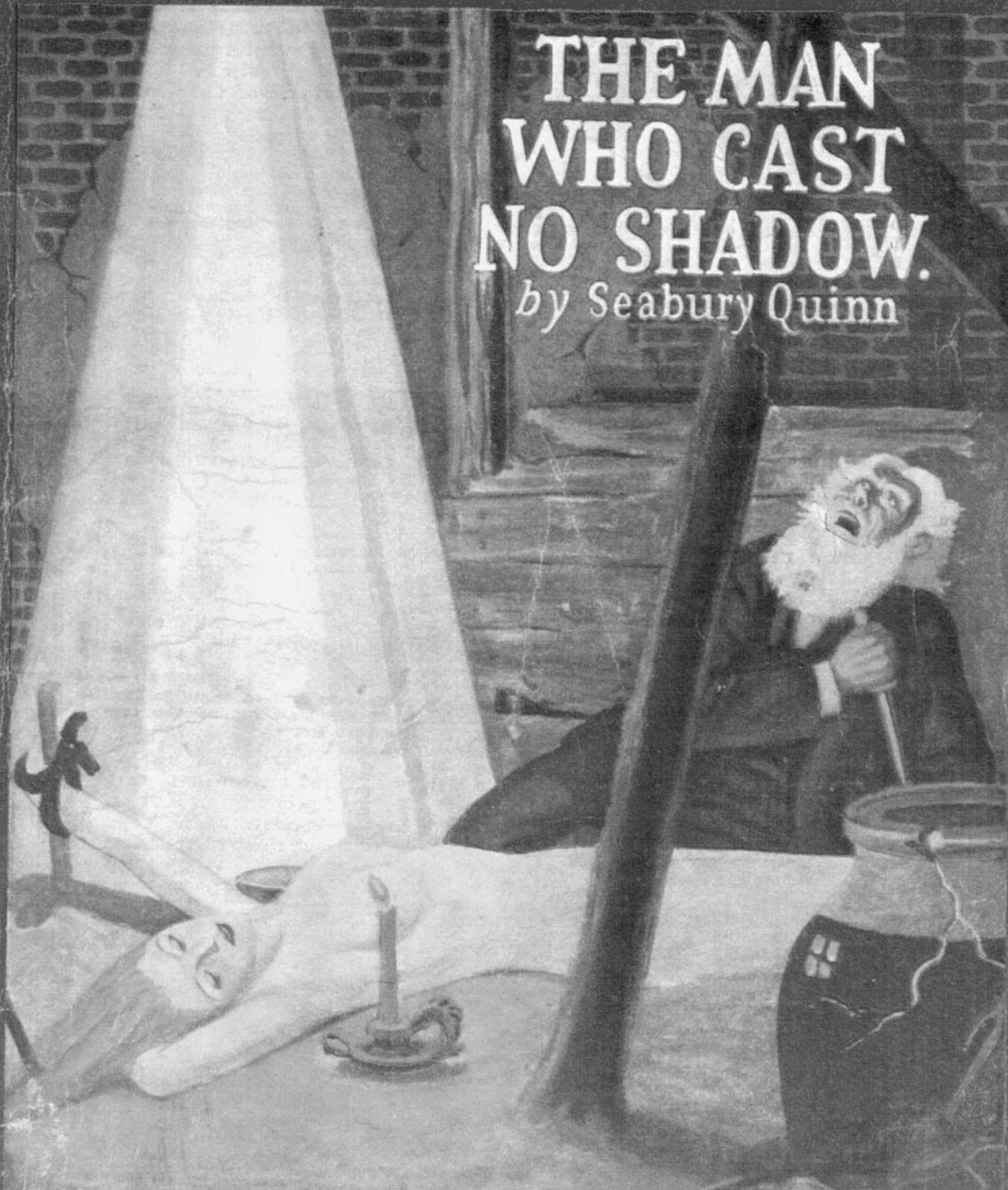
He smiled contentedly as he resumed his seat and poured a thimbleful of glowing *crème de menthe* over the crushed ice in his liqueur glass.

“Justice, my friends,” he pronounced, “she is hard to evade. When she are accompanied by Jules de Grandin — *grand Dieu*, she are invincible!”

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

**THE MAN
WHO CAST
NO SHADOW.**
by Seabury Quinn



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25¢

The Man Who Cast No Shadow

“BUT NO, MY FRIEND,” Jules de Grandin shook his sleek blond head decidedly and grinned across the breakfast table at me, “we will go to this so kind Madame Norman’s tea, of a certainty. Yes.”

“But hang it all,” I replied, giving Mrs. Norman’s note an irritable shove with my coffee spoon, “I don’t want to go to a confounded tea party! I’m too old and too sensible to dress up in a tall hat and a long coat and listen to the vaporings of a flock of silly flappers. I—”

“*Mordieu*, hear the savage!” de Grandin chuckled delightedly. “Always does he find excuses for not giving pleasure to others, and always does he frame those excuses to make him more important in his own eyes. Enough of this, Friend Trowbridge; let us go to the kind Madame Norman’s party. Always there is something of interest to be seen if one but knows where to look for it.”

“H’m, maybe,” I replied grudgingly, “but you’ve better sight than I think you have if you can find anything worth seeing at an afternoon reception.”

The reception was in full blast when we arrived at the Norman mansion in Tuscarora Avenue that afternoon in 192-. The air was heavy with the commingled odors of half a hundred different perfumes and the scent of hot poured jasmine tea, while the clatter of cup on saucer, laughter, and buzzing conversation filled the wide hall and dining room. In the long double parlors the rugs had been rolled back and young men in frock coats glided over the polished parquet in company with girls in provocatively short skirts to the belching melody of a saxophone and the drumming rhythm of a piano.

“*Pardieu*,” de Grandin murmured as he viewed the dancers a moment, “your American youth take their pleasures with seriousness, Friend Trowbridge. Behold their faces. Never a smile, never a laugh. They might be recruits on their first parade for all the joy they show — ah!” He broke off abruptly, gazing with startled, almost horrified, eyes after a couple whirling in the mazes of a foxtrot at the farther end of the room. “*Nom d’un fromage*,” he murmured softly to himself, “this matter will bear investigating, I think!”

“Eh, what’s that?” I asked, piloting him toward our hostess.

“Nothing; nothing, I do assure you,” he answered as we greeted Mrs. Norman and passed toward the dining room. But I noticed his round, blue eyes strayed more than once toward the parlors as we drank our tea and exchanged

amiable nothings with a pair of elderly ladies.

“Pardon,” de Grandin bowed stiffly from the hips to his conversational partner and turned toward the rear drawing room, “there is a gentleman here I desire to meet, if you do not mind — that tall, distinguished one, with the young girl in pink.”

“Oh, I guess you mean Count Czerny,” a young man laden with an ice in one hand and a glass of non-Volstead punch in the other paused on his way from the dining room. “He’s a rare bird, all right. I knew him back in ’13 when the Balkan Allies were polishing off the Turks. Queer-lookin’ duck, ain’t he? First-class fightin’ man, though. Why, I saw him lead a bayonet charge right into the Turkish lines one day, and when he’d shot his pistol empty he went at the enemy with his teeth! Yes, sir, he grabbed a Turk with both hands and bit his throat out, hanged if he didn’t.”

“Czerny,” de Grandin repeated musingly. “He is a Pole, perhaps?”

His informant laughed a bit shamefacedly. “Can’t say,” he confessed. “The Serbs weren’t asking embarrassing questions about volunteers’ nationalities those days, and it wasn’t considered healthful for any of us to do so, either. I got the impression he was a Hungarian refugee from Austrian vengeance; but that’s only hearsay. Come along, I’ll introduce you, if you wish.”

I saw de Grandin clasp hands with the foreigner and stand talking with him for a time, and, in spite of myself I could not forbear a smile at the contrast they made.

The Frenchman was a bare five feet four inches in height, slender as a girl, and, like a girl, possessed of almost laughably small hands and feet. His light hair and fair skin, coupled with his trimly waxed diminutive blond mustache and round, unwinking blue eyes, gave him a curiously misleading appearance of mildness. His companion was at least six feet tall, swarthy-skinned and black-haired, with bristling black mustaches and fierce, slate-gray eyes set beneath beetling black brows. His large nose was like the predatory beak of some bird of prey, and the tilt of his long, pointed jaw bore out the uncompromising ferocity of the rest of his visage. Across his left cheek, extending upward over the temple and into his hair, was a knife-, or saber-scar, a streak of white showing the trail of the steel in his scalp, and shining like silver inlaid in onyx against the blue-black of his smoothly pomaded locks.

What they said was, of course, beyond reach of my ears, but I saw de Grandin’s quick, impish smile flicker across his

keen face more than once, to be answered by a slow, languorous smile on the other's dark countenance.

At length the count bowed formally to my friend and whirled away with a wisp of a girl, while de Grandin returned to me. At the door he paused a moment, inclining his shoulders in a salute as a couple of debutantes brushed past him. Something — I know not what — drew my attention to the tall foreigner a moment, and a sudden chill rippled up my spine at what I saw. Above the georgette-clad shoulder of his dancing partner the count's slate-gray eyes were fixed on de Grandin's trim back, and in them I read all the cold, malevolent fury with which a caged tiger regards its keeper as he passes the bars.

"What on earth did you say to that fellow?" I asked as the little Frenchman rejoined me. "He looked as if he would like to murder you."

"Ha?" he gave a questioning, single-syllabled laugh. "Did he so? Obey the noble Washington's injunction, and avoid foreign entanglements, Friend Trowbridge; it is better so, I think."

"But look here," I began, nettled by his manner, "what—"

"*Non, non,*" he interrupted, "you must be advised by me, my friend. I think it would be better if we dismissed the incident from our minds. But stay — perhaps you had better meet that gentleman, after all. I will have the good Madame Norman introduce you."

More puzzled than ever, I followed him to our hostess and waited while he requested her to present me to the count.

In a lull in the dancing she complied with his request, and the foreigner acknowledged the introduction with a brief handclasp and an almost churlish nod, then turned his back on me, continuing an animated conversation with the large-eyed young woman in an abbreviated party frock.

"And did you shake his hand?" de Grandin asked as we descended the Norman's steps to my waiting car.

"Yes, of course," I replied.

"Ah? Tell me, my friend, did you notice anything — ah — peculiar, in his grip?"

"H'm." I wrinkled my brow a moment in concentrated thought. "Yes, I believe I did."

"So? What was it?"

"Hanged if I can say, exactly," I admitted, "but — well, it seemed — this sounds absurd, I know — but it seemed as though his hand had two backs — no palm at all — if that means anything to you."

"It means much, my friend; it means a very great deal," he answered with such a solemn nod that I burst into a fit of laughter. "Believe me, it means much more than you suspect."

It must have been some two weeks later that I chanced to

remark to de Grandin, "I saw your friend, Count Czerny, in New York yesterday."

"Indeed?" he answered with what seemed like more than necessary interest. "And how did he impress you at the time?"

"Oh, I just happened to pass him on Fifth Avenue," I replied. "I'd been up to see an acquaintance in Fifty-ninth street and was turning into the avenue when I saw him driving away from the Plaza. He was with some ladies."

"No doubt," de Grandin responded dryly. "Did you notice him particularly?"

"Can't say that I did, especially," I answered, "but it seems to me he looked older than the day we met him at Mrs. Norman's."

"Yes?" the Frenchman leaned forward eagerly. "Older, do you say? *Parbleu*, this is of interest; I suspected as much!"

"Why—" I began, but he turned away with an impatient shrug. "Pah!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Friend Trowbridge, I fear Jules de Grandin is a fool, he entertains all sorts of strange notions."

I had known the little Frenchman long enough to realize that he was as full of moods as a prima donna, but his erratic, unrelated remarks were getting on my nerves. "See here, de Grandin," I began testily, "what's all this nonsense—"

The sudden shrill clatter of my office telephone bell cut me short. "Dr. Trowbridge," an agitated voice asked over the wire, "can you come right over, please? This is Mrs. Norman speaking."

"Yes, of course," I answered, reaching for my medicine case; "what is it — who's ill?"

"It's — it's Guy Eckhart, he's been taken with a fainting fit, and we don't seem to be able to rouse him."

"Very well," I promised, "Dr. de Grandin and I will be right over."

"Come on, de Grandin," I called as I shoved my hat down over my ears and shrugged into my overcoat, "one of Mrs. Norman's house guests has been taken ill; I told her we were coming."

"*Mais oui,*" he agreed, hurrying into his outdoors clothes. "Is it a man or a woman, this sick one?"

"It's a man," I replied, "Guy Eckhart."

"A man," he echoed incredulously. "A man, do you say? No, no, my friend, that is not likely."

"Likely or not," I rejoined sharply, "Mrs. Norman says he's been seized with a fainting fit, and I give the lady credit for knowing what she's talking about."

"*Eh bien,*" he drummed nervously on the cushions of the automobile seat, "perhaps Jules de Grandin really is a fool. After all, it is not impossible."

“It certainly isn’t,” I agreed fervently to myself as I set the car in motion.

Young Eckhart had recovered consciousness when we arrived, but looked like a man just emerging from a lingering fever. Attempts to get a statement from him met with no response, for he replied slowly, almost incoherently, and seemed to have no idea concerning the cause of his illness.

Mrs. Norman was little more specific. “My son Ferdinand found him lying on the floor of his bath with the shower going and the window wide open, just before dinner,” she explained. “He was totally unconscious, and remained so till just a few minutes ago.”

“Ha, is it so?” de Grandin murmured half heedlessly, as he made a rapid inspection of the patient.

“Friend Trowbridge,” he called me to the window, “what do you make of these objective symptoms: a soft, frequent pulse, a fluttering heart, suffused eyes, a hot, dry skin and a flushed, hectic face?”

“Sounds like an arterial hemorrhage,” I answered promptly, “but there’s been no trace of blood on the boy’s floor, nor any evidence of a stain on his clothing. Sure you’ve checked the signs over?”

“Absolutely,” he replied with a vigorous double nod. Then to the young man: “Now, *mon enfant*, we shall inspect you, if you please.”

Quickly he examined the boy’s face, scalp, throat, wrists and calves, finding no evidence of even a pinprick, let alone a wound capable of causing syncope.

“*Mon Dieu*, this is strange,” he muttered; “of a surety, it has the queerness of the devil! Perhaps the bleeding is internal, but — ah, *regardez vous*, Friend Trowbridge!”

He had turned down the collar of the youngster’s pajama jacket, more in idle routine than in hope of discovering anything tangible, but the livid spot to which he pointed seemed the key to our mystery’s outer door. Against the smooth, white flesh of the young man’s left breast there showed a red, angry patch, such as might have resulted from a vacuum cup being held some time against the skin, and in the center of the discoloration was a double row of tiny punctures scarcely larger than needlepricks, arranged in horizontal divergent arcs, like a pair of parentheses laid sidewise.

“You see?” he asked simply, as though the queer, blood-infused spot explained everything.

“But he couldn’t have bled much through that,” I protested. “Why, the man seems almost drained dry, and these wounds wouldn’t have yielded more than a cubic centimeter of blood, at most.”

He nodded gravely. “Blood is not entirely colloidal, my

friend,” he responded. “It will penetrate the tissues to some extent, especially if sufficient force is applied.”

“But it would have required a powerful suction—” I replied, when his rejoinder cut me short:

“Ha, you have said it, my friend. Suction — that is the word!”

“But what could have sucked a man’s blood like this?” I was in a near-stupor of mystification.

“What, indeed?” he replied gravely. “That is for us to find out. Meantime, we are here as physicians. A quarter-grain morphine injection is — indicated here, I think. You will administer the dose; I have no license in America.”

When I returned from my round of afternoon calls next day I found de Grandin seated on my front steps in close conference with Indian John.

Indian John was a town character of doubtful lineage who performed odd jobs of snow shoveling, furnace tending and grass cutting, according to season, and interspersed his manual labors with brief incursions into the mercantile field when he peddled fresh vegetables from door to door. He also peddled neighborhood gossip and retailed local lore to all who would listen, his claim to being a hundred years old giving him the standing of an indisputable authority in all matters antedating living memory.

“*Pardieu*, but you have told me much, *mon vieux*,” de Grandin declared as I came up the porch steps. He handed the old rascal a handful of silver and rose to accompany me into the house.

“Friend Trowbridge,” he accused as we finished dinner that night, “you had not told me that this town grew up on the site of an early Swedish settlement.”

“Never knew you wanted to know,” I defended with a grin.

“You know the ancient Swedish church, perhaps,” he persisted.

“Yes, that’s old Christ Church,” I answered. “It’s down in the east end of town; don’t suppose it has a hundred communicants today. Our population has made some big changes, both in complexion and creed, since the days when the Dutch and Swedes fought for possession of New Jersey.”

“You will drive me to that church, right away, at once, immediately?” he demanded eagerly.

“I guess so,” I agreed. “What’s the matter now; Indian John been telling you a lot of fairy-tales?”

“Perhaps,” he replied, regarding me with one of his steady, unwinking stares. “Not all fairy-tales are pleasant, you know. Do you recall those of *Chaperon Rouge* — how do you say it, Red Riding Hood? — and Bluebeard?”

“Huh!” I scoffed; “they’re both as true as any of John’s

stories, I'll bet."

"Undoubtedly," he agreed with a quick nod. "The story of Bluebeard, for instance, is unfortunately a very true tale indeed. But come, let us hasten; I would see that church tonight, if I may."

Christ Church, the old Swedish place of worship, was a combined demonstration of how firmly adz-hewn pine and walnut can resist the ravages of time and how nearly three hundred years of weather can demolish any structure erected by man. Its rough-painted walls and short, firm-based spire shone ghostly and pallid in the early spring moonlight, and the cluster of broken and weather-worn tombstones which staggered up from its unkempt burying ground were like soiled white chicks seeking shelter from a soiled white hen.

Dismounting from a car at the wicket gate of the churchyard, we made our way over the level graves, I in a maze of wonderment, de Grandin with an eagerness almost childish. Occasionally he flashed the beam from his electric torch on some monument of an early settler, bent to decipher the worn inscription, then turned away with a sigh of disappointment.

I paused to light a cigar, but dropped my half-burned match in astonishment as my companion gave vent to a cry of excited pleasure. "*Triomphe!*" he exclaimed delightedly. "Come and behold. Friend Trowbridge. Thus far your lying friend, the Indian man, has told the truth. *Regardez!*"

He was standing beside an old, weather-gnawed tombstone, once marble, perhaps, but appearing more like brown sandstone under the ray of his flashlight. Across its upper end was deeply cut the one word:

SARAH

while below the name appeared a verse of half-obliterated doggerel:

Let nonne difturb her deathleffe fleepe
Abote ye tombe wilde garlick keepe
For if fhee wake much woe will boaft
Prayfe Faither, Sonne & Holie Goaft.

"Did you bring me out here to study the orthographical eccentricities of the early settlers?" I demanded in disgust.

"Ah bah!" he returned. "Let us consult the *ecclesiastique*. He, perhaps, will ask no fool's questions."

"No, you'll do that," I answered tartly as we knocked at the rectory door.

"Pardon, Monsieur," de Grandin apologized as the white-haired old minister appeared in answer to our summons, "we do not wish to disturb you thus, but there is a matter of great import on which we would consult you. I would that you tell

us what you can, if anything, concerning a certain grave in your churchyard. A grave marked 'Sarah' if you please."

"Why" — the elderly cleric was plainly taken aback — "I don't think there is anything I can tell you about it, sir. There is some mention in the early parish records, I believe, of a woman believed to have been a murderess being buried in that grave, but it seems the poor creature was more sinned against than sinning. Several children in the neighborhood died mysteriously — some epidemic the ignorant physicians failed to understand, no doubt — and Sarah, whatever the poor woman's surname may have been, was accused of killing them by witchcraft. At any rate, one of the bereft mothers took vengeance into her own hands, and strangled poor Sarah with a noose of well-rope. The witchcraft belief must have been quite prevalent, too, for there is some nonsense verse on the tombstone concerning her 'deathless sleep' and an allusion to her waking from it; also some mention of wild garlic being planted about her."

He laughed somewhat ruefully. "I wish they hadn't said that," he added, "for, do you know, there are garlic shoots growing about that grave to this very day. Old Christian, our sexton, declares that he can't get rid of it, no matter how much he grubs it up. It spreads to the surrounding lawn, too," he added sadly.

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin gasped. "This is of the importance, sir!"

The old man smiled gently at the little Frenchman's impetuosity.

"It's an odd thing," he commented, "there was another gentleman asking about that same tomb a few weeks ago; a — pardon the expression — a foreigner."

"So?" de Grandin's little waxed mustache twitched like the whiskers of a nervous tom-cat. "A foreigner, do you say? A tall, rawboned, fleshless living skeleton of a man with a scar on his face and a white streak in his hair?"

"I wouldn't be quite so severe in my description," the other answered with a smile. "He certainly was a thin gentleman, and I believe he had a scar on his face, too, though I can't be certain of that, he was so very wrinkled. No, his hair was entirely white, there was no white streak in it, sir. In fact, I should have said he was very advanced in age, judging from his hair and face and the manner in which he walked. He seemed very weak and feeble. It was really quite pitiable."

"*Sacré nom d'un fromage vert!*" de Grandin almost snarled. "Pitiable, do you say, Monsieur? *Pardieu*, it is damnable, nothing less!"

He bowed to the clergyman and turned to me. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, come away," he cried. "We must go to Madame Norman's at once, right away, immediately."

"What's behind all this mystery?" I demanded as we left

the parsonage door.

He elevated his slender shoulders in an eloquent shrug. "I only wish I knew," he replied. "Someone is working the devil's business, of that I am sure; but what the game is, or what the next move will be, only the good God can tell, my friend."

I turned the car through Tunlaw Street to effect a short-cut, and as we drove past an Italian green grocer's, de Grandin seized my arm. "Stop a moment, Friend Trowbridge," he asked, "I would make a purchase at this shop.

"We desire some fresh garlic," he informed the proprietor as we entered the little store, "a considerable amount, if you have it."

The Italian spread his hands in a deprecating gesture. "We have it not, *Signor*," he declared. "It was only yesterday morning that we sold our entire supply." His little black eyes snapped happily at the memory of an unexpected bargain.

"Eh, what is this?" de Grandin demanded. "Do you say you sold your supply? How is that?"

"I know not," the other replied. "Yesterday morning a rich gentleman came to my shop in an automobile, and called me from my store. He desired all the garlic I had in stock — at my own price, *Signor*, and at once. I was to deliver it to his address in Rupleysville the same day."

"Ah?" de Grandin's face assumed the expression of a cross-word fiend as he begins to see the solution of his puzzle. "And this liberal purchaser, what did he look like?"

The Italian showed his white, even teeth in a wide grin. "It was funny," he confessed. "He did not look like one of our people, nor like one who would eat much garlic. He was old, very old and thin, with a much-wrinkled face and white hair, he—"

"*Nom d'un chat!*" the Frenchman cried, then burst into a flood of torrential Italian.

The shopkeeper listened at first with suspicion, then incredulity, finally in abject terror. "No, no," he exclaimed. "No, *Signor*; *santissima Madonna*, you do make the joke!"

"Do I so?" de Grandin replied. "Wait and see, foolish one."

"*Santo Dio* forbid!" The other crossed himself piously, then bent his thumb across his palm, circling it with his second and third fingers and extending the fore and little fingers in the form of a pair of horns.

The Frenchman turned toward the waiting car with a grunt of inarticulate disgust.

"What now?" I asked as we got under way once more; "what did that man make the sign of the evil eye for, de Grandin?"

"Later, my friend; I will tell you later," he answered.

"You would but laugh if I told you what I suspect. He is of the Latin blood, and can appreciate my fears." Nor would he utter another word till we reached the Norman house.

"Dr. Trowbridge — Dr. de Grandin!" Mrs. Norman met us in the hall; "you must have heard my prayers; I've been phoning your office for the last hour, and they said you were out and couldn't be reached."

"What's up?" I asked.

"It's Mr. Eckhart again. He's been seized with another fainting fit. He seemed so well this afternoon, and I sent a big dinner up to him at 8 o'clock, but when the maid went in, she found him unconscious, and she declares she saw something in his room—"

"Ha?" de Grandin interrupted. "Where is she, this servant? I would speak with her."

"Wait a moment," Mrs. Norman answered; "I'll send for her."

The girl, an ungainly young Southern Negress, came into the front hall, sullen dissatisfaction written large upon her black face.

"Now, then," de Grandin bent his steady, unwinking gaze on her, "what is it you say about seeing someone in the young Monsieur Eckhart's room, *hein?*"

"Ah, did see sumpin', too," the girl replied stubbornly. "Ah don' care who says Ah didn't see nothin', Ah says Ah did. Ah 'd just toted a tray o' vittles up to Mistuh Eckhart's room, an' when Ah opened de do', dere wuz a woman — dere wuz a woman — yas, sar, a skinny, black-eyed white woman-a-bendin' ober 'um an' — an'—"

"And what, if you please?" de Grandin asked breathlessly.

"A-bitin' 'um!" the girl replied defiantly. "Ah don' car whut Mis' Norman says, she wuz a-bitin' 'um. Ah seen her. Ah knows whut she wuz. Ah done hyeah tell erbout dat ol' Sarah woman what come up out 'er grave wid a long rope erbout her neck and go 'round bitin' folks. Yas, sar; an' she wuz a-bitin' 'um, too. Ah seen her!"

"Nonsense," Mrs. Norman commented in an annoyed whisper over de Grandin's shoulder.

"*Grand Dieu*, is it so?" de Grandin exclaimed, and turning abruptly, leaped up the stairs toward the sick man's room, two steps at a time.

"See, see, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered fiercely when I joined him at the patient's bedside. "Behold, it is the mark!" Turning back Eckhart's pajama collar, he displayed two incised horizontal arcs on the young man's flesh. There was no room for dispute, they were undoubtedly the marks of human teeth, and from the fresh wounds the blood was flowing freely.

As quickly as possible we stanching the flow and applied restoratives to the patient, both of us working in silence, for

my brain was too much in a whirl to permit the formation of intelligent questions, while de Grandin remained dumb as an oyster.

“Now,” he ordered as we completed our ministrations, “we must get back to that cemetery, Friend Trowbridge, and once there, we must do the thing which must be done!”

“What the devil’s that?” I asked as we left the sickroom.

“*Non, non*, you shall see,” he promised as we entered my car and drove down the street.

“Quick, the crank-handle,” he demanded as we descended from the car at the cemetery gate, “it will make a serviceable hammer.” He was prying a hemlock paling from the graveyard fence as he spoke.

We crossed the unkempt cemetery lawn again and finally paused beside the tombstone of the unknown Sarah.

“Attend me, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin commanded, “hold the searchlight, if you please.” He pressed his pocket flash into my hand. “Now—” He knelt beside the grave, pointing the stick he had wrenched from the fence straight downward into the turf. With the crank of my motor he began hammering the wood into the earth.

Farther and farther the rough stake sank into the sod, de Grandin’s blows falling faster and faster as the wood drove home. Finally, when there was less than six inches of the wicket projecting from the grave’s top, he raised the iron high over his head and drove downward with all his might.

The short hair at the back of my neck suddenly started upward, and little thrills of horripilation chased each other up my spine as the wood sank suddenly, as though driven from clay into sand, and a low hopeless moan, like the wailing of a frozen wind through an ice-cave, wafted up to us from the depths of the grave.

“Good God, what’s that?” I asked, aghast.

For answer he leaned forward, seized the stake in both hands and drew suddenly up on it. At his second tug the wood came away. “See,” he ordered curtly, flashing the pocket lamp on the tip of the stave. For the distance of a foot or so from its pointed end the wood was stained a deep, dull red. It was wet with blood.

“And now forever,” he hissed between his teeth, driving the wood into the grave once more, and sinking it a full foot below the surface of the grass by thrusting the crank-handle into the earth. “Come, Friend Trowbridge, we have done a good work this night. I doubt not the young Eckhart will soon recover from his malady.”

His assumption was justified. Eckhart’s condition improved steadily. Within a week, save for a slight pallor, he was, to all appearances, as well as ever.

The pressure of the usual early crop of influenza and pneumonia kept me busily on my rounds, and I gradually

gave up hope of getting any information from de Grandin, for a shrug of the shoulders was all the answer he vouchsafed to my questions. I relegated Eckhart’s inexplicable hemorrhages and the bloodstained stake to the limbo of never-to-be-solved mysteries. But—

2

“Good mornin’, gentlemen,” Detective Sergeant Costello greeted as he followed Nora, my household factotum, into the breakfast room, “it’s sorry I am to be disturbin’ your meal, but there’s a little case puzzlin’ th’ department that I’d like to talk over with Dr. de Grandin, if you don’t mind.”

He looked expectantly at the little Frenchman as he finished speaking, his lips parted to launch open a detailed description of the case.

“*Parbleu*,” de Grandin laughed, “it is fortunate for me that I have completed my breakfast, *cher Sergent*, for a riddle of crime detection is to me like a red rag to a bullfrog — I must needs snap at it, whether I have been fed or no. Speak on, my friend, I beseech you; I am like Balaam’s ass, all ears.”

The big Irishman seated himself on the extreme edge of one of my Heppelwhite chairs and gazed deprecatingly at the derby he held firmly between his knees. “It’s like this,” he began. “’Tis one o’ them mysterious disappearance cases, gentlemen an’ whilst I’m thinkin’ th’ young lady knows exactly where she’s at an’ why she’s there, I hate to tell her folks about it.

“All th’ high-hat folks ain’t like you two gentlemen, askin’ your pardon, sors — they mostly seems to think that a harness bull’s unyform is sumpin’ like a livery — like a shofur’s or a footman’s or sumpin’, an’ that a plainclothes man is just a sort o’ inferior servant. They don’t give th’ police credit for no brains, y’see, an’ when one o’ their darters gits giddy an’ runs off th’ reservation, if we tells ’em th’ gurrl’s run away of her own free will an’ accord they say we’re a lot o’ lazy, good-fer-nothin’ bums who are tryin’ to dodge our laygitimate jooties by castin’ mud on th’ young ladies’ char-ac-ters, d’ye see? So, when this Miss Esther Norman disappears in broad daylight leastwise, in th’ twilight — o’ th’ day before her dance, we suspects right away that th’ gurrl’s gone her own ways into th’ best o’ intentions, y’see; but we dasn’t tell her folks as much, or they’ll be hollerin’ to th’ commissioner fer to git a bran’ new set o’ detectives down to headquarters, so they will.

“Now, mind ye, I’m not sayin’ th’ young lady mightn’t o’ been kidnaped, y’ understand, gentlemen, but I do be sayin’ ’tis most unlikely. I’ve been on th’ force, man an’ boy, in unyform and in plain clothes fer th’ last twenty-five years, an’ th’ number of laygitimate kidnapin’s o’ young women

over ten years of age I've seen can be counted on th' little finger o' me left hand, an' I ain't got none there at all, at all."

He held the member up for our inspection, revealing the fact that the little finger had been amputated close to the knuckle.

De Grandin, elbows on the table, pointed chin cupped in his hands, was puffing furiously at a vile-smelling French cigarette, alternately sucking down great drafts of its acrid smoke and expelling clouds of fumes in double jets from his narrow, aristocratic nostrils.

"What is it you say?" he demanded, removing the cigarette from his lips. "Is it the so lovely Mademoiselle Esther, daughter of that kind Madame Tuscarora Avenue Norman, who is missing?"

"Yes, sor," Costello answered, "'tis th' same young lady's flew the coop, accordin' to my way o' thinkin'."

"*Mordieu!*" The Frenchman gave the ends of his blond mustache a savage twist. "You intrigue me, my friend. Say on, how did it happen, and when?"

"'Twas about midnight last night th' alarm came into headquarters," the detective replied. "Accordin' to th' facts as we have 'em, th' young lady went downtown in th' Norman car to do some errands. We've checked her movements up, an' here they are."

He drew a black-leather memorandum book from his pocket and consulted it.

"At 2:45 or thereabouts, she left th' house, arrivin' at th' Ocean Trust Company at 2:55, five minutes before th' instytootion closed for th' day. She drew out three hundred an' thirty dollars an' sixty-five cents, an' left th' bank, goin' to Madame Gerard's, where she tried on a party dress for th' dance which was bein' given at her house that night.

"She left Madame Gerard's at 4:02, leavin' orders for th' dress to be delivered to her house immeejately, an' dismissed her sho-fur at th' corner o' Dean an' Tunlaw Streets, sayin' she was goin' to deliver some vegytables an' what-not to a pore family she an' some o' her friends was keepin' till their oldman gits let out o' jail — 'twas meself an' Clancey, me buddy, that put him there when we caught him red-handed in a job o' housebreakin', too.

"Well, to return to th' young lady, she stopped at Pete Bacigalupo's store in Tunlaw Street an' bought a basket o' fruit an' canned things, at 4:30, an' —" He clamped his long-suffering derby between his knees and spread his hands empty before us.

"Yes, 'and'—?" de Grandin prompted, dropping the glowing end of his cigarette into his coffee cup.

"An' that's all," responded the Irishman. "She just walked off, an' no one ain't seen her since, sor."

"But — *cordieu!* — such things do not occur, my friend,"

de Grandin protested. "Somewhere you have overlooked a factor in this puzzle. You say no one saw her later? Have you nothing whatever to add to the tale?"

"Well" — the detective grinned at him — "there are one or two little incidents, but they ain't of any importance in th' case, as far as I can see. Just as she left Pete's store an old gink tried to 'make' her, but she give him th' air, an' he went off an' didn't bother her no more.

"I'd a' liked to seen th' old boy, at that. Day before yesterday there was an old felly hangin' 'round by the silk mills, annoyin' th' gurrils as they come off from work. Clancey, me mate, saw 'im an' started to take 'im up, an' darned if th' old rummy wasn't strong as a bull. D'ye know, he broke clean away from Clancey an' darn near broke his arm, in th' bargain? Belike 'twas th' same man accosted Miss Norman outside Pete's store."

"Ah?" de Grandin's slender, white fingers began beating a devil's tattoo on the tablecloth. "And who was it saw this old man annoy the lady, *hein?*"

Costello grinned widely, "'Twas Pete Bacigalupo himself, sor," he answered. "Pete swore be recognized th' old geezer as havin' come to his store a month or so ago in an autymobile an bought up all his entire stock o' garlic. Huh! Th' fool said he wouldn't a gone after th' felly' for a hundred dollars — said he had th' pink-eye, or th' evil eye, or some such thing. That sure do burn me up!"

"*Dieu et le diable!*" de Grandin leaped up, oversetting his chair in his mad haste. "And we sit here like three *poissons d'avril* — like poor fish — while he works his devilish will on her! Quick, Sergeant! Quick, Friend Trowbridge! Your hats, your coats; the motor! Oh, make haste, my friends, fly, fly, I implore you; even now it may be too late!"

As though all the fiends of pandemonium were at his heels he raced from the breakfast room, up the stairs, three steps at a stride, and down the upper hall toward his bedroom. Nor did he cease his shouted demands for haste throughout his wild flight.

"Cuckoo?" The sergeant tapped his forehead significantly.

I shook my head as I hastened to the hall for my driving clothes. "No," I answered, shrugging into my topcoat, "he's got a reason for everything he does; but you and I can't always see it, Sergeant."

"You said a mouthful that time, doc," he agreed, pulling his hat down over his ears. "He's the darndest, craziest Frog I ever seen, but, at that, he's got more sense than nine men out o' ten."

"To Rupleysville, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin shouted as he leaped into the seat beside me. "Make haste, I do implore you. Oh, Jules de Grandin, your grandfather was an imbecile and all your ancestors were idiots, but you are the greatest zany in the family. Why, oh, why, do you

require a sunstroke before you can see the light, foolish one?"

I swung the machine down the pike at highest legal speed, but the little Frenchman kept urging greater haste. "*Sang de Dieu, sang de Saint Denis, sang du diable!*" he wailed despairingly. "Can you not make this abominable car go faster, Friend Trowbridge? Oh, ah, *hélas*, if we are too late! I shall hate myself, I shall loathe myself — *pardieu*, I shall become a Carmelite friar and eat fish and abstain from swearing!"

We took scarcely twenty minutes to cover the ten-mile stretch to the aggregation of tumbledown houses which was Rupleysville, but my companion was almost frothing at the mouth when I drew up before the local apology for a hotel.

"Tell me, Monsieur," de Grandin cried as he thrust the hostelry's door open with his foot and brandished his slender ebony cane before the astonished proprietor's eyes, "tell me of *un vieillard* — an old, old man with snow-white hair and an evil face, who has lately come to this so detestable place. I would know where to find him, right away, immediately, at once!"

"Say," the boniface demanded truculently, "where d'ye git that stuff? Who are you to be askin'—"

"That'll do" — Costello shouldered his way past de Grandin and displayed his badge — "you answer this gentleman's questions, an' answer 'em quick an' accurate, or I'll run you in, see?"

The innkeeper's defiant attitude melted before the detective's show of authority like frost before the sunrise. "Guess you must mean Mr. Zerny," he replied sullenly. "He come here about a month ago an' rented the Hazeltown house, down the road about a mile. Comes up to town for provisions every day or two, and stops in here sometimes for a—" He halted abruptly, his face suffused with a dull flush.

"Yeah?" Costello replied. "Go on an' say it; we all know what he stops here for. Now listen, buddy" — he stabbed the air two inches before the man's face with a blunt forefinger — "I don't know whether this here Zerny felly's got a tellyphone or not, but if he has, you just lay off tellin' 'im we're comin'; git me? If anyone's tipped him off when we git to his place I'm comin' back here and plaster more padlocks on this place o' yours than Sousa's got medals on his blouse. Savvy?"

"Come away, *Sergent*; come away, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin besought almost tearfully. "Bandy not words with the *cancre*; we have work to do!"

Down the road we raced in the direction indicated by the hotelkeeper, till the picket fence and broken shutters of the Hazeltown house showed among a rank copse of second-growth pines at the bend of the highway.

The shrewd wind of early spring was moaning and souging among the black boughs of the pine trees as we ran toward the house, and though it was bright with sunshine on the road, there was chill and shadow about us as we climbed the sagging steps of the old building's ruined piazza and paused breathlessly before the paintless front door.

"Shall I knock?" Costello asked dubiously, involuntarily sinking his voice to a whisper.

"But no," de Grandin answered in a low voice, "what we have to do here must be done quietly, my friends."

He leaned forward and tried the doorknob with a light, tentative touch. The door gave under his hand, swinging inward on protesting hinges, and we tiptoed into a dark, dust-carpeted hall. A shaft of sunlight, slanting downward from a chink in one of the window shutters, showed innumerable dust-motes flying lazily in the air, and laid a bright oval of light against the warped floor-boards.

"Huh, empty as a pork-butcher's in Jerusalem," Costello commented disgustedly, looking about the unfurnished rooms, but de Grandin seized him by the elbow with one hand while he pointed toward the floor with the ferrule of his slender ebony walking stick.

"Empty, perhaps," he conceded in a low, vibrant whisper, "but not recently, *mon ami*." Where the sunbeam splashed on the uneven floor there showed distinctly the mark of a booted foot, two marks — a trail of them leading toward the rear of the house.

"Right y'are," the detective agreed. "Someone's left his track here, an' no mistake."

"Ha!" de Grandin bent forward till it seemed the tip of his high-bridged nose would impinge on the tracks. "Gentlemen," he rose and pointed forward into the gloom with a dramatic flourish of his cane, "they are here! Let us go!"

Through the gloomy hall we followed the trail by the aid of Costello's flashlight, stepping carefully to avoid creaking boards as much as possible. At length the marks stopped abruptly in the center of what had formerly been the kitchen. A disturbance in the dust told where the walker had doubled on his tracks in a short circle, and a ringbolt in the floor gave notice that we stood above a trap-door of some sort.

"Careful, Friend Costello," de Grandin warned, "have ready your flashlight when I fling back the trap. Ready? *Un — deux — trois!*"

He bent, seized the rusty ringbolt and heaved the trap-door back so violently that it flew back with a thundering crash on the floor beyond.

The cavern had originally been a cellar for the storage of food, it seemed, and was brick-walled and earth-floored, without window or ventilation opening of any sort. A dank, musty odor assaulted our nostrils as we leaned forward, but

further impressions were blotted out by the sight directly beneath us.

White as a figurine of carven alabaster, the slender, bare body of a girl lay in sharp reverse silhouette against the darkness of the cavern floor, her ankles crossed and firmly lashed to a stake in the earth, one hand doubled behind her back in the position of a wrestler's hammerlock grip, and made firm to a peg in the floor, while the left arm was extended straight outward, its wrist pinioned to another stake. Her luxuriant fair hair had been knotted together at the ends, then staked to the ground, so that her head was drawn far back, exposing her rounded throat to its fullest extent, and on the earth beneath her left breast and beside her throat stood two porcelain bowls.

Crouched over her was the relic of a man, an old, old, hideously wrinkled witch-husband, with matted white hair and beard. In one hand he held a long, gleaming, double-edged dirk while with the other he caressed the girl's smooth throat with gloating strokes of his skeleton fingers.

"Howly Mither!" Costello's County Galway brogue broke through his American accent at the horrid sight below us.

"My God!" I exclaimed, all the breath in my lungs suddenly seeming to freeze in my throat.

"*Bonjour, Monsieur le Vampire!*" Jules de Grandin greeted nonchalantly, leaping to the earth beside the pinioned girl and waving his walking stick airily. "By the horns of the devil, but you have led us a merry chase, Baron Lajos Czuczron of Transylvania!"

The crouching creature emitted a bellow of fury and leaped toward de Grandin, brandishing his knife.

The Frenchman gave ground with a quick, catlike leap and grasped his slender cane in both hands near the top. Next instant he had ripped the lower part of the stick away, displaying a fine, three-edged blade set in the cane's handle, and swung his point toward the frothing-mouthed thing which mouthed and gibbered like a beast at bay. "A-ah?" he cried with a mocking, upward-lilting accent. "You did not expect this, eh, Friend Blood-drinker? I give you the party-of-surprise, *n'est-ce-pas?* The centuries have been long, *mon vieux*; but the reckoning has come at last. Say, now will you die by the steel, or by starvation?"

The aged monster fairly champed his gleaming teeth in fury. His eyes seemed larger, rounder, to gleam like the eyes of a dog in the firelight, as he launched himself toward the little Frenchman.

"*Sa-ha!*" the Frenchman sank backward on one foot then straightened suddenly forward, stiffening his sword-arm and plunging his point directly into the charging beastman's distended, red mouth. A scream of mingled rage and pain filled the cavern with deafening shrillness and the monster half turned, as though on an invisible pivot, clawed with

horrid impotence at the wire-fine blade of de Grandin's rapier, then sank slowly to the earth, his death cry stilled to a sickening gurgle as his throat filled with blood.

"*Fini!*" de Grandin commented laconically, drawing on his handkerchief and wiping his blade with meticulous care, then cutting the unconscious girl's bonds with his pocket-knife. "Drop down your overcoat, Friend Trowbridge," he added, "that we may cover the poor child's nudity until we can piece out a wardrobe for her.

"Now, then" — as he raised her to meet the hands Costello and I extended into the pit — "if we clothe her in the motor rug, your jacket, *Sergent*, Friend Trowbridge's topcoat and my shoes, she will be safe from the chill. *Parbleu*, I have seen women refugees from the Boche who could not boast so complete a toilette!"

With Esther Norman, hastily clothed in her patchwork assortment of garments, wedged in the front seat between de Grandin and me, we began our triumphant journey home.

"An' would ye mind tellin' me how ye knew where to look for th' young lady, Dr. de Grandin, sor?" Detective Sergeant Costello asked respectfully, leaning forward from the rear seat of the car.

"Wait, wait, my friend," de Grandin replied with a smile. "When our duties are all performed I shall tell you such a tale as shall make your two eyes to pop outward like a snail's. First, however, you must go with us to restore this *pauvre enfant* to her mother's arms; then to the headquarters to report the death of that *sale bête*. Friend Trowbridge will stay with the young lady for so long as he deems necessary, and I shall remain with him to help. Then, this evening — with your consent, Friend Trowbridge — you will dine with us, *Sergent*, and I shall tell you all, everything, in total. Death of my life, what a tale it is! *Parbleu*, but you shall call me a liar many times before it is finished!"

Jules de Grandin placed his demitasse on the tabouret and refilled his liqueur glass. "My friends," he began, turning his quick, elfish smile first on Costello, then on me, "I have promised you a remarkable tale. Very well, then, to begin."

He flicked a wholly imaginary fleck of dust from his dinner jacket sleeve and crossed his slender, womanishly small feet on the hearth rug.

"Do you recall, Friend Trowbridge, how we went, you and I, to the tea given by the good Madame Norman? Yes? Perhaps, then, you will recall how at the entrance of the ballroom I stopped with a look of astonishment on my face. Very good. At that moment I saw that which made me disbelieve the evidence of my own two eyes. As the gentleman we later met as Count Czerny danced past a mirror on the wall I beheld — *parbleu!* what do you suppose? — the reflection only of his dancing partner! It was as if the man had been non-existent, and the young lady

had danced past the mirror by herself.

“Now, such a thing was not likely, I admit; you, *Sergent*, and you, too, Friend Trowbridge, will say it was not possible; but such is not the case. In certain circumstances it is possible for that which we see with our eyes to cast no shadow in a mirror. Let that point wait a moment; we have other evidence to consider first.

“When the young man told us of the count’s prowess in battle, of his incomparable ferocity, I began to believe that which I had at first disbelieved, and when he told us the count was a Hungarian, I began to believe more than ever.

“I met the count, as you will remember, and I took his hand in mine. *Parbleu*, it was like a hand with no palm — it had hairs on both sides of it! You, too, Friend Trowbridge, remarked on that phenomenon.

“While I talked with him I managed to maneuver him before a mirror. *Morbleu*, the man was as if he had not been; I could see my own face smiling at me where I knew I should have seen the reflection of his shoulder!

“Now, attend me; The *Sûreté General* — what you call the Police Headquarters — of Paris is not like your English and American bureaus. All facts, no matter however seemingly absurd, which come to that office are carefully noted down for future reference. Among other histories I have read in the archives of that office was that of one Baron Lajos Czuczron of Transylvania, whose actions had once been watched by our secret agents.

“This man was rich and favored beyond the common run of Hungarian petty nobles, but he was far from beloved by his peasantry. He was known as cruel, wicked and implacable, and no one could be found who had ever one kind word to say for him.

“Half the countryside suspected him of being a *loup-garou*, or werewolf, the others credited a local legend that a woman of his family had once in the olden days taken a demon to husband and that he was the offspring of that unholy union. According to the story, the progeny of this wicked woman lived like an ordinary man for one hundred years, then died on the stroke of the century *unless his vitality was renewed by drinking the blood of a slaughtered virgin!*

“Absurd? Possibly. An English intelligence office would have said ‘bally nonsense’ if one of its agents had sent in such a report. An American bureau would have labeled the report as being the sauce-of-the-apple; but consider this fact: in six hundred years there was no single record of a Baron Czuczron having died. Barons grew old — old to the point of death — but always there came along a new baron, a man in the prime of life, not a youth, to take the old baron’s place, nor could any say when the old baron had died or where his body had been laid.

“Now, I had been told that a man under a curse — the

werewolf, the vampire, or any other thing in man’s shape, who lives more than his allotted time by virtue of wickedness — can not cast a shadow in a mirror; also that those accursed ones have hair in the palms of their hands. *Eh bien*, with this foreknowledge, I engaged this man who called himself Count Czerny in conversation concerning Transylvania. *Parbleu*, the fellow denied all knowledge of the country. He denied it with more force than was necessary. ‘You are a liar, *Monsieur le Comte*,’ I tell him, but I say it to myself. Even yet, however, I do not think what I think later.

“Then came the case of the young Eckhart. He loses blood, he can not say how or why, but Friend Trowbridge and I find a queer mark on his body. I think to me, ‘if, perhaps, a vampire — a member of that accursed tribe who leave their graves by night and suck the blood of the living — were here, that would account for this young man’s condition. But where would such a being come from? It is not likely.’

“Then I meet that old man, the one you call Indian John. He tells me much of the history of this town in the early days, and he tells me something more. He tells of a man, an old, old man, who has paid him much money to go to a certain grave — the grave of a reputed witch — in the old cemetery and dig from about it a growth of wild garlic. Garlic, I know, is a plant intolerable to the vampire. He can not abide it. If it is planted on his grave he can not pass it.

“I ask myself, ‘Who would want such a thing to be, and why? But I have no answer; only, I know, if a vampire have been confined to that grave by planted garlic, then liberated when that garlic is taken away, it would account for the young Eckhart’s strange sickness.

“*Tiens*, Friend Trowbridge and I visit that grave, and on its tombstone we read a verse which makes me believe the tenant of that grave may be a vampire. We interview the good minister of the church and learn that another man, an old, old man, have also inquired about that strange grave. ‘Who have done this? I ask me; but even yet I have no definite answer to my question.

“As we rush to the Norman house to see young Eckhart I stop at an Italian green grocer’s and ask for fresh garlic, for I think perhaps we can use it to protect the young Eckhart if it really is a vampire which is troubling him. *Parbleu*, some man, an old, old man, have what you Americans call ‘cornered’ the available supply of garlic. ‘*Cordieu*,’ I tell me, ‘this old man, he constantly crosses our trail! Also he is a very great nuisance.’

“The Italian tell me the garlic was sent to a house in Rupleysville, so I have an idea where this interfering ol rascal may abide. But at that moment I have greater need to see our friend Eckhart than to ask further question of the Italian. Before I go, however, I tell that shopkeeper that his

garlic customer has the evil eye. *Parbleu*, Monsieur Garlic-Buyer you will have no more dealings with that Italian! He knows what he knows.

“When we arrive at the Norman house we find young Eckhart in great trouble, and a black serving maid tells of a strange-looking woman who bit him. Also, we find toothmarks on his breast. ‘The vampire woman, Sarah, is, in very truth, at large,’ I tell me, and so I hasten to the cemetery to make her fast to her grave with a wooden stake, for, once he is staked down, the vampire can no longer roam. He is finished.

“Friend Trowbridge will testify he saw blood on the stake driven into a grave dug nearly three hundred years ago. Is it not so, *mon ami*?”

I nodded assent, and he took up his narrative:

“Why this old man should wish to liberate the vampire woman, I know not; certain it is, one of that grisly guild, or one closely associated with it, as this ‘Count Czerny’ undoubtedly was, can tell when another of the company is in the vicinity, and I doubt not he did this deed for pure malice and deviltry.

“However that may be, Friend Trowbridge tells me he have seen the count, and that he seems to have aged greatly. The man who visited the clergyman and the man who bought the garlic was also much older than the count as we knew him. ‘Ah ha, he is coming to the end of his century,’ I tell me; ‘now look out for devilment, Jules de Grandin.

Certainly, it is sure to come.’

“And then, my Sergeant, come you with your tale of Mademoiselle Norman’s disappearance, and I, too, think perhaps she has run away from home voluntarily, of her own free will, until you say the Italian shopkeeper recognized the old man who accosted her as one who has the evil eye. Now what old man, save the one who bought the garlic and who lives at Rupleysville, would that Italian accuse of the evil eye? *Pardieu*, has he not already told you the same man once bought his garlic? But yes. The case is complete.

“The girl has disappeared, an old, old man has accosted her; an old, old man who was so strong he could overcome a policeman; the count is nearing his century mark when he must die like other men unless he can secure the blood of a virgin to revivify him. I am more than certain that the count and baron are one and the same and that they both dwell at Rupleysville. *Voilà*, we go to Rupleysville, and we arrive there not one little minute too soon. *N’est-ce-pas, mes amis*?”

“Sure,” Costello agreed, rising and holding out his hand in farewell, “you’ve got th’ goods, doc. No mistake about it.”

To me, as I helped him with his coat in the hall, the detective confided, “An’ he only had one shot o’ licker all evenin’! Gosh, doc, if one drink could fix me up like that I wouldn’t care how much prohibition we had!”

The Blood-Flower

“**A**LLO,” Jules de Grandin seized the receiver from the office telephone before the echo of the tinkling bell had ceased, “who is it, please? But of course, Mademoiselle, you may speak with Dr. Trowbridge.” He passed the instrument to me and busied himself with a third unsuccessful attempt to ignite the evil-smelling French cigarette with which he insisted on fumigating the room.

“Yes?” I queried, placing the receiver to my ear.

“This is Miss Ostrander, Dr. Trowbridge,” a well modulated voice informed me. “Mrs. Evander’s nurse, you know.”

“Yes?” I repeated, a little sharply, annoyed at being called by an ordinary case after an onerous day. “What is it?”

“I — I don’t quite know, sir.” She laughed the short, semi-hysterical laugh of an embarrassed woman. “She’s acting very queerly. She — she’s — oh, my, there it goes again, sir! Please come over right away; I’m afraid she’s becoming delirious!” And with that she hung up, leaving me in a state of astounded impatience.

“Confound the woman!” I scolded as I prepared to slip into my overcoat. “Why couldn’t she have hung on thirty seconds more and told me what the matter was?”

“Eh, what is it, my friend?” de Grandin gave up his attempt to make the cigarette burn and regarded me with one of his fixed, unwinking stares. “You are puzzled, you are in trouble; can I assist you?”

“Perhaps,” I replied. “There’s a patient of mine, a Mrs. Evander, who’s been suffering from a threatened leukemia — I’ve administered Fowler’s solution and arsenic trioxide and given her bed-rest treatment for the past week. It looked as if we had the situation pretty well in hand, but ...” I repeated Miss Ostrander’s message.

“Ah?” he murmured, musingly. “‘There it goes again,’ she did say? What, I wonder, was ‘it’; a cough, a convulsion, or — who can say? Let us hasten, my friend. *Parbleu*, she does intrigue me, that Mademoiselle Ostrander with her so cryptic ‘There it goes again!’”

Lights were gleaming through the storm from the windows of the Evander house as we came to a stop before its wide veranda. A servant, half clothed and badly frightened, let us in and ushered us on tiptoe to the upper story chamber where the mistress of the establishment lay sick.

“What’s wrong?” I demanded as I entered the sickroom, de Grandin at my heels.

A glance at the patient reassured me. She lay back on a little pile of infant pillows, her pretty blonde hair trickling in stray rivulets of gold from the confines of her lace sleeping cap, her hand, almost as white as the linen itself, spread restfully on the Madeira counterpane.

“Humph!” I exclaimed, turning angrily to Miss Ostrander. “Is this what you called me out in the rain to see?”

The nurse raised a forefinger quickly to her lips and motioned toward the hall with her eyes. “Doctor,” she said in a whisper when we stood outside the sickroom door, “I know you’ll think me silly, but — but it was positively ghastly!”

“*Tiens*, Mademoiselle,” de Grandin cut in, “I pray you be more explicit: first you tell Friend Trowbridge that something — we know not what — goes again, now you do inform us that something is ghastly. *Pardieu*, you have my sheep — *non, non*, how do you say? — my goat!”

In spite of herself the girl laughed at the tragic face he turned to her, but she recovered her gravity quickly.

“Last night,” she went on, still in a whisper, “and the night before, just at twelve, a dog howled somewhere in the neighborhood. I couldn’t place the sound, but it was one of those long, quavering howls, almost human. Positively you might have mistaken it for the cry of a little child in pain, at first.”

De Grandin tweaked first one, then the other end of his trimly waxed blond mustache. “And it was the sleepless dog’s lament which went again, and which was so ghastly, Mademoiselle?” he inquired solicitously.

“No!” the nurse exploded with suppressed vehemence and heightened color. “It was Mrs. Evander, sir. Night before last, when the beast began baying, she stirred in her sleep — turned restlessly for a moment, then went back to sleep. When it howled the second time, a little nearer the house, she half sat up, and made a queer little growling noise in her throat. Then she slept. Last night the animal was howling louder and longer, and Mrs. Evander seemed more restless and made odd noises more distinctly. I thought the dog was annoying her, or that she might be having a nightmare, so I got her a drink of water; but when I tried to give it to her, *she snarled at me!*”

“*Eh bien*, but this is of interest,” de Grandin commented. “She did snarl at you, you say?”

“Yes, sir. She didn’t wake up when I touched her on the shoulder; just turned her head toward me and showed her teeth and growled. Growled like a bad-tempered dog.”

“Yes? And then?”

“Tonight the dog began howling a few minutes earlier, five or ten minutes before midnight, perhaps, and it seemed to me his voice was much stronger. Mrs. Evander had the same reaction she had the other two nights at first, but suddenly she sat bolt-upright in bed, rolled her head from side to side, and drew back her lips and growled, then she began snapping at the air, like a dog annoyed by a fly. I did my best to quiet her, but I didn’t like to go too near — I was afraid, really — and all at once the dog began howling again, right in the next yard, it seemed, and Mrs. Evander threw back her bedclothes, knelt up in bed and answered him!”

“Answered him?” I echoed in stupefaction.

“Yes, doctor, she threw back her head and howled — long quavering howls, just like his. At first they were low, but they grew louder and higher till the servants heard them, and James, the butler, came to the door to see what the matter was. Poor fellow, he was nearly scared out of his wits when he saw her.”

“And then ...?” I began.

“Then I called you. Right while I was talking to you, the dog began baying again, and Mrs. Evander answered him. That was what I meant” — she turned to de Grandin — “when I said ‘There it goes again.’ I had to hang up before I could explain to you, Dr. Trowbridge, for she had started to crawl out of bed toward the window, and I had to run and stop her.”

“But why didn’t you tell me this yesterday, or this afternoon when I was here?” I demanded.

“I didn’t like to, sir. It all seemed so crazy, so utterly impossible, especially in the daytime, that I was afraid you’d think I’d been asleep on duty and dreamed it all; but now that James has seen it, too...”

Outside in the rain-drenched night there suddenly rose a wail, long-drawn, pulsating, doleful as the cry of an abandoned soul. “*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*” it rose and fell, quavered and almost died away, then resurged with increased force. “*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*”

“Hear it?” the nurse cried, her voice thin-edged with excitement and fear.

Again, “*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*” like the echo of the howls outside came an answering cry from the sickroom beyond the door.

Miss Ostrander dashed into the room, de Grandin and I close behind her.

The dainty white counterpane had been thrown back. Mrs. Evander, clad only in her Georgette nightrobe and bed cap, had crossed the floor to the window and flung up the sash. Already, the wind-whipped rain was beating in upon

her as she leaned across the sill, one pink sole toward us, one little white foot on the window-ledge, preparatory to jumping.

“*Mon Dieu, seize her!*” de Grandin shrieked, and, matching command with performance leaped across the room, grasped her shoulders in his small, strong hands, and bore her backward as she flexed the muscles of her legs to hurl herself into the yard below.

For a moment she fought like a tigress, snarling, scratching, even snapping at us with her teeth, but Miss Ostrander and I overbore her and thrust her into bed, drawing the covers over her and holding them down like a strait-jacket against her furious struggles.

De Grandin leaned across the window-sill, peering out into the stormy darkness. “*Aroint thee, accursed of God!*” I heard him shout into the wind as he drew the sash down, snapped the catch fast and turned again to the room.

“Ah?” he approached the struggling patient and bent over her, staring intently. “A grain and a half of morphine in her arm, if you please, Friend Trowbridge. The dose is heavy for a non-addict, but” — he shrugged his shoulders — “it is *necessaire* that she sleep, this poor one, So! That is better.

“*Mademoiselle,*” he regarded Miss Ostrander with his wide-eyed stare, “I do not think she will be thus disturbed in the day, but I most strongly urge that hereafter you administer a dose of one-half grain of codeine dissolved in eighty parts of water each night not later than half-past ten. Dr. Trowbridge will write the prescription.

“Friend Trowbridge,” he interrupted himself, “where, if at all, is Madame’s husband, Monsieur Evander?”

“He’s gone to Atlanta on a business trip,” Miss Ostrander supplied. “We expect him back tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow? *Zut,* that is too bad!” de Grandin exclaimed. “*Eh bien,* with you Americans it is always the business. Business before happiness; *cordieu,* business before the safety of those you love!

“*Mademoiselle,* you will please keep in touch with Dr. Trowbridge and me at all times, and when that Monsieur Evander does return from his business trip, please tell him that we desire to see him soon — at once, right away, immediately.

“Come, Friend Trowbridge — *bonne nuit,* *Mademoiselle.*”

“I say, Dr. Trowbridge,” Niles Evander flung angrily into my consulting room, “what’s the idea of keeping my wife doped like this? Here I just got back from a trip to the South last night and rushed out to the house to see her before she went to sleep, and that dam’ nurse said she’d given her a sleepin’ powder and couldn’t waken her. I don’t like it, I tell you, and I won’t have it! I told the nurse that if she gave her any dope tonight she was through, and that goes for you,

too!" He glared defiantly at me.

De Grandin, sunk in the depths of a great chair with a copy of de Gobineau's melancholy *Lovers of Kandahar*, glanced up sharply, then consulted the watch strapped to his wrist. "It is a quarter of eleven," he announced apropos of nothing, laying down the elegant blue-and-gold volume and rising from his seat.

Evander turned on him, eyes ablaze. "You're Dr. de Grandin," he accused. "I've heard of you from the nurse. It was you who persuaded Trowbridge to dope my wife — buttin' in on a case that didn't concern you. I know all about you," he went on furiously as the Frenchman gave him a cold stare. "You're some sort of charlatan from Paris, a dabbler in criminology and spiritualism and that sort of rot. Well, sir, I want to warn you to keep your hands off my wife. American doctors and American methods are good enough for me!"

"Your patriotism is most admirable, Monsieur," de Grandin murmured with a suspicious mildness. "If you..."

The jangle of the telephone bell cut through his words. "Yes?" he asked sharply, raising the receiver, but keeping his cold eyes fixed on Evander's face. "Yes, Mademoiselle Ostrander, this is — *grand Dieu!* What? How long? Eh, do you say so? *Dix million diables!* But of course, we come, we hasten — *morbleu*, but we shall fly.

"Gentlemen," he hung up the receiver, then turned to us, inclining his shoulders ceremoniously to each of us in turn, his gaze as expressionless as the eyes of a graven image, "that was Mademoiselle Ostrander on the 'phone. Madame Evander is gone — disappeared."

"Gone? Disappeared?" Evander echoed stupidly, looking helplessly from de Grandin to me and back again. He slumped down in the nearest chair, gazing straight before him unseeing. "Great God!" he murmured.

"Precisely, Monsieur," de Grandin agreed in an even, emotionless voice. "That is exactly what I said. Meantime" — he gave me a significant glance — "let us go, *cher* Trowbridge. I doubt not that Mademoiselle Ostrander will have much of interest to relate.

"Monsieur" — his eyes and voice again became cold, hard, stonily expressionless — "if you can so far discommode yourself as to travel in the company of one whose nationality and methods you disapprove, I suggest you accompany us."

Niles Evander rose like a sleep-walker and followed us to my waiting car.

The previous day's rain had turned to snow with a shifting of the wind to the northeast, and we made slow progress through the suburban roads. It was nearly midnight when we trooped up the steps to the Evander porch and pushed vigorously at the bell-button.

"Yes, sir," Miss Ostrander replied to my question, "Mr. Evander came home last night and positively forbade my giving Mrs. Evander any more codeine. I told him you wanted to see him right away, and that Dr. de Grandin had ordered the narcotic, but he said..."

"Forbear, if you please, Mademoiselle," de Grandin interrupted. "Monsieur Evander has already been at pain to say as much — and more — to us in person. Now, when did Madame disappear, if you please?"

"I'd already given her her medicine last night," the nurse took up her story at the point of interruption, "so there was no need of calling you to tell you of Mr. Evander's orders. I thought perhaps I could avoid any unpleasantness by pretending to obey him and giving her the codeine on the sly this evening, but about nine o'clock he came into the sickroom and snatched up the box of powders and put them in his pocket. Then he said he was going to drive over to have it out with you. I tried to telephone you about it, but the storm had put the wires out of commission, and I've been trying to get a message through ever since."

"And the dog, Mademoiselle, the animal who did howl outside the window, has he been active?"

"Yes! Last night he screamed and howled so I was frightened. Positively, it seemed as though he were trying to jump up from the ground to the window. Mrs. Evander slept through it all, though, thanks to the drug."

"And tonight?" de Grandin prompted.

"Tonight!" The nurse shuddered. "The howling began about half-past nine, just a few minutes after Mr. Evander left for the city. Mrs. Evander was terrible. She seemed like a woman possessed. I fought and struggled with her, but nothing I could do had the slightest effect. She was savage as a maniac. I called James to help me hold her in bed once, and then, for a while, she lay quietly, for the thing outside seemed to have left.

"Sometime later the howling began again, louder and more furious, and Mrs. Evander was twice as hard to manage. She fought and bit so that I was beginning to lose control of her, and I screamed for James again. He must have been somewhere downstairs, though, for he didn't hear my call. I ran out into the hall and leaned over the balustrade to call again, and when I ran back — I wasn't out there more than a minute — the window was up and Mrs. Evander was gone."

"And didn't you do anything? — didn't you look for her?" Evander cut in passionately.

"Yes, sir. James and I ran outside and called and searched all through the grounds, but we couldn't find a trace of her. The wind is blowing so and the snow falling so rapidly, any tracks she might have made would have been wiped out almost immediately."

De Grandin took his little pointed chin between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand and bowed his head in silent meditation. "Horns of the devil!" I heard him mutter to himself. "This is queer — those cries, that delirium, that attempted flight, now this disappearance, *Pardieu*, the trail seems clear. But why? *Mille cochons*, why?"

"See here," Evander broke in frantically, "can't you do something? Call the police, call the neighbors, call..."

"Monsieur," de Grandin interrupted in a frigid voice, "may I inquire your vocation?"

"Eh?" Evander was taken aback. "Why — er — I'm an engineer."

"Precisely, exactly. Dr. Trowbridge and I are medical men. We do not attempt to build bridges or sink tunnels. We should make sorry work of it. You, Monsieur have already once tried your hand at medicine by forbidding the administration of a drug we considered necessary. Your results were most deplorable. Kindly permit us to follow our profession in our own way. The thing we most of all do not desire in this case is the police force. Later, perhaps. Now, it would be more than ruinous."

"But..."

"There are no buts, Monsieur. It is my belief that your wife, Madame Evander, is in no immediate danger. However, Dr. Trowbridge and I shall institute such search as may be practicable, and do you meantime keep in such communication with us as the storm will permit." He bowed formally. "A very good night to you, Monsieur."

Miss Ostrander looked at him questioningly. "Shall I go with you, doctor?" she asked.

"*Mais non*," he replied. "You will please remain here, *ma nourrice*, and attend the homecoming of Madame Evander."

"Then you think she will return?"

"Most doubtlessly. Unless I am more badly mistaken than I think I am, she will be back to you before another day."

"Say," Evander, almost beside himself burst out, "what makes you so cocksure she'll be back? Good Lord, man, do you realize she's out in this howling blizzard with only her nightclothes on?"

"Perfectly. But I do declare she will return."

"But you've nothing to base your absurd..."

"Monsieur!" de Grandin's sharp, whiplike reply cut in. "Me, I am Jules de Grandin. When I say she will return, I mean she will return. I do not make mistakes."

"Where shall we begin the search?" I asked as we entered my car.

He settled himself snugly in the cushions and lighted a cigarette. "We need not search, *cher ami*," he replied. "She will return of her own free will and accord."

"But, man," I argued, "Evander was right; she's out in this storm with nothing but a Georgette nightdress on."

"I doubt it," he answered casually.

"You doubt it? Why...?"

"Unless the almost unmistakable signs fail, my friend, this Madame Evander, thanks to her husband's pig-ignorance, is this moment clothed in fur."

"Fur?" I echoed.

"Perfectly. Come, my friend, tread upon the gas. Let us snatch what sleep we can tonight — *eh bien*, tomorrow is another day."

He was up and waiting for me as I entered the office next morning. "Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he demanded, "this Madame Evander's leukemia, upon what did you base your diagnosis?"

"Well," I replied, referring to my clinical cards, "a physical examination showed the axillary glands slightly enlarged, the red corpuscles reduced to little more than a million to the count, the white cells stood at about four hundred thousand, and the patient complained of weakness, drowsiness and a general feeling of malaise."

"U'm?" he commented noncommittally. "That could easily be so. Yes; such signs would undoubtedly be shown. Now..." The telephone bell broke off his remarks half uttered.

"Ah?" his little blue eyes snapped triumphantly, as he listened to the voice on the wire. "I did think so. But yes; right away, at once, immediately."

"Trowbridge, my old one, she has returned. That was Mademoiselle Ostrander informing me of Madame Evander's reappearance. Let us hasten. There is much I would do this day."

"After you went last night," Miss Ostrander told us, "I lay down on the chaise longue in the bedroom and tried to sleep. I suppose I must have napped by fits and starts, but it seemed to me I could hear the faint howling of dogs, sometimes mingled with yelps and cries, all through the night. This morning, just after six o'clock, I got up to prepare myself a piece of toast and a cup of tea before the servants were stirring, and as I came downstairs I found Mrs. Evander lying on the rug in the front hall."

She paused a moment, and her color mounted slightly as she went on. "She was lying on that gray wolfskin rug before the fireplace, sir, and was quite nude. Her sleeping cap and nightgown were crumpled up on the floor beside her."

"Ah?" de Grandin commented. "And...?"

"I got her to her feet and helped her upstairs, where I dressed her for bed and tucked her in. She didn't seem to show any evil effects from being out in the storm. Indeed, she seems much better this morning, and is sleeping so

soundly I could hardly wake her for breakfast, and when I did, she wouldn't eat. Just went back to sleep."

"Ah?" de Grandin repeated. "And you bathed her, Mademoiselle, before she was put to bed?"

The girl looked slightly startled. "No sir, not entirely; but I did wash her hands. They were discolored, especially about the fingertips, with some red substance, almost as if she had been scratching something, and gotten blood under her nails."

"*Parbleu!*" the Frenchman exploded. "I did know it Friend Trowbridge. Jules de Grandin, he is never mistaken.

"Mademoiselle," he turned feverishly to the nurse "did you, by any happy chance, save the water in which you laved Madame Evander's hands?"

"Why, no, I didn't, but — oh I see — yes, I think perhaps some of the stain may be on the washcloth and the orange stick I cleaned her nails with. I really had quite a time cleaning them, too."

"*Bien, très bien!*" he ejaculated. "Let us have these cloths, these sticks, at once, please. Trowbridge, do you withdraw some blood from Madame's arm for a test, then we must hasten to the laboratory. *Cordieu*, I burn with impatience!"

An hour later we faced each other in the office. "I can't understand it," I confessed. "By all the canons of the profession, Mrs. Evander ought to be dead after last night's experience, but there's no doubt she's better. Her pulse was firmer, her temperature right, and her blood count practically normal today."

"Me, I understand perfectly, up to a point," he replied. "Beyond that, all is dark as the cave of Erebus. Behold, I have tested the stains from Madame's fingers. They are — what do you think?"

"Blood?" I hazarded.

"*Parbleu*, yes, but not of humanity. *Mais non*, they are blood of a dog, my friend."

"Of a dog?"

"Perfectly. I, myself, did greatly fear they might prove human, but *grace à Dieu*, they are not. Now, if you will excuse, I go to make certain investigations, and will meet you at the *maison* Evander this evening. Come prepared to be surprised, my friend. *Parbleu*, I shall be surprised if I do not astonish myself!"

Four of us, de Grandin, Miss Ostrander, Niles Evander and I, sat in the dimly lighted room, looking alternately toward the bed where the mistress of the house lay in a drugged sleep, into the still-burning fire of coals in the fireplace grate, and at each other's faces. Three of us were puzzled almost to the point of hysteria, and de Grandin seemed on pins and needles with excitement and expectation. Occasionally he would rise and walk to the bed with that quick soundless tread of his which always made

me think of a cat. Again he would dart into the hall, nervously light a cigarette, draw a few quick puffs from it, then glide noiselessly into the sickroom once more. None of us spoke above a whisper and our conversation was limited to inconsequential things. Throughout our group there was the tense expectancy and solemn, taut-nerved air of medical witnesses in the prison death chamber awaiting the advent of the condemned.

Subconsciously, I think, we all realized what we waited for, but my nerves nearly snapped when it came.

With the suddenness of a shot, unheralded by any preliminary, the wild, vibrating howl of a beast sounded beneath the sickroom window, its sharp, poignant wail seeming to split the frigid, moonlit air of the night.

"*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*" it rose against the winter stillness, diminished to a moan of heart-rending melancholy, then suddenly crescendoed upward, from a moan to a wail, from a wail to a howl, despairing, passionate, longing as the lament of a damned spirit, wild and fierce as the rallying call of the fiends of hell.

"Oh!" Miss Ostrander exclaimed involuntarily.

"Let be!" Jules de Grandin ordered tensely, his whisper seeming to carry more because of its sharpness than from any actual sound it made.

"*O-o-o — o-o-o-o — o-o-o — o-o-o-o!*" again the cry shuddered through the air, again it rose to a pitch of intolerable shrillness and evil, then died away, and, as we sat stone-still in the shadowy chamber, a new sound, a sinister, scraping sound, intensified by the ice-hard coldness of the night, came to us. Someone, some *thing*, was swarming up the rose-trellis outside the house!

Scrape, scratch, scrape, the alternate hand- and foot-holds sounded on the cross-bars of the lattice. A pair of hands, long, slender, corded hands like hands of a cadaver long dead, and armed with talons, blood-stained and hooked, grasped the window-ledge, and a face — God of Mercy, such a face! — was silhouetted against the background of the night.

Not human, nor yet wholly bestial it was, but partook grotesquely of both, so that it was at once a foul caricature of each. The forehead was low and narrow, and sloped back to a thatch of short, nondescript-colored hair resembling an animal's fur. The nose was elongated out of all semblance to a human feature and resembled the pointed snout of some animal of the canine tribe except that it curved sharply down at the tip like the beak of some unclean bird of prey. Thin, cruel lips were drawn sneeringly back from a double row of tusk-like teeth which gleamed horribly in the dim reflection of the open fire, and a pair of round, baleful eyes, green as the luminescence from a rotting carcass in a midnight swamp, glared at us across the windowsill. On each of us in turn the basilisk glance dwelt momentarily, then fastened

itself on the sleeping sick woman like a falcon's talons on a dove.

Miss Ostrander gave a single choking sob and slid forward from her chair unconscious. Evander and I sat stupefied with horror, unable to do more than gaze in terror-stricken silence at the apparition, but Jules de Grandin was out of his seat and across the room with a single bound of feline grace and ferocity.

"Aroint thee, accursed of God!" he screamed, showering a barrage of blows from a slender wand on the creature's face. "Back, spawn of Satan! To thy kennel, hound of hell! I, Jules de Grandin, command it!"

The suddenness of his attack took the thing by surprise. For a moment it snarled and cowered under the hailstorm of blows from de Grandin's stick, then, as suddenly as it had come into view, it loosed its hold on the windowsill and dropped from sight.

"*Sang de Dieu, sang du diable; sang des tous les saints de ciel!*" de Grandin roared, hurling himself out the window in the wake of the fleeing monster. "I have you, vile wretch. *Pardieu, Monsieur Loup-garou*, but I shall surely crush you!"

Rushing to the window, I saw the tall, skeleton-thin form of the enormity leaping across the moonlit snow with great, space-devouring bounds, and after it, brandishing his wand, ran Jules de Grandin, shouting triumphant invectives in mingled French and English.

By the shadow of a copse of evergreens the thing made a stand. Wheeling in its tracks, it bent nearly double, extending its cadaverous claws like a wrestler searching for a hold, and baring its glistening tusks in a snarl of fury.

De Grandin never slackened pace. Charging full tilt upon the waiting monstrosity, he reached his free hand into his jacket pocket. There was a gleam of blue metal in the moonlight. Then eight quick, pitiless spurts of flame stabbed through the shadow where the monster lurked, eight whiplike crackling reports echoed and re-echoed in the midnight stillness — and the voice of Jules de Grandin:

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux, ohé*, Friend Trowbridge, bring a light quickly! I would that you see what I see!"

Weltering in a patch of blood-stained snow at de Grandin's feet we found an elderly man, ruddy-faced, gray-haired, and, doubtless, in life, of a dignified, even benign aspect. Now, however, he lay in the snow as naked as the day his mother first saw him, and eight gaping gunshot wounds told where de Grandin's missiles had found their mark. The winter cold was already stiffening his limbs and setting his face in a mask of death.

"Good heavens," Evander ejaculated as he bent over the lifeless form, "it's Uncle Friedrich — my wife's uncle! He disappeared just before I went south."

"*Eh bien*," de Grandin regarded the body with no more emotion than if it had been an effigy molded in snow, "we shall know where to find your uncle henceforth, Monsieur. Will some of you pick him up? Me — *pardieu* I would no more touch him than I would handle a hyena!"

"Now, Monsieur," de Grandin faced Evander across the living room table, "your statement that the gentleman at whose happy dispatch I so fortunately officiated was your wife's uncle, and that he disappeared before your southern trip, does interest me. Say on, tell me all concerning this Uncle Friedrich of your wife's. When did he disappear, and what led up to his disappearance? Omit nothing, I pray you, for trifles which you may consider of no account may be of the greatest importance. Proceed Monsieur. I listen."

Evander squirmed uncomfortably in his chair like a small boy undergoing catechism. "He wasn't really her uncle," he responded. "Her father and he were schoolmates in Germany — Heidelberg — years ago. Mr. Hoffmeister — Uncle Friedrich — immigrated to this country shortly after my father-in-law came back, and they were in business together for years. Mr. Hoffmeister lived with my wife's people — all the children called him Uncle Friedrich — and was just like one of the family.

"My mother-in-law died a few years ago, and her husband died shortly after, and Mr. Hoffmeister disposed of his share of the business and went to Germany on a long visit. He was caught there in the war and didn't return to America until '21. Since that time he lived with us."

Evander paused a moment, as though debating mentally whether he should proceed, then smiled in a half shamefaced manner. "To tell you the truth," he continued, "I wasn't very keen on having him here. There were times when I didn't like the way he looked at my wife a dam' bit."

"Eh," de Grandin asked, "how was that, Monsieur?"

"Well, I can't quite put a handle to it in words, but more than once I'd glance up and see him with his eyes fastened on Edith in a most peculiar way. It would have angered me in a young man, but in an old man, it both angered and disgusted me. I was on the point of asking him to leave when he disappeared and saved me the trouble."

"Yes?" de Grandin encouraged. "And his disappearance, what of that?"

"The old fellow was always an enthusiastic amateur botanist," Evander replied, "and he brought a great many specimens for his herbarium back from Europe with him. Off and on he's been messing around with plants since his return, and about a month ago he received a tin of dried flowers from Kerovitch, Rumania, and they seemed to set him almost wild."

"Kerovitch? *Mordieu!*" de Grandin exclaimed. "Say on, Monsieur; I burn with curiosity. Describe these flowers in

detail, if you please.”

“H’m,” Evander took his chin in his hand and studied in silence a moment. “There wasn’t anything especially remarkable about them that I could see. There were a dozen of them, all told, perhaps, and they resembled our ox-eyed daisies a good deal, except that their petals were red instead of yellow. Had a queer sort of odor, too. Even though they were dried, they exuded a sort of sickly-sweet smell, yet not quite sweet either. It was a sort of mixture of perfume and stench, if that means anything to you.

“*Pardieu*, it means much!” de Grandin assured him. “And their sap, where it had dried, did it not resemble that of the milkweed plant?”

“Yes! How did you know?”

“No matter. Proceed, if you please. Your Uncle Friedrich did take these so accursed flowers out and...”

“And tried an experiment with them,” Evander supplied. “He put them in a bowl of water, and they freshened up as though they had not been plucked an hour.”

“Yes — and his disappearance — name of a little green man! — his disappearance?”

“That happened just before I went south. All three of us went to the theater one evening, and Uncle Friedrich wore one of the red flowers in his buttonhole. My wife wore a spray of them in her corsage. He tried to get me to put one of the things in my coat, too, but I hated their smell so much I wouldn’t do it.”

“Lucky you!” de Grandin murmured so low the narrator failed to hear him.

“Uncle Friedrich was very restless and queer all evening,” Evander proceeded, “but the old fellow had been getting rather childish lately, so we didn’t pay any particular attention to his actions. Next morning he was gone.”

“And did you make inquiry?”

“No, he often went away on little trips without warning us beforehand, and, besides, I was glad enough to see him get out. I didn’t try to find him. It was just after this that my wife’s health became bad, but I had to make this trip for our firm, so I called in Dr. Trowbridge, and there you are.”

“Yes, *parbleu*, here we are, indeed!” de Grandin nodded emphatically. “Listen carefully, my friends; what I am about to say is the truth:

“When first I came to visit Madame Evander with Friend Trowbridge, and heard the strange story Mademoiselle Ostrander told, I was amazed. ‘Why,’ I ask me, ‘does this lady answer the howling of a dog beneath her window?’ *Parbleu*, it was most curious!

“Then while we three — Friend Trowbridge, Mademoiselle Ostrander and I — did talk of Madame’s so strange malady, I did hear the call of that dog beneath the window with my own two ears, and did observe Madame Evander’s

reaction to it.

“Out the window I did put my head, and in the storm I saw no dog at all, but what I thought might be a human man — a tall, thin man. Yet a dog had howled beneath that window and had been answered by Madame but a moment before. Me, I do not like that.

“I call upon that man, if such he be, to be gone. Also I do request Mademoiselle Ostrander to place her patient under an opiate each night, that the howls beneath her window may not awaken Madame Evander.

“*Eh bien*, thus far, thus good. But you do come along, Monsieur, and countermand my order. While Madame is not under the drug that unholy thing beneath her window does howl once more, and Madame disappears. Yes.

“Now, there was no ordinary medical diagnosis for such a case as this, so I search my memory and my knowledge for an extraordinary one. What do I find in that storehouse of my mind?

“In parts of Europe, my friends — believe me, I know whereof I speak! — there are known such things as werewolves, or wolf-men. In France we know them as *les loups-garoux*; in Wales they call them the bug-wolves, or bogie-wolves; in the days of old the Greeks did know them under the style of *lukanthropos*. Yes.

“What he is no one knows well. Sometimes he is said to be a wolf — a magical wolf — who can become a man. Sometimes, more often, he is said to be a man who can, or must, become a wolf. No one knows accurately. But this we know: The man who is also a wolf is ten times more terrible than the wolf who is only a wolf. At night he quests and kills his prey, which is most often his fellow man, but sometimes his ancient enemy, the dog. By day he hides his villainy under the guise of a man’s form. Sometimes he changes entirely to a wolf’s shape, sometimes he becomes a fearful mixture of man and beast, but always he is a devil incarnate. If he be killed while in the wolf shape, he at once reverts to human form, so by that sign we know we have slain a werewolf and not a true wolf. Certainly.

“Now, some werewolves become such by the aid of Satan; some become so as the result of a curse; a few are so through accident. In Transylvania, that devil-ridden land, the very soil does seem to favor the transformation of man into beast. There are springs from which the water, once drunk, will make its drinker into a savage beast, and there are flowers — *cordieu*, have I not seen them? — which, if worn by a man at night during the full of the moon, will do the same. Among the most potent of these blooms of hell is *la fleur de sang*, or blood-flower, which is exactly the accursed weed you have described to us, Monsieur Evander — the flower your Uncle Friedrich and your lady did wear to the theater that night of the full moon. When you mentioned the

village of Kerovitch, I did see it all at once, immediately, for that place is on the Rumanian side of the Transylvanian Alps, and there the blood-flowers are found in greater numbers than anywhere else in the world. The very mountain soil does seem cursed with lycanthropy.

“Very well. I did not know of the flower when first I came into this case, but I did suspect something evil had cast a spell on Madame. She did exhibit all the symptoms of a lycanthrope about to be transformed, and beneath her window there did howl what was undoubtedly a wolf-thing.

“‘He has put his cursed sign upon her and does even now seek her for his mate,’ I tell me after I order him away in the name of the good God.

“When Madame disappeared I was not surprised. When she returned after a night in the snow, I was less surprised. But the blood on her hands did perturb me. Was it human? Was she an all-unconscious murderess, or was it, happily, the blood of animals? I did not know. I analyzed it and discovered it were dog’s blood. ‘Very well,’ I tell me. ‘Let us see where a dog has been mauled in that vicinity.’

“This afternoon I made guarded inquiries. I find many dogs have been strangely killed in this neighborhood of late. No dog, no matter how big, was safe out of doors after nightfall.

“Also I meet a man, an *ivrogne* — what you call a drunkard — one who patronizes the leggers-of-the-boot not with wisdom, but with too great frequency. He is no more so. He have made the oath to remain sober. *Pourquoi?* Because three nights ago, as he passed through the park he were set upon by a horror so terrible that he thought he was in alcoholic delirium. It were like a man, yet not like a man. It had a long nose, and terrible eyes, and great, flashing teeth, and it did seek to kill and devour him. My friends, in his way, that former drunkard did describe the thing which tried to enter this house tonight. It were the same.

“Fortunately for the poor drunken man, he were carrying a walking cane of ash wood, and when he raised it to defend himself, the terror did shrink from him. ‘Ah ha,’ I tell me when I hear that, ‘now we know it were truly *le loup-garou*,’ for it is notorious that the wood of the ash tree is as intolerable to the werewolf as the bloom of the garlic is unpleasant to the vampire.

“What do I do? I go to the woods and cut a bundle of ash switches. Then I come here. Tonight the wolf-thing come crying for the mate who ranged the snows with him last night. He is lonely, he is mad for another of his kind. Tonight, perhaps, they will attack nobler game than dogs. Very well, I am ready.

“When Madame Evander, being drugged, did not answer his call, he was emboldened to enter the house. *Pardieu*, he

did not know Jules de Grandin awaited him! Had I not been here it might well have gone hard with Mademoiselle Ostrander. As it was” — he spread his slender hands — “there is one less man-monster in the world this night.”

Evander stared at him in round-eyed wonder. “I can’t believe it,” he muttered, “but you’ve proved your case. Poor Uncle Friedrich! The curse of the blood-flower.” He broke off, an expression of mingled horror and despair on his face. “My wife!” he gasped. “Will she become a thing like that? Will ...?”

“Monsieur,” de Grandin interrupted gently, “she *has* become one. Only the drug holds her bound in human form at this minute.”

“Oh,” Evander cried, tears of grief streaming down his face, “save her! For the love of heaven, save her! Can’t you do anything to bring her back to me?”

“You do not approve my methods,” de Grandin reminded him.

Evander was like a pleading child. “I apologize,” he whimpered. “I’ll give you anything you ask if you’ll only save her. I’m not rich, but I think I can raise fifty thousand dollars. I’ll give it to you if you’ll cure her!”

The Frenchman twisted his little blond mustache furiously. “The fee you name is attractive, Monsieur,” he remarked.

“I’ll pay it; I’ll pay it!” Evander burst out hysterically. Then, unable to control himself, he put his folded arms on the table, sank his head upon them, and shook with sobs.

“Very well,” de Grandin agreed, casting me the flicker of a wink. “Tomorrow night I shall undertake your lady’s case. Tomorrow night we attempt the cure. *Au revoir*, Monsieur. Come away, Friend Trowbridge, we must rest well before tomorrow night.”

De Grandin was silent to the point of moodiness all next morning. Toward noon he put on his outdoor clothing and left without luncheon, saying he would meet me at Evander’s that night.

He was there when I arrived and greeted me, saying that the main business would start soon.

“Meantime, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, I beg you will assist me in the kitchen. There is much to do and little time in which to do it.”

Opening a large valise he produced a bundle of slender sticks which he began splitting into strips like basket-wives, explaining that they were from a mountain ash tree. When some twenty-five of these had been prepared, he selected a number of bottles from the bottom of the satchel, and, taking a large aluminum kettle, began scouring it with a clean cloth.

“Attend me carefully, Friend Trowbridge,” he commanded; “do you keep close tally as I compound the draft, for much depends on the formula being correct. To begin.”

Arranging a pair of apothecary's scales and a graduate glass before him on the table, he handed me this memorandum.

R

3 pints pure spring water
2 drachms sulfur
½ oz. castorium
6 drachms opium
3 drachms asafoetida
½ oz. hypericum
¾ oz. aromatic ammonia
½ oz. gum camphor

As he busied himself with scales and graduate I checked the amounts he poured into the kettle. "Voilà," he announced, "we are prepared!"

Quickly he thrust the ash withes into a pailful of boiling water and proceeded to bind together a three-stranded hyssop of ash, poplar and birch twigs.

"And now, my friend, if you will assist me, we shall proceed," he asserted, thrusting a large wash pan into my hands and preparing to follow me into the dining room with the kettle of liquor he had prepared, his little brush-broom thrust under his arm.

We moved the dining room furniture against the walls, and de Grandin put the kettle of liquid in the dishpan I had brought in, piling a number of light wood chips about it, and starting a small fire. As the liquid in the kettle began bubbling and seething over the flame, he knelt and began tracing a circle about seven feet in diameter with a bit of white chalk. Inside the first circle he drew a second ring some three feet in diameter, and within this traced a star composed of two interlaced triangles. At the very center he marked down an odd-looking figure composed of a circle surmounted by a crescent and supported by a cross. "This is the Druid's foot, or pentagram," he explained, indicating the star. "The powers of evil are powerless to pass it, either from without or within. This," he pointed to the central figure, "is the sign of Mercury. It is also the sign of the Holy Angels, my friend, and the *bon Dieu* knows we shall need their kind offices this night. Compare, Friend Trowbridge, if you please, the chart I have drawn with the exemplar which I did most carefully prepare from the occult books today. I would have the testimony of both of us that I have left nothing undone."

Into my hand he thrust the following chart:

Quickly, working like one possessed, he arranged seven small silver lamps about the outer circle where the seven little rings on the

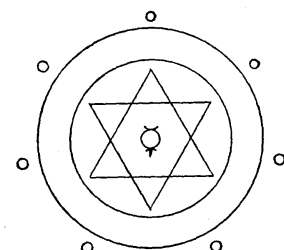


chart indicated, ignited their wicks, snapped off the electric light and, rushing into the kitchen, returned with the boiled ash withes dangling from his hand.

Fast as he had worked, there was not a moment to spare, for Miss Ostrander's hysterical call, "Dr. de Grandin, oh, Dr. de Grandin!" came down the stairs as he returned from the kitchen.

On the bed Mrs. Evander lay writhing like a person in convulsions. As we approached, she turned her face toward us, and I stopped in my tracks, speechless with the spectacle before me.

It was as if the young woman's pretty face were twisted into a grimace, only the muscles, instead of resuming their wonted positions again, seemed to stretch steadily out of place. Her mouth widened gradually till it was nearly twice its normal size, her nose seemed lengthening, becoming more pointed, and crooking sharply at the end. Her eyes, of sweet cornflower blue, were widening, becoming at once round and prominent, and changing to a wicked, phosphorescent green. I stared and stared, unable to believe the evidence of my eyes, and as I looked she raised her hands from beneath the covers, and I went sick with the horror of it. The dainty, flower-like pink-and-white hands with their well-manicured nails were transformed into a pair of withered, corded talons armed with long, hornlike, curved claws, saber-sharp and hooked like the nails of some predatory bird. Before my eyes a sweet, gently bred woman was being transfigured into a foul hell-hag, a loathsome, hideous parody of herself.

"Quickly, Friend Trowbridge, seize her, bind her!" de Grandin called, thrusting a handful of the limber withes into my grasp and hurling himself upon the monstrous thing which lay in Edith Evander's place.

The hag fought like a true member of the wolf pack. Howling, clawing, growling and snarling, she opposed tooth and nail to our efforts, but at last we lashed her wrists and ankles firmly with the wooden cords and bore her struggling frantically, down the stairs and placed her within the mystic circle de Grandin had drawn on the dining room floor.

"Inside, Friend Trowbridge, quickly!" the Frenchman ordered as he dipped the hyssop into the boiling liquid in the kettle and leaped over the chalk marks. "Mademoiselle Ostrander, Monsieur Evander, for your lives, leave the house!"

Reluctantly the husband and nurse left us and de Grandin began showering the contorting, howling thing on the floor with liquid from the boiling kettle.

Swinging his hyssop in the form of a cross above the hideous changeling's head, he uttered

some invocation so rapidly that I failed to catch the words, then, striking the wolf-woman's feet, hands, heart and head in turn with his bundle of twigs, he drew forth a small black book and began reading in a firm, clear voice: "*Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord; Lord hear my voice....*"

And at the end he finished with a great shout: "*I know that my redeemer liveth ... I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live!*"

As the words sounded through the room it seemed to me that a great cloud of shadow, like a billow of black vapor, rose from the dark corners of the apartment, eddied toward the circle of lamps, swaying their flames lambently, then suddenly gave back, evaporated and disappeared with a noise like steam escaping from a boiling kettle.

"Behold, Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin ordered, pointing to the still figure which lay over the sign of Mercury at his feet.

I bent forward, stifling my repugnance, then sighed with mingled relief and surprise. Calm as a sleeping child, Edith Evander, freed from all the hideous stigmata of the wolf-people, lay before us, her slender hands, still bound in the wooden ropes, crossed on her breast, her sweet, delicate features as though they had never been disfigured by the curse of the blood-flower.

Loosing the bonds from her wrists and feet the Frenchman picked the sleeping woman up in his arms and bore her to her bedroom above stairs.

"Do you summon her husband and the nurse, my friend," he called from the turn in the stairway. "She will have need of both anon."

"Wh — why, she's herself again!" Evander exclaimed joyfully as he leaned solicitously above his wife's bed.

"But of course!" de Grandin agreed. "The spell of evil was strong upon her, Monsieur, but the charm of good was mightier. She is released from her bondage for all time."

"I'll have your fee ready tomorrow," Evander promised diffidently. "I could not arrange the mortgages today — it was rather short notice, you know."

Laughter twinkled in de Grandin's little blue eyes like the reflection of moonlight on flowing water. "My friend," he replied, "I did make the good joke on you last night. *Parbleu*, to hear you agree to anything, and to announce that

you did trust to my methods, as well, was payment enough for me. I want not your money. If you would repay Jules de Grandin for his services, continue to love and cherish your wife as you did last night when you feared you were about to lose her. Me, *morbleu!* but I shall make the eyes of my *confrères* pop with jealousy when I tell them what I have accomplished this night. *Sang d'un poisson*, I am one very clever man, Monsieur!"

"It's all a mystery to me, de Grandin," I confessed as we drove home, "but I'm hanged if I can understand how it was that the man was transformed into a monster almost as soon as he wore those flowers, and the woman resisted the influence of the things for a week or more."

"Yes," he agreed, "that is strange. Myself, I think it was because werewolfism is an outward and visible sign of the power of evil, and the man was already steeped in sin, while the woman was pure in heart. She had what we might call a higher immunity from the virus of the blood-flower."

"And wasn't there some old legend to the effect that a werewolf could only be killed with a silver bullet?"

"Ah bah," he replied with a laugh. "What did those old legend-mongers know of the power of modern fire arms? *Parbleu*, had the good St. George possessed a military rifle of today, he might have slain the dragon without approaching nearer than a mile! When I did shoot that wolfman, my friend, I had something more powerful than superstition in my hand. *Morbleu*, but I did shoot a hole in him large enough for him to have walked through!"

"That reminds me," I added, "how are we going to explain his body to the police?"

"Explain?" he echoed with a chuckle. "*Nom d'un bouc*, we shall not explain: I, myself, did dispose of him this very afternoon. He lies buried beneath the roots of an ash tree, with a stake of ash through his heart to hold him to the earth. His sinful body will rise again no more to plague us, I do assure you. He was known to have a habit of disappearing. Very good. This time there will be no reappearance. We are through, finished, done with him for good."

We drove another mile or so in silence, then my companion nudged me sharply in the ribs. "This curing of werewolf ladies, my friend," he confided, "it is dry work. Are you sure there is a full bottle of brandy in the cellar?"

The Veiled Prophetess

“BUT, *Madame*, what you say is incredible,” Jules de Grandin was saying to a fashionably dressed young woman as I returned to the consulting room from my morning round of calls.

“It may be incredible,” the visitor admitted, “but it’s so, just the same. I tell you she was there.”

“Ah, Trowbridge, *mon cher*,” de Grandin leaped up as he beheld me in the doorway, “this is Madame Penneman. She has a remarkable story to tell.

“*Madame*,” he bowed ceremoniously to our caller, “will you have the goodness to relate your case to Dr. Trowbridge? He will be interested.”

The young lady crossed her slender, gray-silk clad legs, adjusted her abbreviated black-satin dress in a manner to cover at least a portion of her patellæ, and regarded me with the fixed, dreamy stare of a pupil reciting a lesson learned by rote.

“My name is Naomi Penneman,” she began; “my husband is Benjamin Penneman, of the chocolate importing firm of Penneman & Brixton. We have been married six months, and came to live in Harrisonville when we returned from our honeymoon trip, three months ago. We have the Barton place in Tunlaw Street.”

“Yes?” I murmured.

“I heard of Dr. de Grandin through Mrs. Norman — she said he did a wonderful piece of work in rescuing her daughter Esther from some horrible old man — so I brought my case to you. I wouldn’t dare go to the police with it.”

“U’m?” I murmured. “Just what—”

“It’s about my husband,” she went on, without giving me time to form my query. “There’s a woman — or something — trying to take him away from me!”

“Well — er — my, dear young lady, don’t you think you would better have consulted a lawyer?” I objected. “Physicians sometimes undertake to patch up leaky hearts, but they are scarcely in the business of repairing outraged affections, you know.”

“*Mais non*, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin denied with a delighted chuckle, “you do misapprehend *Madame*’s statement. Me, I think perhaps she speaks advisedly when she does say ‘a woman *or something*’ designs to alienate her husband.

“Proceed, *Madame*, if you please.”

“I graduated from Barnard in ’24,” Mrs. Penneman took up her statement, “and married Ben last year. We went on a ninety-day cruise for our wedding tour, and moved here as

soon as we came back.

“Our class had a reunion at the Allenton Thursday of Christmas week, and some of the girls were crazy about Madame Naïra, the Veiled Prophetess, a fortune-teller up in East Eighty-second Street. Thy talked about her so much the rest of us decided to pay her a call.

“I was afraid to go by myself, so I teased Ben, my husband, into going with me, and — and he’s been acting queer ever since.”

“Queer?” I echoed. “How?”

“Well” — she made a vague sort of gesture with one of her small, well-manicured hands and flushed slightly — “you know, Doctor, when two people have been married only six months the star-dust oughtn’t to be rubbed off the wings of romance, ought it? Yet Ben’s been cooler and cooler to me, commencing almost immediately after we went to see that horrid woman.”

“You mean—”

“Oh, it’s hard to put into words. Just little things, you know; none of them important in themselves, but pretty big in the aggregate. He forgets, to kiss me good-bye in the morning, stays over in New York late at night — sometimes without calling me up to let me know he won’t be home — and breaks engagements to take me places without warning. Then, when I expostulate, he pleads business.”

“But my dear madame,” I protested, “this is certainly no case for us. Not every man has the capacity for retaining romance after marriage. Mighty few of them have, I imagine. And it may easily be exactly as your husband says: his business may require his presence in New York at nights. Be reasonable, my dear; when you were first married, he might have strained a point to be home while dinner was still hot, and let his partners handle matters, but you’re really old married folks now, you know, and he has to make a living for you both. You’d best let me give you a bromide — this thing may have gotten on your nerves — and go home and forget your silly suspicions.”

“And will the bromide keep her — or it — out of my house — out of my bedroom — at night?” Mrs. Penneman asked.

“Eh, what’s that?” I demanded.

“That’s what made me call on Dr. de Grandin,” she replied. “It was bad enough when Ben took to neglecting me, but on the second of last month, while we were in bed, *I saw a woman in our room.*”

“A woman — in your bedroom?” I asked. The story

seemed more sordid than I had at first supposed.

“Well, if it wasn’t a woman it was something in the shape of one,” she replied. “I’d been pretty much upset by Ben’s actions, and had reproached him pretty severely the Sunday before when he didn’t show up to take me from the Ambersons’ reception, and he’d promised to reform.

“He did, too. For four nights, from Monday to Thursday, he’d been home to dinner on time, and Thursday night — the second — we’d been to the theater over in New York. We went to a night club after the play and came back on the owl train. It must have been one o’clock before we got home. I was awfully tired and went to bed just as soon as I could get my clothes off; but Ben was in bed first, and was sound asleep when I got into mine.

“I was just dropping off when I happened to remember he hadn’t kissed me good night — we’d rather gotten out of the habit during the last few weeks.

“I turned my covers back and was in the act of getting out of bed to lean over Ben and kiss him, when I noticed he was moaning, or talking in his sleep. Just as I put my feet to the floor, I heard him say, ‘Second, Second!’ twice, just like that, and put his hands out, as if he were pushing something away from him.

“Then I saw *her*. All at once she was standing by the door of our room, smiling at him like — like a cat smiling at a bird, if you can imagine such a thing — and walking toward him with her arms outstretched.

“I thought I was dreaming, but I wasn’t. I tell you, I saw her. She walked across the rug and stood beside him, looking down with that queer, catty smile of hers, and took both his hands in hers. He sat up in bed, and looked at her like — as he used to look at me when we were first married!

“I was spellbound for a moment, then I said, ‘Dream or no dream, she shan’t have him!’ and leaped to my feet. The woman loosed one of her hands from Ben’s and pointed her finger at me, smiling that same awful, calm smile all the time.

“‘Woman,’ she said, ‘get you gone. This man is mine, bound to me forever. He has put you away and wedded me. Be off!’ That’s just what she said, speaking in a sort of throaty voice — and then she went away.”

“How do you mean, ‘went away’?” I asked. “Did she vanish?”

“I don’t know,” Mrs. Penneman answered. “I couldn’t say whether she actually vanished or faded out like a motion picture or went through the door. She just wasn’t there when I looked again.”

“And your husband?”

“He fell right back on the pillows and went to sleep. I had to shake him in order to wake him up.”

“Shamming?”

“No-o, I don’t think so. He really seemed asleep, and he

didn’t seem to know anything about the woman when I asked him.”

“U’m?” I gave de Grandin a quick look, but there was no gleam of agreement in his round blue eyes as they encountered mine.

“Proceed, *Madame*, if you please,” he urged with a nod at our caller.

“She’s been back three times since then,” Mrs. Penneman said, “and each time she has warned me to leave. The last time — night before last — she threatened me. Said she would wither me if I did not go.”

“Tell me, *Madame*,” de Grandin broke in, “is there any condition precedent to this strange visitant’s appearance?”

“I — I don’t believe I understand,” the girl replied.

“Any particular conduct on your husband’s part which would seem to herald her approach? Does he show any signs? Or, perhaps, do you have any feelings of apprehension or presentiment before she comes?”

“No-o,” Mrs. Penneman answered thoughtfully, “no, I can’t say that — wait a moment! — yes! Every time she’s come it’s been after a period of reformation on Ben’s part, after he’s been attentive to me for several days. As long as he’s indifferent to me she stays away, but each time he begins to be his old, dear self, she makes her appearance, always very late at night or early in the morning, and always with the same command for me to leave.

“One thing more, Doctor. The last time she told me to go — the time she threatened me — I noticed Ben’s seal ring on her finger.”

“Eh, what is that?” de Grandin snapped. “His ring? How?”

“He lost his ring when we went to visit Madame Naïra. I’m sure he did, though he declares he didn’t. It was a class ring with the seal of the university on it and his class numerals imposed on the seal.”

“And how came he to lose it, if you please?”

“He was clowning,” the girl answered. “Ben was always acting like a comedian in the old days, and he was showing off when we went to the Veiled Prophetess’ that day. Really, I think the place rather impressed him and he was like a little boy whistling his way past the graveyard when he acted like a buffoon. The place was awfully weird, with a lot of Eastern bric-à-brac in the reception room where we waited for the Prophetess to see us. Ben went all around, examining everything, and seemed especially taken with the statue of a woman with a cat’s head. The thing was almost life-size, and shaped something like a mummy — it gave me the creeps, really. Ben put his hat — he was wearing a derby that day — on its head, and then slipped his seal ring on its finger. Just then the door to the Prophetess’ consulting room opened, and Ben snatched his hat off the thing’s head in a hurry, but I’m sure he didn’t get his ring back. We were

ushered into the fortune-teller's place immediately, and went out by another door, and we were so full of the stuff she'd told us that neither of us missed the ring till we were on the train coming home.

"Ben 'phoned her place next day, but they said no such ring had been found. He didn't like to confess he'd put it on the statue's finger, so he told them he must have dropped it on the floor."

"Ah?" de Grandin drew a pad of paper and a pencil toward him and scribbled a note. "And what did she tell you, this Madame Veiled Prophetess Naïra, if you please, *Madame?*"

"Oh" — the girl spread her hands — "the usual patter the fortune-tellers have. Recited my history fairly accurately, told me I'd been to Egypt — nothing wonderful in that; I was wearing a scarab Ben bought me in Cairo — and ended up with some nonsense about my having to make a big sacrifice in the near future that others might have happiness and destiny be fulfilled."

She paused, a rosy flush suffusing her face. "That frightened us a little," she confessed, "because, when she said that, we both thought maybe she meant I was going to die when — well, you see—"

"Perfectly, *Madame,*" de Grandin nodded with quick understanding. "Mankind is perpetuated by woman's going into the Valley of the Shadow of Death to fetch up new lives. Fear not, dear lady, I do assure you the Prophetess meant something quite otherwise."

"And you will help me?" she begged. "Dr. de Grandin, I—I am going to do what you said about the Valley of the Shadow this spring, and I want my husband. He is my man, my mate, and no one — *no thing* — shall take him from me. Can you make her go away? Please?"

"I shall try, *Madame,*" the little Frenchman answered gently. "I can not say I quite understand everything — yet — but I shall make your case my study. *Parbleu,* but I shall sleep not until I have reached a working hypothesis!"

"Oh, thank you; thank you!" the young matron exclaimed. "I feel ever so much easier already."

"But of course," de Grandin acquiesced, bending a smile of singular sweetness on her, "that is as it should be, *ma chère.*" He raised her fingers to his lips before escorting her from the room.

"And now, Friend Trowbridge, what do you think of our case?" he demanded when the front door had closed behind our caller.

"Since you ask me," I answered with brutal frankness, "I don't know who's the crazier, Mrs. Penneman or you; but I think you are, for you should know better. You know as well as I that illusions and hallucinations are apt to occur at any time during the puerperal period. This is a clear case of mild manic-depressive insanity. Because of her condition

this poor child has construed her husband's absorption in his business as neglect. She's a psychic type, reacting readily to external stimuli, and in her state of depression she thinks his love has failed. That's preyed on her mind till she's on the borderline of insanity, and you were very unkind to humor her in her delusions."

He rested his elbows on the desk, cupping his little pointed chin in his hands, and puffed furiously on his cigarette till its acrid, unpleasant smoke surrounded his sleek blond head in a gray nimbus. "*O, la, la,* hear him!" he chuckled. "Suppose, Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* I were to say I do not consider *la belle* Penneman mad at all. Not even one little bit. What then?"

"Humph!" I returned. "I dare say you'd have agreed with her if she'd said that statue her husband put his ring on had come to life?"

"Perhaps," he returned with an irritating grin. "Before we are through with this case, my friend, we may see stranger things than that."

Two days later he announced matter-of-factly, "Today, Friend Trowbridge, we go to interview this Madame Naïra, the Prophetess of the Veil."

"We?" I responded. "Perhaps you do, but I'll have nothing to do with the matter."

"*Pardieu,* but you will!" he replied with a laugh. "This case, my friend, promises as much adventure as any you and I have had together. Come, a spice of the unusual will be a tonic for you after an uneventful season of house-to-house calls."

"Oh, all right," I agreed grudgingly. "I'll go along, but I want you to know I don't countenance any of this foolishness. What Mrs. Penneman needs is a nerve specialist, not this clowning we're going through."

Madame Naïra's atelier in East Eighty-Second Street spoke volumes for the public's credulity. It was one of the old-fashioned brownstone front residences of two generations ago, located within a pebble's toss of Central Park, and worth its square footage in gold coin. Outside it was as like its neighbors in the block as one pea is like its fellows in the pod. Within it was a perfect example of good taste and expensive furnishings. A butler bearing all the hall-marks of having served in at least a duke's household, staidly resplendent in correct cutaway coat and striped trousers, admitted us and took the cards de Grandin handed him, inspecting them with minute care, accepted the Prophetess' fee (payable strictly in advance) and ushered us into a large and luxuriously furnished parlor.

"See here," I began as we seated ourselves in a pair of richly upholstered chairs, "if you expect to—"

A violent grimace on the Frenchman's face warned me to silence. Next moment he rose, remarking, "What a beautiful

room we have here, my friend,” and sauntered about, admiring the handsome pictures on the walls. Passing my chair he seated himself on its arm and slapped me jovially on the back, then bent close and whispered fiercely in my ear: “No talk, Friend Trowbridge; already I have discovered dictographs concealed behind nearly every picture, and I know not if they have periscope peepholes, to enable them to watch us as well. Caution! I had a friend at the French consulate make the appointment for us in his name, and I am Alphonse Charres, while you have assumed the role of William Tindell, an attorney. Remember.”

Humming a snatch of tune he began a second circuit of the room.

Before he had completed his trip a slender, dark-skinned young man in flowing blue linen robes and a huge turban of red and yellow silk appeared almost as if by magic in the drawing room doorway, beckoning us with a thin bamboo cane which he bore like a badge of office.

Casting me the flicker of a wink de Grandin fell in step behind him and followed up the stairs.

The ground floor drawing room where we had first cooled our heels was a perfect example of Occidental elegance in furniture and appointments. The room into which we were now shown was a riot of Oriental extravagance. Rugs of hues and patterns as gorgeous as the plumage of paradise birds were strewn over the floor, in some cases three deep, the plaster walls were painted in glaring reproductions of Egyptian temple scenes, and fitted here and there with niches in which stood statues of plaster, stone or metal, many of them enameled in brilliant colors.

The only article of furniture in the apartment was a long crescent-shaped bench or settee of some dark wood thickly encrusted with mother-of-pearl inlays, which stood almost in the center of the room and faced what appeared to be the entrance to another chamber.

This entrance was constructed in the form of a temple gateway, or, it seemed to me, the door to a mausoleum. Plaster blocks, made to imitate stone, had been laid like a wall about it, and on each side of the opening there rose straight, thick columns topped with lotus capitals, while a slab of flat stone reached between them, forming the pediment of the doorway. On this was engraved the Egyptian symbol of the solar disk, vulture wings spreading from right and left of it. To the left of the door crouched a terra cotta androsphinx, while on the right stood a queer-looking statue representing a woman swathed in mummy bands about her lower body, naked from the waist upward, and having the head of a lioness set upon her shoulders. One hand she held against her rather prominent bosom, grasping an instrument something like an undersized tennis racket, only, instead of strings, the open oval of the racket was fitted with transverse horizontal bars on which rows of little

bells hung. The other hand was extended as though bestowing a blessing, the long, tapering fingers widely separated.

I did not like the thing's looks. Involuntarily, even though I knew it to be only a lifeless piece of plaster and papier-mâché, I shuddered as I looked at it, and felt easier when my gaze rested elsewhere.

Straight before us the entrance to the next room opened between the pillars of the temple door. The doorway was fitted with two gates of iron grillwork, heavily gilded; behind the arabesqued iron hung curtains of royal purple silk.

At a sign from the usher we seated ourselves on the inlaid bench and faced the closed iron lattice.

“*Assez!*” de Grandin exclaimed in an irritable voice, “When you have done inspecting us, *Madame*, kindly have the goodness to admit us. We have urgent business elsewhere.” To me he whispered: “They do peer at us through the meshes of the curtain! *Mordieu*, are we beasts at the menagerie to be stared at thus?”

As though in answer to his protest the lights in the room began to grow dimmer, a deep-toned gong sounded somewhere beyond the iron gates, and the grilled doors swung back, disclosing a darkened room beyond.

“Enter!” a deep, sepulchral voice bade us, and we stepped across the threshold of Madame Naïra's consultation room.

The place was pitch-dark, for the purple curtain fell behind us, shutting out all light from the room we had left. I stood stock-still, attempting vainly to pierce the enveloping darkness with my gaze, and it seemed as though an icy wind were blowing on my face, a chilling wind, like the draft from a long-disused tunnel. Subtly, too, the odor of sandalwood and acrid tang of frankincense was wafted to my nostrils, and in the darkness before me the faint, phosphorescent glow of a cold green-blue light became visible.

Slowly the luminosity spread, gradually taking form. Through the dark it shone, cold and hard as a far-distant star viewed on a frosty night, assuming the shape of an ancient coffin. Now the effulgence gained in strength till we could make out an upright figure in the mummy case; the figure of a woman, garbed in a straight-hanging robe of silk tissue thickly sewn with silver sequins. Her hands were crossed above her breast and her face was bowed upon them so that all we could observe at first was the whiteness of her arms and shoulders and the blackness of her hair, piled coil on coil in a high coronal. As the light increased we saw her bare feet rested on the center of a horizontal crescent moon, the horns of which extended upward on each side of her.

The breeze which blew through the dark increased its force. We could hear the flutter of the silken curtain behind

us as the Prophetess raised her head and stepped majestically from her coffin, advancing toward us with a lithe, silent movement which somehow reminded me of the tread of a great, graceful leopardess.

By now the increasing light enabled us to see the woman's face was hidden in a sequin-spangled veil of the same material as her robe, and that her brows were bound with a diadem of blue-green enamel fashioned in the form of a pair of backward-bent hawk wings and bearing the circular symbol of the sun at its center.

"*Morbleu,*" I heard de Grandin murmur, "are we at the circus, perhaps?"

Seemingly unaware of our presence, the veiled woman glided noiselessly across the room till she stood a scant two yards from us, extended one of her white, jewel-decked arms and motioned us to be seated. Simultaneously a crystal sphere suddenly appeared in the dark before her, glowing with cold inward fire like a monster opal, and she sank to rest in a carved chair, her long, sinuous hands hovering and darting in fantastic gestures about and above the crystal. On each fore- and little finger there gleamed a green-jeweled ring, so that her writhing hands looked for all the world like a pair of green-eyed serpents weaving a saraband in the purple dark.

"I see," she intoned in a rich contralto voice, "I see a man who vaunts his learning; a man who dares pit his puny strength against the powers which were old when Kronos himself was young. I warn that man to meddle not with what does not concern him. I warn him not to interfere in behalf of the wife who has been put away, or cross the path of one who draws her strength from the ancient goddess of Bubastis.

"Away with you, rash upstart" — one of her long, jeweled hands suddenly rose and pointed through the shadows at de Grandin — "back to your test-tubes and your retorts, your puny science and punier learning. Go give your aid to the sick and the ailing, but espouse not the cause of the woman who has been cursed by Bast, or your life shall pay the forfeit!"

Like the closing of an eyelid the light in the crystal and the paler light about the mummy case went out, leaving the room in total blackness. There came a greater gust of air than any we had yet felt, and with it an overpowering, cloying sweetness which stifled our breath and made our eyes smart like fumes from burning pepper.

"Seize her, Friend Trowbridge!" I heard de Grandin cry, then fall to coughing and gasping as the sharp, penetrating fumes attacked his mucous membranes. Something more potent than the darkness blotted out my sight, bringing hot tears to my eyes and smothering the answering hail I would have given. About me the gloom seemed filled with tiny shimmering star-points of wicked, dancing light. I reached

blindly for the spot where the veiled woman had sat, encountered only empty space, and fell forward on my face, wrenched and racked with a fit of uncontrollable coughing.

Somewhere, far, far away, a light was shining, and in the greater distance a voice was calling my name, thinly, ineffectually, like a voice heard dimly in a dream. I sat up, rubbing my stinging eyes, and stared about me. The light which danced and flickered overhead was a city street lamp, and the voice ringing faintly in my ears was the voice of Jules de Grandin. We were sitting, the pair of us, on the curb of East Eighty-Second Street, the arc-light laughing down at us through the cold, frosty air of the winter evening. Neither of us had hat or overcoat, and de Grandin's thin, white face was already pinched with cold.

"*Nom d'un colimaçon; nom d'un coq; nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" he chattered through rattling teeth. "They have made of us one pair of fools, Friend Trowbridge. They have taken us as the fisherman takes the fish of April. Jules de Grandin, you are no more worthy to regard yourself in the mirror!"

"Whew!" I breathed, clearing my lungs of the fumes which still hung in them. "That was as sharp a trick as I ever saw, de Grandin. There must have been enough chloroform mixed with that incense to have put a dozen men away!" I got unsteadily to my feet and looked about me. We were a good two blocks from the house where Madame Naïra had hoodwinked us so neatly, though how we came there was more than I knew.

"*Parbleu,* yes," he agreed, rising and buttoning his jacket over his breast. "We were unconscious before we could so much as call the name of that Monsieur Jacques Robinson! Meantime, I famish with the cold. Can we not obtain suitable clothing?"

"H'm," I answered, "it is too late for any of the regular shops to be open, but we might get something to tide us over at one of the secondhand places in Third Avenue."

"Ha, is it so?" he replied. "By all means, then, let us do so at once, right away, immediately. *Mordieu,* me, I am likely to become a snow man at any minute. *Allons!*"

A Hebrew gentleman who dealt in cast-off garments eyed us suspiciously when we entered his musty emporium of relics, but the sight of our money quickly quieted any misgivings he might have entertained, and within half an hour, togged out in garments which almost sent their vendor into fits at their beauty and general excellence, we were seated in a taxicab proceeding toward the railway station.

"Well," I teased as we concluded our dinner that night, "you saw your Veiled Prophetess. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied!" He gave me a glare beside which the fabled basilisk's worst would have been a melting love-glance. "*Pardieu,* we shall see who shall make *un sacré singe* out of

whom before we are through! That woman — that adventuress! She did warn me not to meddle in what was not my affair. *Nom d'un veau noir*, and is not a five-hundred-franc overcoat, to say nothing whatever of a hundred-franc hat, which she stole from me — are they, perhaps, not my affair? *Morbleu*, I shall say they are, my friend! *Mais oui*, I shall make that fortune-teller of the veil eat her words. *Cordieu*, but she shall eat them to the last crumb, nor will they prove a palatable meal for her, either!”

“You’ve got to admit she drew first blood, anyhow,” I replied with a laugh.

“That is true,” he agreed, nodding gravely, “but attend me, my friend, he bleeds best who bleeds last, I do assure you.”

He was moody as a bear with a sore head all evening, and morose to the point of surliness the next day. Toward noon he took his hat and coat and left the house abruptly. “I shall return when I come back,” he told me as he hastened down the steps.

It was long after dinner time when he put in an appearance, but his face wore its usual complacent expression, and, though his eyes twinkled now and again with elfish laughter, I could not get him to tell me of his adventures during the day.

Early next morning he left the house on another mysterious errand, and the same thing occurred each day during the week. The following Monday he suddenly insisted on my accompanying him to New York, and, at his direction, we took a taxicab from the Hudson Terminal and drove northward to Columbus Circle, turning in at the entrance of Central Park.

“Ah ha, my friend,” he replied when I urged him to explain our errand, “you shall see what you shall see, and it shall be worth seeing.”

Presently, as we proceeded toward Cleopatra’s Needle, he gave me a sharp nudge in the ribs. “Observe that *moteur* yonder, my friend,” he commanded, “that one of the color of pea soup. Regard the driver and his companion, if you please.”

Our taxi leaped ahead at his sudden command to the driver, and we passed a long, low sport-model roadster driven by a young man in a heavy raccoon ulster. There was nothing remarkable about the fellow, except that he seemed more than commonly pleased with himself, but I was forced to admit that it was worth our trip to the city to view his companion. She was dark, dark with that mysterious, compelling beauty not possessed by one woman in a thousand. Despite the chill of the winter wind her cheeks showed not a touch of color, but were pale with the rich, creamy tint of old parchment, which made her vivid red lips seem all the more brilliant. Her head was small and finely

poised, and fitted with a cap of some tawny-hued fur which nestled snugly to her blue black hair with the tightness of a turban. Her eyes were long and narrow and of that peculiar shade of hazel which defies exact classification, being sometimes topaz-brown, sometimes sea-green. Her lips were full, passionate and brightly rouged, and her long, oval face and prominent cheekbones gave her a decidedly Oriental appearance. Patrician she looked, even royal, and mysterious as night-veiled Isis herself. A collar of tawny fur frothed about her slender bare throat, and her shoulders were covered by a coat of some smooth, mustard-colored pelage which glistened in the morning sunlight like the back of a seal just emerged from the water.

“By George, she’s a beauty,” I admitted, “but—”

“Yes?” de Grandin elevated his brows interrogatively. “You did say ‘but,’ my friend?”

“I was thinking I wouldn’t care to have her enmity,” I replied. “Her claws seem a bit too near the surface, and I’ll warrant they’re sharp, too.”

“*Eh bien*, you should know, *mon vieux*,” he replied with a chuckle. “You have felt them.”

“What — you mean—?”

“Nothing less. The lady is none other than our friend, Madame Naïra, the Veiled Prophetess.”

“And the man—?”

“Is Benjamin Penneman, the husband of our client, Madame Penneman.”

“Oh, so he *is* running about with Madame Naïra?” I replied. “His poor little wife—”

“Will have him back, and on his knees, to boot, or Jules de Grandin is a greater fool than Madame Naïra made of him the other night,” he cut in. “Attend me, Friend Trowbridge. After our so humiliating fiasco at the house of the Prophetess that night, I was like a caged beast who sees her young slain before her eyes. Only desire for revenge actuated me, and I could not think clearly for my madness. Then I calmed myself. ‘Jules de Grandin, you great zany,’ I said to me, ‘if you are to overcome the enemy, you must think, and to think you must have the clear brain. Control yourself.’

“And so I did. I went to New York and proceeded to play detective on the trail of this unfaithful husband. Where he went I went. When he stopped I stopped. *Parbleu*, but he led me a merry chase! He is active, that one.

“At last, however, my patience reaped its deserved reward. I did see him go to that accursed house in Eighty-Second Street and come out with that woman. Again and again I did follow him, and always my trail led to the same burrow. *Triomphe!* I told me. ‘We have at last established this lady’s identity.’ Today I did but bring you to see her that you might recognize her face without its veil. Tonight we begin our work of turning her temporary victory into

crushing defeat.”

“How are you going to pay her off?” I asked. “Name her as correspondent in a divorce suit?”

“*Non, non, non!*” he grinned at me. “All in good time, my friend. I have first planned my work; you shall now observe me as I work my plan. This very night I do begin.” Nor could I get any further information from him.

For three consecutive nights de Grandin watched our telephone as a cat mounts vigil over a rat-hole. On the fourth night, as we were preparing to go upstairs to bed, the bell rang, and he snatched the receiver from the hook before the little clapper had ceased to vibrate against the gongs.

“*Allo, allo!*” he called excitedly through the mouthpiece. “But yes; most certainly. Immediately, at once, right away!”

“Trowbridge, my friend, come with me. Come and see the game we have caught in our trap. Death of my life, but that Madame Penneman is one clever woman!”

Waving away my questions, he hustled me into hat and coat and fairly dragged me to the automobile, urging more and more speed as we bowled along the road to the Penneman house.

Disdaining to knock, he burst the front door open and hurried up the stairs, turning unerringly down the upper hall and pushing open the first door to the right.

An amazing scene greeted us. The room was a tastefully furnished bedchamber, pieces of mahogany, well chosen rugs and shaded lamps giving it the air of intimacy such apartments have at their best. Against the farther wall, opposite the dressing table, stood a pair of twin beds, and on the nearer one lay the pajama-clad form of the young man we had seen driving in the park a few days before. Obviously, he was asleep, and, quite as obviously his sleep was troubled, for he tossed and moaned restlessly, turning his head from side to side on the pillow, and once or twice attempting to rise to a sitting posture.

In the niche beside the windows, beside the telephone table, crouched Mrs. Penneman, clad in a negligée of orchid silk, her frightened eyes turning now on her sleeping husband, now on something which occupied the center of the room.

I followed her gaze as it swerved from the man on the bed and gasped in astonishment, then rubbed my eyes in wonder and gasped again. A circle of holly leaves, some six feet in diameter, lay upon the rug, and within it, half nebulous, like a ghost, but plainly visible, cowered the form of Madame Naïra, the Veiled Prophetess. She was clad as we had first seen her, in a diaphanous one-piece garment of midnight blue silk encrusted with tiny bright metal plates, and on her head was the crown of Egypt’s royalty. But the veil was gone from her face, and if ever I beheld loathsome, inhuman hatred on human countenance, it sat upon the beautiful features of the fortune-teller. Her green eyes were no longer

narrow, but opened to their greatest compass, round and flashing with fury, and her red mouth was squared like the grimacing of an old Greek tragic mask or those hideous carved heads made by the natives of Fiji. Now she extended her hands, long, slender and red-nailed, and now she beat her breasts with clenched fists. Again she opened her vivid lips and emitted gurgling sounds like the moanings of an enraged cat, or hissed with a sibilant, spitting noise, as though she were in very truth a cat and no woman at all.

“*Très bien, Madame,*” de Grandin bowed to Mrs. Penneman, “I see you have caught the marauder.”

He turned nonchalantly to the hissing fury inside the circle of holly leaves. “I believe you did warn me not to pit my strength — my puny strength — against one who drew her power from the goddess of Bubastis?” he asked mockingly. “You have some further warnings to give, *n’est-ce-pas, Madame?*”

“Let me go; let me go!” she begged, stretching her hands out to him supplicatingly.

“Eh, what is this? You do beg deliverance of me?” he replied in mock misunderstanding. “Were you not about to forfeit my so worthless life if I continued to espouse the cause of the wife who had been put away? *Eh bien, Madame Cat, you purr a different tune tonight, it would seem.*”

“Benjamin, Benjamin,” the prisoned woman screamed. “Help me, my husband, my lover! See, by the ring I hold you with, I implore your aid!”

The man on the bed stirred uneasily and moaned in his sleep, but did not wake or rise.

“I fear my puny science has bested you, Madame Cat,” de Grandin put in. “Your husband-lover is bound in a spell which I did conjure up from a bottle, and not all your magic can overcome it. Seek no help from him. I, Jules de Grandin, rule here!”

With that his cloak of sarcasm fell from him, and he faced her with a visage as savage and implacable as her own. “You — you would come into honest women’s houses and take their men!” he fairly spat at her. “You would thrust your unclean magic between a man and the mother-to-be of his child! You — *mordieu* — you would steal the hat and coat of Jules de Grandin! Look not for mercy from me. Till cock-crow I shall hold you here, and then—” He elevated his shoulders in an expressive shrug.

“No, no; not that!” she begged, and her voice sank from a wail to a whimper. “See, I will give back his ring. I will release him from my charm — only let me go; let me go!”

“I make no promises to such as you,” he responded, but the self-satisfied twinkle in his little blue eyes, and the half-checked gesture of his right hand as it rose to caress his trimly waxed blond mustache betrayed him.

The woman redoubled her entreaties. She sank to her knees and lowered her forehead to the floor. “Master!” she exclaimed. “I am your slave, your conquest. You have won.

Show me mercy, and I will swear by the head of Bast, my mother, never to trouble this man or this woman again!”

“*Tiens*,” this time his hand would not be denied. It rose automatically to his mustache and tweaked the waxed end viciously. “Give back the ring, then, and go in peace. And make sure that you send us those hats and those overcoats which you did so unwisely steal from us.”

She tossed a heavy gold seal ring across the intervening hedge of holly, and de Grandin bent forward, retrieving the trinket, before he displaced one of the green twigs with the toe of his boot.

There was a noise like steam escaping from an overheated teakettle, and the woman on the floor seemed suddenly to elongate, to draw out into a vapory nothingness, and vanish like a puff of smoke before a freshening breeze.

“Here, *Madame*,” de Grandin bowed gallantly, French fashion, from the hips, as he extended the seal to Mrs. Penneman. “Do you place this upon your husband’s finger and bid him be more careful in future. He will wake anon, and have no memory of the thralldom in which he has been held. Blame him not. He signed himself into slavery to a thing which was old — and very wicked — when time was still a youth.”

Mrs. Penneman bent above her husband and slipped the golden circlet on the little finger of his left hand, then leaned forward and kissed him on the mouth. “My boy, my poor, sweet boy,” she murmured, as gently as a mother might croon above her babe.

“Isn’t he wonderful?” she asked de Grandin.

“Undoubtedly, *Madame*,” the Frenchman agreed with a quick bow. “Did he not have the rare judgment to pick you for a helpmeet? But me, I think I am a little wonderful, too.” He twisted first one, then the other end of his mustache till the waxed points stood out from his lips like the whiskers of a belligerent tom-cat.

“Of course you are — you’re a darling!” she agreed enthusiastically, and before he was aware of her intention, she put her hands upon his shoulders and kissed him soundly first on one cheek, then the other, finally upon the lips.

“*Pardieu*, Friend Trowbridge, I think it is high time we did leave these reunited lovers together!” he exclaimed, his little eyes dancing like sunlight reflected on running water. “Come, my friend, let us go. *Allez-vous-en!*”

“*Bonne nuit, Madame!*”

“For the love of heaven, de Grandin.” I demanded as we drove home, “what have I been seeing, or have I dreamed it all? Was that really Madame Naïra in the Pennemans’ bedroom, and if it were—?”

“Ha!” he gave a short, delighted laugh. “Did I not tell you you should see what you should see, and that it would be worth seeing?”

“Never mind the showmanship,” I cut in. “Just explain all this crazy business — if you can.”

“*Eh bien*, that can also be arranged,” he replied. “Listen, my friend. The average man will tell you there are no such things as witches, and he will, perhaps, be right in the main, but he will also be wrong. From the very birth of time there have been forces — evil forces, *parbleu!* — which the generality of men wisely forbore to understand or to know, but which a few sought out and allied themselves with for their own wicked advantage.

“These gods of ancient times, now — what were they but such forces? Nothing. Zeus, Apollo, Osiris, Ptah, Isis, Bast — such things are but names; they describe certain vaguely understood, but nonetheless potent forces. *Pardieu*, there is, no God but God, my friend; the rest are — who knows what?”

“Now, when your countrymen hanged each other in Salem town in the winter of 1692, they undoubtedly killed many innocent persons, but their basic idea was right. There were then, there have always been, and there still are certain servants of that evil entity, or combination of entities, which we call Satan.

“This Madame Naïra, she was one. *Cordieu*, she was a very great one, indeed.

“In some way, I know not how, she had become adept in using certain principles of evil for her ends, and set up in business as a fortune-teller in the world’s richest city. Before our time there were thousands such in Thebes, Babylon, Ilium and Rome. Always these evil ones follow the course of the river of gold.”

“And you mean to tell me Penneman actually married her when he put his ring on that statue’s hand?” I asked, incredulously.

“*Mais non*, he did not wed her, for true marriage is a spiritual linking of the souls, my friend, but he did put himself in her power, for when he had gone she took the ring he left and kept it, and having such an intimately personal possession of his, she also acquired a powerful hold on its owner.

“The first clue I had to the true state of affairs was when Madame Penneman related the incident of the strange woman’s appearance in her chamber. Already she had told of the incident of the missing ring, and when she declared her husband exclaimed ‘Second, Second!’ in his sleep as the sorceress bent above him, at once I knew that what he said was not ‘Second,’ but ‘Sechet,’ which is another name for Bast, the cat-headed goddess.

“‘Very good,’ I tell me, ‘we have here a votary of that cruel half woman, half cat, which reigned in olden times along the banks of the Nile. We shall see how we can defeat her.’”

“I then undertook to ascertain what the young Penneman did while he neglected his wife. *Parbleu*, his time and

money were lavished like water on that veiled woman for whose smile he forsook her he had sworn to love and cherish!"

"Then there really was a liaison between him and Madame Naïra?" I asked.

"Yes — yes, and no," he replied ambiguously. "For the touch of her lower lip he would have walked barefoot over miles of broken glass, yet he knew not what he did while doing it. His state was something akin to that of one under hypnosis — conscious of his acts and deeds while doing them, entirely unaware of them afterward. A sort of externally induced amnesia, it was.

"These things puzzled me much, but still I was unwilling to concede the woman possessed more than ordinary powers. 'We shall see this Veiled Prophetess,' I tell me. 'Friend Trowbridge and I shall interview her under assumed names, and prove to ourselves that she is but a charlatan.'

"*Eh bien*, we did see much. We did see the loss of our hats and overcoats!"

"But if Madame Naïra knew at once who you were and that you were fighting her, how was it she could not avoid the trap — and, by the way, what was that trap?" I demanded.

"I can not say," he responded. "Perhaps there are limitations on her powers of divination. It may well be that she could read my thoughts even to my name, when we were face to face, yet could not project herself through space to observe what I planned while away from her. Were not those other witches of olden times unable to say when the officers of the law were descending on them, and so were taken to perish at the stake?"

"As for the trap we set, my friend, it was simple. That was not the Veiled Prophetess herself you did behold in Madame Penneman's room, but her simulacrum — her projection. It is possible for those people, by taking thought, to project their likenesses at great distances, but always they must be where there is sympathetic atmosphere. This the witch woman already had, because she had bound Benjamin Penneman in her spell. At will she could assume the likeness of herself in his room, or anywhere he happened to be, while her living body lay, as though locked in sleep, miles away. That explains how it is she vanished so mysteriously after warning Madame Penneman on her previous visits.

"But, *grâce à Dieu*, for all ill there is a remedy, if we can but find it. I bethought me. 'Is it not likely,' I ask me, 'that the things which charm away those other evil people, the werewolves and the vampires, will also prevent the free movement of the projection of a witch?'

"*Morbleu*, but it is most probable,' I reply to me, and so I set about my work.

"First I did give to Madame Penneman a harmless drug — a hypnotic — to mix with the food and drink of her husband. That will induce a seemingly natural sleep, and hold him fast away from the wicked Madame Naïra. Very good. The first night the plan did work well, the second and third, also.

"Heretofore this woman have come in her spiritual likeness to charm her lover back when he have returned to his wife. I make sure she will do so again, and I have prepared a barrier which I think she can not pass. It is made of the wicks of blessed candles and on it are strung many leaves and twigs of holly — holly, the Christmas bloom, the touch of which is intolerable to evil spirits and over which they can not pass.

"When the projection of Madame Naïra comes to Penneman's house to-night, Madame Penneman does surround it suddenly with the ring of holly. Then she calls me. Had it been the real Naïra in the flesh, she could have stepped over the holly, but her projection, being spirit — and evil spirit, at that — was powerless to move. Also, my friend, I well knew that if I did but keep that spiritual seeming of the real Naïra away from her body until the crowing of the cock it might have great difficulty in returning to its habitation, and would, perhaps, be forced to wander forever through space. The flesh of Madame Naïra would, as we say, die, for there would be no spirit to animate it.

"Therefore, I was in position to bargain with her, to force her to give back the ring she stole by trick from the young Penneman and to quit the house and the lives of those young people forevermore."

"But why didn't you keep her in the holly circle, if what you say is true?" I asked. "Surely, she would be better dead."

"What!" he demanded. "And leave her evil spirit, freed from the bonds of flesh, to walk the earth by night? Not I, my friend. In the flesh she had certain restrictions; dying a natural death she shall probably return to that unpleasant place from whence she came; but had I torn her from her body by force, she would have still held the young Penneman beneath her spell, and that would have meant death, or worse, for him. No, my friend, I did act for the best, I assure you.

"Br-r-r-r!" he shivered and pulled a comic face as I brought the car to a stop before my door. "I do still shake like a little wet dog from that experience when she stole my coat, Friend Trowbridge," he announced. "Come, a long drink of your so excellent sherry before we go to bed! It will start the blood to flowing through my frozen veins once more."

The Curse of Everard Maundy

“**M**ORT D’UN CHAT! I do not like this!” Jules de Grandin slammed the evening paper down upon the table and stared ferociously at me through the lamplight.

“What’s up now?” I asked, wondering vaguely what the cause of his latest grievance was. “Some reporter say something personal about you?”

“*Parbleu, non*, he would better try,” the little Frenchman replied, his round blue eyes flashing ominously. “Me, I would pull his nose and tweak his ears. But it is not of the reporter’s insolence I speak, my friend; I do not like these suicides; there are too many of them.”

“Of course there are,” I conceded soothingly, “one suicide is that much too many; people have no right to—”

“Ah bah!” he cut in. “You do misapprehend me, *mon vieux*. Excuse me one moment, if you please.” He rose hurriedly from his chair and left the room. A moment later I heard him rummaging about in the cellar.

In a few minutes he returned, the week’s supply of discarded newspapers salvaged from the dust bin in his arms.

“Now, attend me,” he ordered as he spread the sheets out before him and began scanning the columns hastily. “Here is an item from Monday’s *Journal*:

Two Motorists Die While Driving Cars

The impulse to end their lives apparently attacked two automobile drivers on the Albemarle turnpike near Lonesome Swamp, two miles out of Harrisonville, last night. Carl Planz, thirty-one years old, of Martins Falls, took his own life by shooting himself in the head with a shotgun while seated in his automobile, which he had parked at the roadside where the pike passes nearest the swamp. His remains were identified by two letters, one addressed to his wife, the other to his father, Joseph Planz, with whom he was associated in the real estate business at Martins Falls. A check for three hundred dollars and several other papers found in his pockets completed identification. The letters, which merely declared his intention to kill himself, failed to establish any motive for the act.

Almost at the same time, and within a hundred yards of the spot where Planz’s body was found by State Trooper Henry Anderson this morning, the body of Henry William Nixon, of New Rochelle, N.Y., was discovered partly sitting, partly lying on the rear seat of his automobile, an empty bottle of windshield cleaner lying on the floor beside him. It is thought this liquid, which contained a

small amount of cyanide of potassium, was used to inflict death. Police Surgeon Stevens, who examined both bodies, declared that the men had been dead approximately the same length of time when brought to the station house.

“What think you of that, my friend, hein?” de Grandin demanded, looking up from the paper with one of his direct, challenging stares.

“Why — er—” I began, but he interrupted.

“Hear this,” he commanded, taking up a second paper, “this is from the *News* of Tuesday:

Mother and Daughters Die in Death Pact

Police and heartbroken relatives are today trying to trace a motive for the triple suicide of Mrs. Ruby Westerfelt and her daughters, Joan and Elizabeth, who perished by leaping from the eighth floor of the Hotel Dolores, Newark, late yesterday afternoon. The women registered at the hotel under assumed names, went immediately to the room assigned them, and ten minutes later Miss Gladys Walsh, who occupied a room on the fourth floor, was startled to see a dark form hurtle past her window. A moment later a second body flashed past on its downward flight, and as Miss Walsh, horrified, rushed toward the window, a loud crash sounded outside. Looking out, Miss Walsh saw the body of a third woman partly impaled on the spikes of a balcony rail.

Miss Walsh sought to aid the woman. As she leaned from her window and reached out with a trembling arm she was greeted by a scream: “Don’t try! I won’t be saved; I must go with Mother and Sister!” A moment later the woman had managed to free herself from the restraining iron spikes and fell to the cement area-way four floors below.

“And here is still another account, this one from tonight’s paper,” he continued, unfolding the sheet which had caused his original protest:

High School Co-ed Takes Life in Attic

The family and friends of Edna May McCarty, fifteen-year-old co-ed of Harrisonville High School, are at a loss to assign a cause for her suicide early this morning. The girl had no love affairs, as far as is known, and had not failed in her examinations. On the contrary, she had passed the school’s latest test with flying colors. Her mother told investigating police officials that overstudy might have temporarily unbalanced the child’s mind. Miss McCarty’s body was found suspended from the rafters of her father’s attic by her mother this morning

when the young woman did not respond to a call for breakfast and could not be found in her room on the second floor of the house. A clothes line, used to hang clothes which were dried inside the house in rainy weather, was used to form the fatal noose.

“Now then, my friend,” de Grandin reseated himself and lighted a vile-smelling French cigarette, puffing furiously, till the smoke surrounded his sleek, blond head like a mephitic nimbus, “what have you to say to those reports? Am I not right! Are there not too many — *mordieu* entirely too many! — suicides in our city?”

“All of them weren’t committed here,” I objected practically, “and besides, there couldn’t very well be any connection between them. Mrs. Westerfelt and her daughters carried out a suicide pact, it appears, but they certainly could have had no understanding with the two men and the young girl—”

“Perhaps, maybe, possibly,” he agreed, nodding his head so vigorously that a little column of ash detached itself from his cigarette and dropped unnoticed on the bosom of his stiffly starched evening shirt. “You may be right, Friend Trowbridge, but then, as is so often the case, you may be entirely wrong. One thing I know: I, Jules de Grandin, shall investigate these cases myself personally. *Cordieu*, they do interest me! I shall ascertain what is the what here.”

“Go ahead,” I encouraged. “The investigation will keep you out of mischief,” and I returned to the second chapter of Haggard’s *The Wanderer’s Necklace*, a book which I have read at least half a dozen times, yet find as fascinating at each rereading as when I first perused its pages.

The matter of the six suicides still bothered him next morning. “Trowbridge, my friend,” he asked abruptly as he disposed of his second helping of coffee and passed his cup for replenishment, “why is it that people destroy themselves?”

“Oh,” I answered evasively, “different reasons, I suppose. Some are crossed in love, some meet financial reverses and some do it while temporarily deranged.”

“Yes,” he agreed thoughtfully, “yet every self-murderer has a real or fancied reason for quitting the world, and there is apparently no reason why any of these six poor ones who hurled themselves into outer darkness during the past week should have done so. All, apparently, were well provided for, none of them, as far as is known, had any reason to regret the past or fear the future; yet”—he shrugged his narrow shoulders significantly — “*voilà*, they are gone!

“Another thing: At the *Faculté de Médecine Légal* and the *Sûreté* in Paris we keep most careful statistics, not only on the number, but on the manner of suicides. I do not think your Frenchman differs radically from your American when it comes to taking his life, so the figures for one nation may

well be a signpost for the other. These self-inflicted deaths, they are not right. They do not follow the rules. Men prefer to hang, slash or shoot themselves; women favor drowning, poison or gas; yet here we have one of the men taking poison, one of the women hanging herself, and three of them jumping to death. *Nom d’un canard*, I am not satisfied with it!”

“H’m, neither are the unfortunate parties who killed themselves, if the theologians are to be believed,” I returned.

“You speak right,” he returned, then muttered dreamily to himself: “Destruction — destruction of body and imperilment of soul — *mordieu*, it is strange, it is not righteous!” He disposed of his coffee at a gulp and leaped from his chair. “I go!” he declared dramatically turning toward the door.

“Where?”

“Where? Where should I go, if not to secure the history of these so puzzling cases? I shall not rest nor sleep nor eat until I have the string of the mystery’s skein in my hands.” He paused at the door, a quick, elfin smile playing across his usually stern features. “And should I return before my work is complete,” he suggested, “I pray you, have the excellent Nora prepare another of her so magnificent apple pies for dinner.”

Forty seconds later the front door clicked shut, and from the dining room’s oriel window I saw his neat little figure, trimly encased in blue chinchilla and gray worsted, pass quickly down the sidewalk, his ebony cane hammering a rapid tattoo on the stones as it kept time to the thoughts racing through his active brain.

“I am desolated that my capacity is exhausted,” he announced that evening as he finished his third portion of deep-dish apple pie smothered in pungent rum sauce and regarded his empty plate sadly. “*Eh bien*, perhaps it is as well. Did I eat more I might not be able to think clearly, and clear thought is what I shall need this night, my friend. Come; we must be going.”

“Going where?” I demanded.

“To hear the reverend and estimable Monsieur Maundy deliver his sermon.”

“Who? Everard Maundy?”

“But of course, who else?”

“But — but,” I stammered, looking at him incredulously, “why should we go to the tabernacle to hear this man? I can’t say I’m particularly impressed with his system, and — aren’t you a Catholic, de Grandin?”

“Who can say?” he replied as he lighted a cigarette and stared thoughtfully at his coffee cup. “My father was a Huguenot of the Huguenots; a several times great-grand sire of his cut his way to freedom through the Paris streets on the fateful night of August 24, 1572. My mother was convent-

bred, and as pious as anyone with a sense of humor and the gift of thinking for herself could well be. One of my uncles — he for whom I am named — was like a blood brother to Darwin the magnificent, and Huxley the scarcely less magnificent, also. Me, I am” — he elevated his eyebrows and shoulders at once and pursed his lips comically — “what should a man with such a heritage be, my friend? But come, we delay, we tarry, we lose time. Let us hasten. I have a fancy to bear what this Monsieur Maundy has to say, and to observe him. See, I have here tickets for the fourth row of the hall.”

Very much puzzled, but never doubting that something more than the idle wish to hear a sensational evangelist urged the little Frenchman toward the tabernacle, I rose and accompanied him.

“*Parbleu*, what a day!” he sighed as I turned my car toward the downtown section. “From coroner’s office to undertakers’ I have run; and from undertakers’ to hospitals. I have interviewed everyone who could shed the smallest light on these strange deaths, yet I seem no further advanced than when I began. What I have found out serves only to whet my curiosity; what I have not discovered—” He spread his hands in a world-embracing gesture and lapsed into silence.

The Jachin Tabernacle, where the Rev. Everard Maundy was holding his series of non-sectarian revival meetings, was crowded to overflowing when we arrived, but our tickets passed us through the jostling crowd of half-skeptical, half-believing people who thronged the lobby, and we were soon ensconced in seats where every word the preacher uttered could be heard with ease.

Before the introductory hymn had been finished, de Grandin mumbled a wholly unintelligible excuse in my ear and disappeared up the aisle, and I settled myself in my seat to enjoy the service as best I might.

The Rev. Mr. Maundy was a tall, hatchet-faced man in early middle life, a little inclined to rant and make use of worked-over platitudes, but obviously sincere in the message he had for his congregation. From the half-cynical attitude of a regularly enrolled church member who looks on revivals with a certain disdain, I found myself taking keener and keener interest in the story of regeneration the preacher had to tell, my attention compelled not so much by his words as by the earnestness of his manner and the wonderful stage presence the man possessed. When the ushers had taken up the collection and the final hymn was sung, I was surprised to find we had been two hours in the tabernacle. If anyone had asked me, I should have said half an hour would have been nearer the time consumed by the service.

“Eh, my friend, did you find it interesting?” de Grandin asked as he joined me in the lobby and linked his arm in mine.

“Yes, very,” I admitted, then, somewhat sulkily: “I thought you wanted to hear him, too — it was your idea that we came here — what made you run away?”

“I am sorry,” he replied with a chuckle which belied his words, “but it was *necessaire* that I fry other fish while you listened to the reverend gentleman’s discourse. Will you drive me home?”

The March wind cut shrewdly through my overcoat after the superheated atmosphere of the tabernacle, and I felt myself shivering involuntarily more than once as we drove through the quiet streets. Strangely, too, I felt rather sleepy and ill at ease. By the time we reached the wide, tree-bordered avenue before my house I was conscious of a distinctly unpleasant sensation, a constantly-growing feeling of malaise, a sort of baseless, irritating uneasiness. Thoughts of years long forgotten seemed summoned to my memory without rime or reason. An incident of an unfair advantage I had taken of a younger boy while at public school, recollections of petty, useless lies and bits of naughtiness committed when I could not have been more than three came flooding back on my consciousness, finally an episode of my early youth which I had forgotten some forty years.

My father had brought a little stray kitten into the house, and I, with the tiny lad’s unconscious cruelty, had fallen to teasing the wretched bundle of bedraggled fur, finally tossing it nearly to the ceiling to test the tale I had so often heard that a cat always lands on its feet. My experiment was the exception which demonstrated the rule, it seemed, for the poor, half-starved feline hit the hardwood floor squarely on its back, struggled feebly a moment, then yielded up its entire ninefold expectancy of life.

Long after the smart of the whipping I received in consequence had been forgotten, the memory of that unintentional murder had plagued my boyish conscience, and many were the times I had awakened at dead of night, weeping bitter repentance out upon my pillow.

Now, some forty years later, the thought of that kitten’s death came back as clearly as the night the unkempt little thing thrashed out its life upon our kitchen floor. Strive as I would, I could not drive the memory from me, and it seemed as though the unwitting crime of my childhood was assuming an enormity out of all proportion to its true importance.

I shook my head and passed my hand across my brow, as a sleeper suddenly wakened does to drive away the lingering memory of an unpleasant dream, but the kitten’s ghost, like Banquo’s, would not down.

“What is it, Friend Trowbridge?” de Grandin asked as he eyed me shrewdly.

“Oh, nothing,” I replied as I parked the car before our door and leaped to the curb, “I was just thinking.”

“Ah?” he responded on a rising accent. “And of what do

you think, my friend? Something unpleasant?"

"Oh, no; nothing important enough to dignify by that term," I answered shortly, and led the way to the house, keeping well ahead of him, lest he push his inquiries farther.

In this, however, I did him wrong. Tactful women and Jules de Grandin have the talent of feeling without being told when conversation is unwelcome, and besides wishing me a pleasant good-night, he spoke not a word until we had gone upstairs to bed. As I was opening my door, he called down the hall, "Should you want me, remember, you have but to call."

"Humph!" I muttered ungraciously as I shut the door. "Want him? What the devil should I want him for?" And so I pulled off my clothes and climbed into bed, the thought of the murdered kitten still with me and annoying me more by its persistence than by the faint sting of remorse it evoked.

How long I had slept I do not know, but I do know I was wide awake in a single second, sitting up in bed and staring through the darkened chamber with eyes which strove desperately to pierce the gloom.

Somewhere — whether far or near I could not tell — a cat had raised its voice in a long-drawn, wailing cry, kept silence a moment, then given tongue again with increased volume.

There are few sounds more eery to hear in the dead of night than the cry of a prowling feline, and this one was of a particularly sad, almost reproachful tone.

"Confound the beast!" I exclaimed angrily, and lay back on my pillow, striving vainly to recapture my broken sleep.

Again the wail sounded, indefinite as to location, but louder, more prolonged, even, it seemed, fiercer in its timbre than when I first heard it in my sleep.

I glanced toward the window with the vague thought of hurling a book or boot or other handy missile at the disturber, then held my breath in sudden affright. Staring through the aperture between the scrim curtains was the biggest, most ferocious-looking tom-cat I had ever seen. Its eyes, seemingly as large as butter dishes, glared at me with the green phosphorescence of its tribe, and with an added demoniacal glow the like of which I had never seen. Its red mouth, opened to full compass in a venomous, soundless "spit," seemed almost as large as that of a lion, and the wicked, pointed ears above its rounded face were laid back against its head, as though it were crouching for combat.

"Get out! Scat!" I called feebly, but making no move toward the thing.

"S-s-s-sssh!" a hiss of incomparable fury answered me, and the creature put one heavy, padded paw tentatively over the window-sill, still regarding me with its unchanging, hateful stare.

"Get!" I repeated, and stopped abruptly. Before my eyes

the great beast was *growing*, increasing in size till its chest and shoulders completely blocked the window. Should it attack me I would be as helpless in its claws as a Hindoo under the paws of a Bengal tiger.

Slowly, stealthily, its cushioned feet making no sound as it set them down daintily, the monstrous creature advanced into the room, crouched on its haunches and regarded me steadily, wickedly, malevolently.

I rose a little higher on my elbow. The great brute twitched the tip of its sable tail warningly, half lifted one of its forepaws from the floor, and set it down again, never shifting its sulfurous eyes from my face.

Inch by inch I moved my farther foot from the bed, felt the floor beneath it, and pivoted slowly in a sitting position until my other foot was free of the bedclothes. Apparently the cat did not notice my strategy, for it made no menacing move till I flexed my muscles for a leap, suddenly flung myself from the bedstead, and leaped toward the door.

With a snarl, white teeth flashing, green eyes glaring, ears laid back, the beast moved between me and the exit, and began slowly advancing on me, hate and menace in every line of its giant body.

I gave ground before it, retreating step by step and striving desperately to hold its eyes with mine, as I had heard hunters sometimes do when suddenly confronted by wild animals.

Back, back I crept, the ogreish visitant keeping pace with my retreat, never suffering me to increase the distance between us.

I felt the cold draft of the window on my back; the pressure of the sill against me; behind me, from the waist up, was the open night, before me the slowly advancing monster.

It was a thirty-foot drop to a cemented roadway, but death on the pavement was preferable to the slashing claws and grinding teeth of the terrible thing creeping toward me.

I threw one leg over the sill, watching constantly, lest the cat-thing leap on me before I could cheat it by dashing myself to the ground —

"Trowbridge, *mon Dieu*, Trowbridge, my friend! What is it you would do?" The frenzied hail of Jules de Grandin cut through the dark and a flood of light from the hallway swept into the room as he flung the door violently open and raced across the room, seizing my arm in both hands and dragging me from the window.

"Look out, de Grandin!" I screamed. "The cat! It'll get you!"

"Cat?" he echoed, looking about him uncomprehendingly. "Do you say 'cat', my friend? A cat will get me? *Mort d'un chou*, the cat which can make a mouse of Jules de Grandin is not yet whelped! Where is it, this cat of yours?"

“There! Th—” I began, then stopped, rubbing my eyes. The room was empty. Save for de Grandin and me there was nothing animate in the place.

“But it *was* here,” I insisted. “I tell you, I saw it; a great, black cat, as big as a lion. It came in the window and crouched right over there, and was driving me to jump to the ground when you came—”

“*Nom d’un porc!* Do you say so?” he exclaimed, seizing my arm again and shaking me. “Tell me of this cat, my friend. I would learn more of this puss-puss who comes into Friend Trowbridge’s house, grows great as a lion and drives him to his death on the stones below. Ha, I think maybe the trail of these mysterious deaths is not altogether lost! Tell me more, *mon ami*; I would know all — all!”

“Of course, it was just a bad dream,” I concluded as I finished the recital of my midnight visitation, “but it seemed terribly real to me while it lasted.”

“I doubt it not,” he agreed with a quick, nervous nod. “And on our way from the tabernacle tonight, my friend, I noticed you were much *distract*. Were you, perhaps, feeling ill at the time?”

“Not at all,” I replied. “The truth is, I was remembering something which occurred when I was a lad four or five years old; something which had to do with a kitten I killed,” and I told him the whole wretched business.

“U’m?” he commented when I had done. “You are a good man, Trowbridge, my friend. In all your life, since you attained to years of discretion, I do not believe you have done a wicked or ignoble act.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” I returned, “we all—”

“*Parbleu*, I have said it. That kitten incident, now, is probably the single tiny skeleton in the entire closet of your existence, yet sustained thought upon it will magnify it even as the cat of your dream grew from cat’s to lion’s size. *Pardieu*, my friend, I am not so sure you did dream of that abomination in the shape of a cat which visited you. Suppose—” he broke off, staring intently before him, twisting first one, then the other end of his trimly waxed mustache.

“Suppose what?” I prompted.

“*Non*, we will suppose nothing tonight,” he replied. “You will please go to sleep once more, my friend, and I shall remain in the room to frighten away any more dream-demons which may come to plague you. Come, let us sleep. Here I do remain.” He leaped into the wide bed beside me and pulled the down comforter snugly up about his pointed chin.

“... and I’d like very much to have you come right over to see her, if you will,” Mrs. Weaver finished. “I can’t imagine whatever made her attempt such a thing — she’s

never shown any signs of it before.”

I hung up the telephone receiver and turned to de Grandin. “Here’s another suicide, or almost-suicide, for you,” I told him half teasingly. “The daughter of one of my patients attempted her life by hanging in the bathroom this morning.”

“*Par la tête bleu*, do you tell me so?” he exclaimed eagerly. “I go with you, *cher ami*. I see this young woman; I examine her. Perhaps I shall find some key to the riddle there. *Parbleu*, me, I itch, I burn, I am all on fire with this mystery! Certainly, there must be an answer to it; but it remains hidden like a peasant’s pig when the tax collector arrives.”

“Well, young lady, what’s this I hear about you?” I demanded severely as we entered Grace Weaver’s bedroom a few minutes later. “What on earth have you to die for?”

“I — I don’t know what made me want to do it, Doctor,” the girl replied with a wan smile. “I hadn’t thought of it before — ever. But I just got to — oh, you know, sort of brooding over things last night, and when I went into the bathroom this morning, something — something inside my head, like those ringing noises you hear when you have a head-cold, you know — seemed to be whispering, ‘Go on, kill yourself; you’ve nothing to live for. Go on, do it!’ So I just stood on the scales and took the cord from my bathrobe and tied it over the transom, then knotted the other end about my neck. Then I kicked the scales away and” — she gave another faint smile — “I’m glad I hadn’t locked the door before I did it,” she admitted.

De Grandin had been staring unwinkingly at her with his curiously level glance throughout her recital. As she concluded he bent forward and asked: “This voice which you heard bidding you commit an unpardonable sin, Mademoiselle, did you, perhaps, recognize it?”

The girl shuddered. “No!” she replied, but a sudden paling of her face about the lips gave the lie to her word.

“*Pardonnez-moi*, Mademoiselle,” the Frenchman returned. “I think you do not tell the truth. Now, whose voice was it, if you please?”

A sullen, stubborn look spread over the girl’s features, to be replaced a moment later by the muscular spasm which preludes weeping. “It — it sounded like Fanny’s,” she cried, and turning her face to the pillow, fell to sobbing bitterly.

“And Fanny, who is she?” de Grandin began, but Mrs. Weaver motioned him to silence with an imploring gesture.

I prescribed a mild bromide and left the patient, wondering what mad impulse could have led a girl in the first flush of young womanhood, happily situated in the home of parents who idolized her, engaged to a fine young man, and without bodily or spiritual ill of any sort, to attempt her life. Outside, de Grandin seized the mother’s

arm and whispered fiercely: “Who is this Fanny, Madame Weaver? Believe me, I ask not from idle curiosity, but because I seek vital information!”

“Fanny Briggs was Grace’s chum two years ago,” Mrs. Weaver answered. “My husband and I never quite approved of her, for she was several years older than Grace, and had such pronounced modern ideas that we didn’t think her a suitable companion for our daughter, but you know how girls are with their ‘crushes.’ The more we objected to her going with Fanny, the more she used to seek her company, and we were both at our wits’ ends when the Briggs girl was drowned while swimming at Asbury Park. I hate to say it, but it was almost a positive relief to us when the news came. Grace was almost broken-hearted about it at first, but she met Charley this summer, and I haven’t heard her mention Fanny’s name since her engagement until just now.”

“Ah?” de Grandin tweaked the tip of his mustache meditatively. “And perhaps Mademoiselle Grace was somewhere to be reminded of Mademoiselle Fanny last night?”

“No,” Mrs. Weaver replied, “she went with a crowd of young folks to hear Maundy preach. There was a big party of them at the tabernacle — I’m afraid they went more to make fun than in a religious frame of mind, but he made quite an impression on Grace, she told us.”

“*Feu de Dieu!*” de Grandin exploded, twisting his mustache furiously. “Do you tell me so, *Madame*? This is of the interest. *Madame*, I salute you,” he bowed formally to Mrs. Weaver, then seized me by the arm and fairly dragged me away.

“Trowbridge, my friend,” he informed me as we descended the steps of the Weaver portico, “this business, it has *l’odeur du poisson* — how is it you say? — the fishy smell.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“*Parbleu*, what should I mean except that we go to interview this Monsieur Everard Maundy immediately, right away, at once? *Mordieu*, I damn think I have the tail of this mystery in my hand, and may the blight of prohibition fall upon France if I do not twist it!”

The Rev. Everard Maundy’s rooms in the Tremont Hotel were not hard to locate, for a constant stream of visitors went to and from them.

“Have you an appointment with Mr. Maundy?” the secretary asked as we were ushered into the anteroom.

“Not we,” de Grandin denied, “but if you will be so kind as to tell him that Dr. Jules de Grandin, of the Paris *Sûreté*, desires to speak with him for five small minutes, I shall be in your debt.”

The young man looked doubtful, but de Grandin’s steady, catlike stare never wavered, and he finally rose and took our message to his employer.

In a few minutes he returned and admitted us to the big room where the evangelist received his callers behind a wide, flat-topped desk.

“Ah, Mr. de Grandin,” the exhorter began with a professionally bland smile as we entered, “you are from France, are you not, sir? What can I do to help you toward the light?”

“*Cordieu*, Monsieur,” de Grandin barked, for once forgetting his courtesy and ignoring the preacher’s outstretched hand, “you can do much. You can explain these so unexplainable suicides which have taken place during the past week — the time you have preached here. That is the light we do desire to see.”

Maundy’s face went mask-like and expressionless. “Suicides? Suicides?” he echoed. “What should I know of—”

The Frenchman shrugged his narrow shoulders impatiently. “We do fence with words, Monsieur,” he interrupted testily. “Behold the facts: Messieurs Planz and Nixon, young men with no reason for such desperate deeds, did kill themselves by violence; Madame Westerfelt and her two daughters, who were happy in their home, as everyone thought, did hurl themselves from an hotel window; a little schoolgirl hanged herself; last night my good friend Trowbridge, who never understandingly harmed man or beast, and whose life is dedicated to the healing of the sick, did almost take his life; and this very morning a young girl, wealthy, beloved, with every reason to be happy, did almost succeed in dispatching herself.

“Now, Monsieur *le prédicateur*, the only thing this miscellaneous assortment of persons had in common is the fact that *each of them did hear you preach the night before, or the same night, he attempted self-destruction*. That is the light we seek. Explain us the mystery, if you please.”

Maundy’s lean, rugged face had undergone a strange transformation while the little Frenchman spoke. Gone was his smug, professional smirk, gone the forced and meaningless expression of benignity, and in their place a look of such anguish and horror as might rest on the face of one who hears his sentence of damnation read.

“Don’t — don’t!” he besought, covering his writhing face with his hands and bowing his head upon his desk while his shoulders shook with deep, soul-racking sobs. “Oh, miserable me! My sin has found me out!”

For a moment he wrestled in spiritual anguish, then raised his stricken countenance and regarded us with tear-dimmed eyes. “I am the greatest sinner in the world,” he announced sorrowfully. “There is no hope for me on earth or yet in heaven!”

De Grandin tweaked the ends of his mustache alternately as he gazed curiously at the man before us. “Monsieur,” he replied at length. “I think you do exaggerate. There are

surely greater sinners than you. But if you would shrive you of the sin which gnaws your heart, I pray you shed what light you can upon these deaths, for there may be more to follow, and who knows that I shall not be able to stop them if you will but tell me all?"

"*Mea culpa!*" Maundy exclaimed, and struck his chest with his clenched fists like a Hebrew prophet of old. "In my younger days, gentlemen, before I dedicated myself to the salvaging of souls, I was a scoffer. What I could not feel or weigh or measure, I disbelieved. I mocked at all religion and sneered at all the things which others held sacred.

"One night I went to a Spiritualistic seance, intent on scoffing, and forced my young wife to accompany me. The medium was an old colored woman, wrinkled, half-blind, and unbelievably ignorant, but she had something — some secret power — which was denied the rest of us. Even I, atheist and derider of the truth that I was, could see that.

"As the old woman called on the spirits of the departed, I laughed out loud, and told her it was a fake. The negress came out of her trance and turned her deepset, burning old eyes on me. 'White man,' she said, 'yuh is gwine ter feel mighty sorry fo' dem words. Ah tells you de speerits can heah whut yuh says, an dey will take deir revenge on you an' yours — yas, an' on dem as foller yuh — till yuh wishes yo' tongue had been cut out befo' yuh said dem words dis yere night.'

"I tried to laugh at her — to curse her for a sniveling old faker — but there was something so terrible in her wrinkled old face that the words froze on my lips, and I hurried away.

"The next night my wife — my young, lovely bride — drowned herself in the river, and I have been a marked man ever since. Wherever I go it is the same. God has seen fit to open my eyes to the light of Truth and give me words to place His message before His people, and many who come to sneer at me go away believers; but wherever throngs gather to hear me bear my testimony there are always these tragedies. Tell me, gentlemen" — he threw out his hands in a gesture of surrender — "must I forever cease to preach the message of the Lord to His people? I have told myself that these self-murders would have occurred whether I came to town or not, but — is this a judgment which pursues me forever?"

Jules de Grandin regarded him thoughtfully. "Monsieur," he murmured, "I fear you make the mistakes we are all too prone to make. You do saddle *le bon Dieu* with all the sins with which the face of man is blackened. What if this were no judgment of heaven, but a curse of a very different sort, *hein?*"

"You mean the devil might be driving to overthrow the effects of my work?" the other asked, a light of hope breaking over his haggard face.

"U'm, perhaps; let us take that for our working

hypothesis," de Grandin replied. "At present we may not say whether it be devil or devilkin which dogs your footsteps; but at the least we are greatly indebted to you for what you have told. Go my friend; continue to preach the Truth as you conceive the Truth to be, and may the God of all peoples uphold your hands. Me, I have other work to do, but it may be scarcely less important." He bowed formally and, turning on his heel, strode quickly from the room.

"That's the most fantastic story I ever heard!" I declared as we entered the hotel elevator. "The idea! As if an ignorant old negress could put a curse on—"

"*Zut!*" de Grandin shut me off. "You are a most excellent physician in the State of New Jersey, Friend Trowbridge, but have you ever been in Martinique, or Haiti, or in the jungles of the Congo Belgique?"

"Of course not," I admitted, "but—"

"I have. I have seen things so strange among the *Voudois* people that you would wish to have me committed to a madhouse did I but relate them to you. However, as that Monsieur Kipling says, 'that is another story.' At the present we are pledged to the solving of another mystery. Let us go to your house. I would think, I would consider all this business-of-the-monkey. *Pardieu*, it has as many angles as a diamond cut in Amsterdam!"

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he demanded as we concluded our evening meal, "have you perhaps among your patients some young man who has met with a great sorrow recently; someone who has sustained a loss of wife or child or parents?"

I looked at him in amazement, but the serious expression on his little heart-shaped face told me he was in earnest, not making some ill-timed jest at my expense.

"Why, yes," I responded. "There is young Alvin Spence. His wife died in childbirth last June, and the poor chap has been half beside himself ever since. Thank God I was out of town at the time and didn't have the responsibility of the case."

"Thank God, indeed," de Grandin nodded gravely. "It is not easy for us, though we do ply our trade among the dying, to tell those who remain behind of their bereavement. But this Monsieur Spence; will you call on him this evening? Will you give him a ticket to the lecture of Monsieur Maundy?"

"No!" I blazed, half rising from my chair. "I've known that boy since he was a little toddler — knew his dead wife from childhood, too; and if you're figuring on making him the subject of some experiment—"

"Softly, my friend," he besought. "There is a terrible Thing loose among us. Remember the noble martyrs of science, those so magnificent men who risked their lives that

yellow fever and malaria should be no more. Was not their work a holy one? Certainly. I do but wish that this young man may attend the lecture tonight, and on my honor, I shall guard him until all danger of attempted self-murder is passed. You will do what I say?"

He was so earnest in his plea that, though I felt like an accessory before the fact in a murder, I agreed.

Meantime, his little blue eyes snapping and sparkling with the zest of the chase, de Grandin had busied himself with the telephone directory, looking up a number of addresses, culling through them, discarding some, adding others, until he had obtained a list of some five or six. "Now, *mon vieux*," he begged as I made ready to visit Alvin Spence on my treacherous errand, "I would that you convey me to the rectory of St. Benedict's Church. The priest in charge there is Irish, and the Irish have the gift of seeing things which you colder-blooded Saxons may not. I must have a confab with this good Father O'Brien before I can permit that you interview the young Monsieur Spence. *Mordieu*, me, I am a scientist; no murderer!"

I drove him past the rectory and parked my motor at the curb, waiting impatiently while he thundered at the door with the handle of his ebony walking stick. His knock was answered by a little old man in clerical garb and a face as round and ruddy as a winter apple.

De Grandin spoke hurriedly to him in a low voice, waving his hands, shaking his head, shrugging his shoulders, as was his wont when the earnestness of his argument bore him before it. The priest's round face showed first incredulity, then mild skepticism, finally absorbed interest. In a moment the pair of them had vanished inside the house, leaving me to cool my heels in the bitter March air.

"You were long enough," I grumbled as he emerged from the rectory.

"*Pardieu*, yes, just long enough," he agreed. "I did accomplish my purpose, and no visit is either too long or too short when you can say that. Now to the house of the good Monsieur Spence, if you will. *Mordieu*, but we shall see what we shall see this night!"

Six hours later de Grandin and I crouched shivering at the roadside where the winding, serpentine Albemarle Pike dips into the hollow beside the Lonesome Swamp. The wind which had been trenchant as a shrew's tongue earlier in the evening had died away, and a hard, dull bitterness of cold hung over the hills and hollows of the rolling countryside. From the wide salt marshes where the bay's tide crept up to mingle with the swamp's brackish waters twice a day there came great sheets of brumous, impenetrable vapor which shrouded the landscape and distorted commonplace objects into hideous, gigantic monstrosities.

"*Mort d'un petit bonhomme*, my friend," de Grandin

commented between chattering teeth, "I do not like this place; it has an evil air. There are spots where the very earth does breathe of unholy deeds, and by the sacred name of a rooster, this is one such. Look you at this accursed fog. Is it not as if the specters of those drowned at sea were marching up the shore this night?"

"Umph!" I replied, sinking my neck lower in the collar of my ulster and silently cursing myself for a fool.

A moment's silence, then: "You are sure Monsieur Spence must come this way? There is no other road by which he can reach his home?"

"Of course not," I answered shortly. "He lives out in the new Weiss development with his mother and sister — you were there this evening — and this is the only direct motor route to the subdivision from the city."

"Ah, that is well," he replied, hitching the collar of his greatcoat higher about his ears. "You will recognize his car — surely?"

"I'll try to," I promised, "but you can't be sure of anything on a night like this. I'd not guarantee to pick out my own — there's somebody pulling up beside the road now," I interrupted myself as a roadster came to an abrupt halt and stood panting, its headlights forming vague, luminous spots in the haze.

"*Mais oui*," he agreed, "and no one stops at this spot for any good until *It* has been conquered. Come, let us investigate." He started forward, body bent, head advanced, like a motion picture conception of an Indian on the warpath.

Half a hundred stealthy steps brought us abreast of the parked car. Its occupant was sitting back on the driving seat, his hands resting listlessly on the steering wheel, his eyes upturned, as though he saw a vision in the trailing wisps of fog before him. I needed no second glance to recognize Alvin Spence, though the rapt look upon his white, set face transfigured it almost beyond recognition. He was like a poet beholding the beatific vision of his mistress or a medieval eremite gazing through the opened portals of Paradise.

"A-a-ah!" de Grandin's whisper cut like a wire-edged knife through the silence of the fog-bound air, "do you behold it, Friend Trowbridge?"

"Wha—" I whispered back, but broke the syllable half uttered. Thin, tenuous, scarcely to be distinguished from the lazily drifting festoons of the fog itself, there was a *something* in midair before the car where Alvin Spence sat with his yearning soul looking from his eyes. I seemed to see clear through the thing, yet its outlines were plainly perceptible, and as I looked and looked again, I recognized the unmistakable features of Dorothy Spence, the young man's dead wife. Her body — if the tenuous, ethereal mass of static vapor could be called such — was bare of clothing,

and seemed imbued with a voluptuous grace and allure the living woman had never possessed, but her face was that of the young woman who had lain in Rosedale Cemetery for three-quarters of a year. If ever living man beheld the simulacrum of the dead, we three gazed on the wraith of Dorothy Spence that moment.

“Dorothy — my beloved, my dear, my dear!” the man half whispered, half sobbed, stretching forth his hands to the spirit-woman, then falling back on the seat as the vision seemed to elude his grasp when a sudden puff of breeze stirred the fog.

We could not catch the answer he received, close as we stood, but we could see the pale, curving lips frame the single word “Come!” and saw the transparent arms stretched out to beckon him forward.

The man half rose from his seat, then sank back, set his face in sudden resolution and plunged his hand into the pocket of his overcoat.

Beside me de Grandin had been fumbling with something in his inside pocket. As Alvin Spence drew forth his hand and the dull gleam of a polished revolver shone in the light from his dashboard lamp, the Frenchman leaped forward like a panther. “Stop him, Friend Trowbridge!” he called shrilly, and to the hovering vision:

“*Avaunt*, accursed one! Begone, thou exile from heaven! Away, snake-spawn!”

As he shouted he drew a tiny pellet from his inner pocket and hurled it point-blank through the vaporous body of the specter.

Even as I seized Spence’s hand and fought with him for possession of the pistol, I saw the transformation from the tail of my eye. As de Grandin’s missile tore through its unsubstantial substance, the vision-woman seemed to shrink in upon herself, to become suddenly more compact, thinner, scrawny. Her rounded bosom flattened to mere folds of leatherlike skin stretched drum-tight above staring ribs, her slender graceful hands were horrid, claw-tipped talons, and the yearning, enticing face of Dorothy Spence became a mask of hideous, implacable hate, great-eyed, thin-lipped, beak-nosed — such a face as the demons of hell might show after a million million years of burning in the infernal fires. A screech like the keening of all the owls in the world together split the fog-wrapped stillness of the night, and the monstrous thing before us seemed suddenly to shrivel, shrink to a mere spot of baleful, phosphorescent fire, and disappear like a snuffed-out candle’s flame.

Spence saw it, too. The pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers to the car’s floor with a soft thud, and his arm went limp in my grasp as he fell forward in a dead faint.

“*Parbleu*,” de Grandin swore softly as he climbed into the unconscious lad’s car. “Let us drive forward, Friend Trowbridge. We will take him home and administer a

soporific. He must sleep, this poor one, or the memory of what we have shown him will rob him of his reason.”

So we carried Alvin Spence to his home, administered a hypnotic and left him in the care of his wondering mother with instructions to repeat the dose if he should wake.

It was a mile or more to the nearest bus station, and we set out at a brisk walk, our heels hitting sharply against the frosty concrete of the road.

“What in the world was it, de Grandin?” I asked as we marched in step down the darkened highway. “It was the most horrible—”

“*Parbleu*,” he interrupted, “someone comes this way in a monstrous hurry!”

His remark was no exaggeration. Driven as though pursued by all the furies from pandemonium, came a light motor car with plain black sides and a curving top. “Look out!” the driver warned as he recognized me and came to a bumping halt. “Look out, Dr. Trowbridge, it’s walking! It got out and walked!”

De Grandin regarded him with an expression of comic bewilderment. “Now what is it that walks, *mon brave*?” he demanded. “*Mordieu*, you chatter like a monkey with a handful of hot chestnuts! What is it that walks, and why must we look out for it, *hein*?”

“Sile Gregory,” the young man answered. “He died this mornin’ an’ Mr. Johnson took him to th’ parlors to fix ’im up, an’ sent me and Joe Williams out with him this evenin’. I was just drivin’ up to th’ house, an’ Joe hopped out to give me a lift with th’ casket, an’ old Silas *got up an’ walked away!* An’ Mr. Johnson embalmed ’im this mornin’ I tell you!”

“*Nom d’un chou-fleur!*” de Grandin shot back. “And where did this so remarkable demonstration take place, *mon vieux*? Also, what of the excellent Williams, your partner?”

“I don’t know, an’ I don’t care,” the other replied. “When a dead corpse I saw embalmed this mornin’ gets outa its casket an’ walks, I ain’t gonna wait for nobody. Jump up here, if you want to go with me; I ain’t gonna stay here no longer!”

“*Bien*,” de Grandin acquiesced. “Go your way, my excellent one. Should we encounter your truant corpse, we will direct him to his waiting *bière*.”

The young man waited no second invitation, but started his car down the road at a speed which would bring him into certain trouble if observed by a state trooper.

“Now, what the devil do you make of that?” I asked. “I know Johnson, the funeral director, well, and I always thought he had a pretty levelheaded crowd of boys about his place, but if that lad hasn’t been drinking some powerful liquor, I’ll be—”

“Not necessarily, my friend,” de Grandin interrupted. “I

think it not at all impossible that he tells but the sober truth. It may well be that the dead do walk this road tonight.”

I shivered with something other than the night’s chill as he made the matter-of-fact assertion, but forbore pressing him for an explanation. There are times when ignorance is a happier portion than knowledge.

We had marched perhaps another quarter-mile in silence when de Grandin suddenly plucked my sleeve. “Have you noticed nothing, my friend?” he asked.

“What d’ye mean?” I demanded sharply, for my nerves were worn tender by the night’s events.

“I am not certain, but it seems to me we are followed.”

“Followed? Nonsense! *Who* would be following us?” I returned, unconsciously stressing the personal pronoun, for I had almost said, “What would follow us,” and the implication raised by the impersonal form sent tiny shivers racing along my back and neck.

De Grandin cast me a quick, appraising glance, and I saw the ends of his spiked mustache lift suddenly as his lips framed a sardonic smile, but instead of answering he swung round on his heel and faced the shadows behind us.

“*Holà, Monsieur le Cadavre!*” he called sharply. “Here we are, and — *sang du diable!* — here we shall stand.”

I looked at him in open-mouthed amazement, but his gaze was turned steadfastly on something half seen in the mist which lay along the road.

Next instant my heart seemed pounding through my ribs and my breath came hot and choking in my throat, for a tall, gangling man suddenly emerged from the fog and made for us at a shambling gait.

He was clothed in a long, old-fashioned double-breasted frock coat and stiffly starched shirt topped by a standing collar and white, ministerial tie. His hair was neatly, though somewhat unnaturally, arranged in a central part above a face the color and smoothness of wax, and little flecks of talcum powder still clung here and there to his eyebrows. No mistaking it! Johnson, artist that he was, had arrayed the dead farmer in the manner of all his kind for their last public appearance before relatives and friends. One look told me the horrible, incredible truth. It was the body of old Silas Gregory which stumbled toward us through the fog. Dressed, greased and powdered for its last, long rest, the thing came toward us with faltering, uncertain strides, and I noticed, with the sudden ability for minute inventory fear sometimes lends our senses, that his old, sunburned skin showed more than one brand where the formaldehyde embalming fluid had burned it.

In one long, thin hand the horrible thing grasped the helve of a farmyard ax; the other hand lay stiffly folded across the midriff as the embalmer had placed it when his professional ministrations were finished that morning.

“My God!” I cried, shrinking back toward the roadside.

But de Grandin ran forward to meet the charging horror with a cry which was almost like a welcome.

“Stand clear, Friend Trowbridge,” he warned, “we will fight this to a finish, I and It!” His little, round eyes were flashing with the zest of combat, his mouth was set in a straight, uncompromising line beneath the sharply waxed ends of his diminutive mustache, and his shoulders hunched forward like those of a practised wrestler before he comes to grips with his opponent.

With a quick, whipping motion, he ripped the razor-sharp blade of his sword-cane from its ebony sheath and swung the flashing steel in a whirring circle about his head, then sank to a defensive posture, one foot advanced, one retracted, the leg bent at the knee, the triple-edged sword dancing before him like the darting tongue of an angry serpent.

The dead thing never faltered in its stride. Three feet or so from Jules de Grandin it swung the heavy, rust-encrusted ax above its shoulder and brought it downward, its dull, lack-luster eyes staring straight before it with an impassivity more terrible than any glare of hate.

“*Sa ha!*” de Grandin’s blade flickered forward like a streak of storm lightning, and fleshed itself to the hilt in the corpse’s shoulder.

He might as well have struck his steel into a bag of meal.

The ax descended with a crushing, devastating blow.

De Grandin leaped nimbly aside, disengaging his blade and swinging it again before him, but an expression of surprise — almost of consternation — was on his face.

I felt my mouth go dry with excitement, and a queer, weak feeling hit me at the pit of the stomach. The Frenchman had driven his sword home with the skill of a practised fencer and the precision of a skilled anatomist. His blade had pierced the dead man’s body at the junction of the short head of the biceps and the great pectoral muscle, at the coracoid process, inflicting a wound which should have paralyzed the arm — yet the terrible ax rose for a second blow as though de Grandin’s steel had struck wide of the mark.

“Ah?” de Grandin nodded understandingly as he leaped backward, avoiding the ax-blade by the breadth of a hair. “*Bien. À la fin!*”

His defensive tactics changed instantly. Flickeringly his sword lashed forward, then came down and back with a sharp, whipping motion. The keen edge of the angular blade bit deeply into the corpse’s wrist, laying bare the bone. Still the ax rose and fell and rose again.

Slash after slash de Grandin gave, his slicing cuts falling with almost mathematical precision in the same spot, shearing deeper and deeper into his dreadful opponent’s wrist. At last, with a short, clucking exclamation, he drew his blade sharply back for the last time, severing the ax-hand

from the arm.

The dead thing collapsed like a deflated balloon at his feet as hand and ax fell together to the cement roadway.

Quick as a mink, de Grandin thrust his left hand within his coat, drew forth a pellet similar to that with which he had transformed the counterfeit of Dorothy Spence, and hurled it straight into the upturned ghastly-calm face of the mutilated body before him.

The dead lips did not part, for the embalmer's sutures had closed them forever that morning, but the body writhed upward from the road, and a groan which was a muted scream came from its flat chest. It twisted back and forth a moment, like a mortally stricken serpent in its death agony, then lay still.

Seizing the corpse by its graveclothes, de Grandin dragged it through the line of roadside hazel bushes to the rim of the swamp, and busied himself cutting long, straight withes from the brushwood, then disappeared again behind the tangled branches. At last:

"It is finished," he remarked, stepping back to the road. "Let us go."

"Wha — what did you do?" I faltered.

"I did the needful, my friend. *Morbleu*, we had an evil, a very evil thing imprisoned in that dead man, and I took such precautions as were necessary to fix it in its prison. A stake through the heart, a severed head, and the whole firmly thrust into the ooze of the swamp — *voilà*. It will be long before other innocent ones are induced to destroy themselves by *that*."

"But—" I began.

"*Non, non*," he replied, half laughing. "*En avant, mon ami!* I would that we return home as quickly as possible. Much work creates much appetite, and I make small doubt that I shall consume the remainder of that so delicious apple pie which I could not eat at dinner."

Jules de Grandin regarded the empty plate before him with a look of comic tragedy. "May endless benisons rest upon your amiable cook, Friend Trowbridge," he pronounced, "but may the curse of heaven forever pursue the villain who manufactures the woefully inadequate pans in which she bakes her pies."

"Hang the pies, and the plate-makers, too!" I burst out. "You promised to explain all this hocus-pocus, and I've been patient long enough. Stop sitting there like a glutton, wailing for more pie, and tell me about it."

"Oh, the mystery?" he replied, stifling a yawn and lighting a cigarette. "That is simple, my friend, but these so delicious pies — however, I do digress:

"When first I saw the accounts of so many strange suicides within one little week I was interested, but not greatly puzzled. People have slain themselves since the

beginning of time, and yet" — he shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly — "what is it that makes the hound scent his quarry, the war-horse sniff the battle afar off? Who can tell?"

"I said to me: 'There is undoubtedly more to these deaths than the newspapers have said. I shall investigate.'

"From the coroner's to the undertakers', and from the undertakers' to the physicians', yes, *Parbleu!* and to the family residences, as well, I did go, gleaning here a bit and there a bit of information which seemed to mean nothing, but which might mean much did I but have other information to add to it.

"One thing I ascertained early: In each instance the suicides had been to hear this Reverend Maundy the night before or the same night they did away with themselves. This was perhaps insignificant; perhaps it meant much. I determined to hear this Monsieur Maundy with my own two ears; but I would not hear him too close by.

"Forgive me, my friend, for I did make of you the guinea-pig for my laboratory experiment. You I left in a forward seat while the reverend gentleman preached; me, I stayed in the rear of the hall and used my eyes as well as my ears.

"What happened that night? Why, my good, kind Friend Trowbridge, who in all his life had done no greater wrong than thoughtlessly to kill a little, so harmless kitten, did almost *seemingly* commit suicide. But I was not asleep by the switch, my friend. Not Jules de Grandin! All the way home I saw you were *distract*, and I did fear something would happen, and I did therefore watch beside your door with my eye and ear alternately glued to the keyhole. *Parbleu*, I entered the chamber not one little second too soon, either!

"'This is truly strange,' I tell me. 'My friend hears this preacher and nearly destroys himself. Six others have heard him, and have quite killed themselves. If Friend Trowbridge were haunted by the ghost of a dead kitten, why should not those others, who also undoubtedly possessed distressing memories, have been hounded to their graves by them?'"

"'There is no reason why they should not,' I tell me.

"Next morning comes the summons to attend the young Mademoiselle Weaver. She, too, have heard the preacher; she, too, have attempted her life. And what does she tell us? That she fancied the voice of her dead friend urged her to kill herself.

"'Ah, ha!' I say to me. 'This whatever-it-is which causes so much suicide may appeal by fear, or perhaps by love, or by whatever will most strongly affect the person who dies by his own hand. We must see this Monsieur Maundy. It is perhaps possible he can tell us much.'

"As yet I can see no light — I am still in darkness — but far ahead I already see the gleam of a promise of information. When we see Monsieur Everard Maundy and he tells us of his experience at that séance so many years

ago — *parbleu*, I see it all, or almost all.

“Now, what was it acted as agent for that aged sorceress’ curse?”

He elevated one shoulder and looked questioningly at me.

“How should I know?” I answered.

“Correct,” he nodded, “how, indeed? Beyond doubt it were a spirit of some sort; what sort we do not know. Perhaps it were the spirit of some unfortunate who had destroyed himself and was earthbound as a consequence. There are such. And, as misery loves company in the proverb, so do these wretched ones seek to lure others to join them in their unhappy state. Or, maybe, it were an Elemental.”

“A *what*?” I demanded.

“An Elemental — a Neutrarian.”

“What the deuce is that?”

For answer he left the table and entered the library, returning with a small red-leather bound volume in his hand.

“You have read the works of Monsieur Rossetti?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“You recall his poem, *Eden Bowers*, perhaps?”

“H’m; yes, I’ve read it, but I never could make anything of it.”

“Quite likely,” he agreed, “its meaning is most obscure, but I shall enlighten you. *Attendez-moi!*”

Thumbing through the thin pages he began reading at random:

It was Lilith, the wife of Adam,
Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft, sweet woman ...

Lilith stood on the skirts of Eden.
She was the first that thence was driven,
With her was hell and with Eve was heaven

What bright babes had Lilith and Adam,
Shapes that coiled in the woods and waters,
Glittering sons and radiant daughters

“You see, my friend?”

“No, I’m hanged if I do.”

“Very well, then, according to the rabbinical lore, before Eve was created, Adam, our first father, had a demon wife named Lilith. And by her he had many children, not human, nor yet wholly demon.

“For her sins Lilith was expelled from Eden’s bowers, and Adam was given Eve to wife. With Lilith was driven out all her progeny by Adam, and Lilith and her half-man, half-demon brood declared war on Adam and Eve and their descendants forever. These descendants of Lilith and Adam have ever since roamed the earth and air, incorporeal, having no bodies like men, yet having always a hatred for

flesh and blood. Because they were the first, or elder race: they are sometimes called Elementals in the ancient lore; sometimes they are called Neutrarians, because they are neither wholly men nor wholly devils. Me, I do not take odds in the controversy; I care not what they are called, but I know what I have seen. I think it is highly possible those ancient Hebrews, misinterpreting the manifestations they observed, accounted for them by their so fantastic legends. We are told these Neutrarians or Elementals are immaterial beings. Absurd? Not necessarily. What is matter — material. Electricity, perhaps — a great system of law and order throughout the universe and all the millions of worlds extending throughout infinity.

“Very good, so far; but when we have said matter is electricity, what are we to say if asked, ‘What is electricity?’ Me, I think it a modification of the ether.

“‘Very good,’ you say; ‘but what is ether?’

“*Parbleu*, I do not know. The matter — or material — of the universe is little, if anything, more than electrons, flowing about in all directions. For here, now there, the electrons balance and form what we call solids — rocks and trees and men and women. But may they not coalesce at a different rate of speed, or vibration, to form beings which are real, with ambitions and loves and hates similar to ours, yet for the most part invisible to us, as is the air? Why not? No man can truthfully say, ‘I have seen the air,’ yet no one is so great a fool as to doubt its existence for that reason.”

“Yes, but we can see the effects of air,” I objected. “Air in motion, for instance, becomes wind, and—”

“*Mort d’un crapaud!*” he burst out. “And have we not observed the effects of these Elementals — these Neutrarians, or whatsoever their name may be? How of the six suicides; how of that which tempted the young Mademoiselle Weaver and the young Monsieur Spence to self-murder? How of the cat which entered your room? Did we see no effects there, *hein?*”

“But the thing we saw with young Spence, and the cat, were visible,” I objected.

“But of course. When you fancied you saw the cat, you were influenced from within, even as Mademoiselle Weaver was when she heard the voice of her dead friend. What we saw with the young Spence was the shadow of his desire — the intensified love and longing for his dead wife, plus the evil entity which urged him to unpardonable sin.”

“Oh, all right,” I conceded. “Go on with your theory.”

He stared thoughtfully at the glowing tip of his cigarette a moment, then: “It has been observed, my friend, that he who goes to a Spiritualistic seance may come away with some evil spirit attached to him — whether it be a spirit which once inhabited human form or an Elemental, it is no matter; the evil ones swarm about the lowered lights of the Spiritualistic meeting as flies congregate at the honey-pot in

summer. It appears such a one fastened to Everard Maundy. His wife was its first victim, afterward those who heard him preach were attacked.

“Consider the scene at the tabernacle when Monsieur Maundy preaches: Emotion, emotion — all is emotion; reason is lulled to sleep by the power of his words; and the minds of his hearer’s are not on their guard against the entrance of evil spirits; they are too intent on what he is saying. Their consciousness is absent. Pouf! The evil one fastens firmly on some unwary person, explores his innermost mind, finds out his weakest point of defense. With you, it was the kitten; with young Mademoiselle Weaver, her dead friend; with Monsieur Spence, his lost wife. Even love can be turned to evil purposes by such an one.

“These things I did consider most carefully, and then I did enlist the services of young Monsieur Spence. You saw what you saw on the lonely road this night. Appearing to him in the form of his dead beloved, this wicked one had all but persuaded him to destroy himself when we intervened.

“*Très bien.* We triumphed then; the night before I had prevented your death. The evil one was angry with me; also it was frightened. If I continued, I would rob it of much prey, so it sought to do me harm. Me, I am ever on guard, for knowledge is power. It could not lead me to my death, and, being spirit, it could not directly attack me. It had to recourse to its last resort. While the young undertaker’s assistant was about to deliver the body of the old Monsieur Gregory, the spirit seized the corpse and animated it, then pursued me.

“Ha, almost I thought, it had done for me at one time, for I forgot it was no living thing I fought, and attacked it as if it could be killed. But when I found my sword could not kill that which was already dead, I did cut off its so abominable hand. I am very clever, my friend. The evil spirit reaped

small profits from fighting with me.”

He made the boastful admission in all seriousness, entirely unaware of its sound, for to him it was but a straightforward statement of undisputed fact. I grinned in spite of myself, then curiosity got the better of amusement. “What were those little pellets you threw at the spirit when it was luring young Spence to commit suicide, and later at the corpse of Silas Gregory?” I asked.

“Ah” — his elfish smile flickered across his lips then disappeared as quickly as it came — “it is better you do not ask me that, *mon cher*. Let it suffice when I tell you I convinced the good *Père* O’Brien that he should let me have what no layman is supposed to touch, that I might use the ammunition of heaven against the forces of hell.”

“But how do we know this Elemental, or whatever it was, won’t come back again?” I persisted.

“Little fear,” he encouraged. “The resort to the dead man’s body was its last desperate chance. Having elected to fight me physically, it must stand or fall by the result of the fight. Once inside the body, it could not quickly extricate itself. Half an hour, at least, must elapse before it could withdraw, and before that time had passed I had fixed it there for all time. The stake through the heart and the severed head makes that body as harmless as any other, and the wicked spirit which animated it must remain with the flesh it sought to pervert to its own evil ends henceforth and forever.”

“But—”

“*Ah bah!*” He dropped his cigarette end into his empty coffee cup and yawned frankly. “We dally too much, my friend. This night’s work has made me heavy with sleep. Let us take a tiny sip of cognac so the pie may not give us unhappy dreams and then to bed. Tomorrow is another day, and who knows what new task lies before us?”

Creeping Shadows

“**M**ON DIEU! Is it that we are arrest’?” Jules de Grandin half rose from the dinner table in mock consternation as the vigorous ringing of the front door bell was followed by a heavy tramp in the hall, and Nora, my household factotum, ushered Detective Sergeant Costello and two uniformed policemen into the dining room.

“Not a bit of it,” Costello negatived with a grin as he seated himself on the extreme forward edge of the chair I indicated and motioned the two patrolmen to seats beside him. “Not a bit of it, Dr. de Grandin, sor; but we’re after askin’ a favor of you, if you don’t mind. This is Officer Callaghan” — he indicated the burly, red-headed policeman at his right — “an’ this is Officer Schippert. Both good boys, sor, an’ worthy to be believed, for I know ’em of old.”

“I doubt it not,” de Grandin acknowledged the introduction with one of his quick smiles, “those whom you vouch for are surely not to be despised, *mon vieux*. But this favor you would have of me, what of it?”

Detective Sergeant Costello, clasped his black derby hat in a viselike grip between his knees and stared into its interior as though he expected to find inspiration there. “We’re after wantin’ some information in th’ Craven case, if ye don’t mind, sor,” he replied.

“Eh, the Craven case?” de Grandin echoed. “*Parbleu*, old friend, I fear you have come to the wrong bureau of information. I know nothing of the matter except such tags of gossip as I have heard, and that is little enough. Was it not that this Monsieur Craven, who lived alone by himself, was discovered dead in his front yard after having lain there in that condition for several days, and that there was evidence of neither struggle nor robbery? Am I right?”

“M’m,” Costello mumbled. “They didn’t tell ye nothin’ about his head bein’ cut off, then?”

An expression of almost tragic astonishment swept over the little Frenchman’s face. “What is it that you say — he was beheaded?” he exclaimed incredulously. “*Mordieu*, why was I not informed of this? I had been told there was no evidence of struggle! Is it then that lonely gentlemen in America suffer the loss of their heads without struggling? Tell on, my friend. I burn, I am consumed with curiosity. What more of this so remarkable case where a man dies by decapitation and there is no sign of foul play? *Nom d’un raisin*, I am very wise, *cher sergent*, but it seems I have yet much to learn!”

“Well, sor,” Costello began half apologetically, “I don’t know why ye never heard about Craven’s head bein’

missin’, unless th’ coroner’s office hustled th’ body off too soon for th’ folks to git wise. But that ain’t th’ strangest part of th’ case; not by a dam’ sight — askin’ your pardon for th’ expression, sor. Ye see, these boys here” — he indicated the officers, who nodded solemn confirmation of his remark before he uttered it — “these boys here have th’ beat which goes past th’ Craven house, an’ they both of ’em swear they seen him in his front yard th’ mornin’ of th’ very day he was found dead, *an’ supposed to have been dead for several days when found!*

“Now, Dr. de Grandin, I’m just a police officer, an’ Callaghan an’ Schippert’s just a pair o’ harness bulls. We ain’t had no eddycation, all’ th’ doctors at the coroner’s office ought to know what they’re talkin’ about when they say th’ putrefactive state of his body showed Craven had been dead several days; but just th’ same—” He paused, casting a glance at his two blue-uniformed confreres.

“*Nom d’un bouc*, go on, man; go on!” de Grandin urged. “I starve for further details, and you withhold your story like a naughty little boy teasing a dog with a bit of meat! Proceed, I beseech you.”

“Well, sor, as I was sayin’,” the detective resumed, “I ain’t settin’ up to be no medical doctor, nor nothin’ like that; but I’ll take me Bible oath, Mister Craven hadn’t been dead no several days when they found him layin’ in his garden. ’Twas early in th’ mornin’ of th’ very day they found ’im I was walkin’ past his house after bein’ out most all night on a case, an’ I seen him standin’ in his front yard with me own two eyes, as plain as I see you this minute, sor. Callaghan an’ Schippert, who was comin’ off night duty, come past th’ house not more ’n a’ hour afterward, an’ they seen ’im standin’ among th’ flowers, too.”

“Eh, you are sure of this?” de Grandin demanded, his little blue eyes snapping with interest.

“Positive,” Costello returned. “Meself, I might a’ seen a ghost, an’ Callaghan might a’ done th’ same, for we’re Irish, sor, an’ th’ hidden people show ’emselves to us when they don’t bid th’ time o’ day to th’ rest o’ yez; but Schippert here, if he seen a banshee settin’ on a murderer’s grave, combin’ her hair with th’ shin-bone of a dead gipsy, he’d never give th’ old gurrl a tumble unless her screechin’ annoyed th’ neighbors, an’ then he’d tell her to shut up an’ move on, or he’d run her in for disturbin’ th’ peace. So if Schippert says he seen Mr. Craven walkin’ in his front garden half an hour after sun-up, why, Mr. Craven it were, sor, an’ no ghost at all. I’ll swear to that.”

“*Morbleu*, and did you not tell the coroner as much at the inquisition?” de Grandin asked, producing a cigarette from his waistcoat pocket like a prestidigitator exhuming a rabbit from his trick hat, but forgetting to light it in his excitement. “Did you not inform *Monsieur le Coroneur* of this?”

“No, sor; we wasn’t invited to th’ inquest. I reported what I’d seen to headquarters when I heard they’d found Mr. Craven’s body, an’ Callaghan an’ Schippert done th’ same at their precinct, but all they said to us was ‘Applesauce.’ An’ that was that, sor. Y’see, when we all three swore we’d seen th’ man himself th’ same mornin’, an’ th’ doctors all swore he must a’ been dead almost a week before he was found, they thought we was all cuckoo, an’ paid us no more mind.”

“*Nom d’un porc!* Did they so?” de Grandin barked. “They did tell you, my friend, that you spoke the sauce of the apple; you, who have assisted Jules de Grandin in more cases than one? *Mordieu*, it is the insult! I shall go to these *canaille*; I shall tell them to their foolish faces that they possess not the brain of a guinea-pig! I, Jules de Grandin, shall inform them—”

“Aisy, sor; go aisy, if ye please,” Costello besought. “’Twould do us more harm than good should ye cause hard feelin’s agin us at th’ coroner’s office; but ye can be a big help to us in another way, if ye will.”

“*Morbleu*, speak on, my friend, enlighten me,” de Grandin agreed. “If there be a mystery to this case, and a mystery there surely is, have no fear that Jules de Grandin will sleep or eat or drink till it shall be explained!” He poured himself another cup of coffee and imbibed it in two huge gulps. “Lead on, *mon brave*. What is it that you would have me do?”

“Well, sor,” the Irishman grinned with delight at de Grandin’s enthusiastic acceptance of his suggestion, “we knew as how you’d had all sorts an’ kinds o’ experience with dead folks, an’ we’re wonderin’ if mebbe, you would go over to th’ Craven house with us an’ take a look round th’ premises, sorter. Mebbe you’d be able to find out sumpin’ that would make th’ goin’ aisier for us, for they’re razzin’ us sumpin’ awful about sayin’ we seen Mr. Craven several days after th’ doctor says he was kilt, so they are. All th’ same, no matter what they say at th’ coroner’s office,” he added stubbornly, “a man that’s well enough to be walkin’ around his own front yard at half-past four in th’ mornin’ ain’t goin’ to be dead several days when he’s found in th’ same yard a few minutes after four o’clock th’ same afternoon. That’s what I say, an’ Callaghan an’ Schippert here says th’ same.”

“Sure do,” Officers Callaghan and Schippert nodded solemn agreement.

“*Parbleu, mes amis*,” de Grandin agreed as he rose from the table. I consider your logic irrefutable.

“Come, Trowbridge, my friend,” he beckoned to me, “let us go to this house where men who died several days before — with their heads off, *parbleu!* — promenade their front yards.” He held the door of my motor’s tonneau courteously for the three officers, then vaulted nimbly to the front seat beside me. “Trowbridge, my old one,” he whispered as I set the car in motion, “I damn think we shall have the beautiful adventure this night. Hasten, I would that it begins at once, right away.”

The Craven cottage stood in the center of a quarter-acre tract, a low hedge cutting it off from the old military road on which it faced, an eight-foot brick wall surrounding its other three sides. Though the front grounds were planted in a run-down garden, there were no trees near the house, consequently we had an unobstructed view of the yard in the brilliant May moonlight.

“It was right here they found him,” Officer Schippert volunteered, directing our attention to a bed of phlox which still bore the impression of some heavy weight. “He was standin’ almost alongside, this here flower bed when I seen him that mornin’, an’ he must a’ fallen where he stood. I can’t understand what — ouch! What th’ devil’s that?” He drew his hand suddenly back from the mass of flowering plants, grasping his fore-finger in pain.

“Stick yerself, Schip,” Callaghan asked casually. “I didn’t know them things had thorns on ’em.”

“I’ll say I stuck myself,” Officer Schippert replied, displaying a long, pointed sliver of wood adhering to the skin of his finger. “This thing was layin’ right amongst them flowers, an’ — oh, my God! Callaghan, Costello, I’m goin’ blind; I’m dyin’!” With an exclamation which was half grunt, half choke, he slid forward to the earth, his stalwart body crushing the flowers which had bent beneath the weight of Craven’s headless corpse some forty-eight hours earlier.

“Howly Mither!” Sergeant Costello exclaimed as he bent over the prostrate figure of the policeman. “Dr. de Grandin, he *is* dead! See here, sor; his heart’s stopped beatin’!”

De Grandin and I leaned forward, making a hasty inspection. Costello’s diagnosis was all too true. The sturdy patrolman, vibrant with life two minutes before, was lifeless as the man whose body lay in the city morgue, “apparently dead for several days when found,” according to medical testimony.

Costello, and I picked our fallen comrade up and bore him into the empty house of death, and while I struck a match and applied it to a gas jet, de Grandin opened the dead policeman’s blouse and made a closer examination.

“Look here, Dr. de Grandin,” the sergeant announced, looking up from the dead man’s face with the dry-eyed sorrow of a man whose daily duty it is to take desperate

risks “there’s something devilish about this business. Look at his face! He’s turnin’ spotty, a’ ready! Why, you’d think he was dead a couple o’ days, an’ we only just carried him in here a minute ago.”

De Grandin bent closer, examining the dead man’s face, chest and arms attentively. “*Pardieu*, it may easily be so!” he murmured to himself, then aloud to Costello: “You are right, my friend. Do you and the good Callaghan go to the police bureau for an ambulance. Dr. Trowbridge and I will wait until they come for the — for your comrade. Mean-time—” He broke off, gazing, abstractedly about the combination living-dining room in which we stood, noting the odd ornaments on the mantel-shelf, the neatly arranged blue plates in the china closet, the general air of stiff, masculine house-keeping which permeated the apartment.

“*Parbleu*, Trowbridge, my friend,” he commented as the policemen tiptoed out, “I think this matter will require much thinking over. Me, I do not like the way this poor one died, and I have less liking for the intelligence that Monsieur Craven’s head was missing.”

“But Craven must have been cut down by some fiend.” I interposed, “while poor Schippert — well, how *did* he die, de Grandin?”

“Who can say?” he queried in his turn, tapping his teeth thoughtfully with the polished nail of his forefinger.

“Now, Jules de Grandin, great *tête de chou* that you are, what have you to say to this?” he apostrophized himself as he inspected the splinter of wood which had scratched the dead policeman’s hand. “That is what it is, undoubtedly,” he continued his monologue, “yes, *pardieu*, we do all know that, but why? Such things do not happen without reason, foolish one.” He turned to the chest of drawers beneath the kitchen dresser and began, ransacking it as methodically as though he were a burglar intent on looting the place.

“Ah? What have we here?” he demanded as a heavy package, securely wrapped in muslin, came to light. “Perhaps it is a plate—” He bore the parcel to the unpainted kitchen table and began undoing the nautical knots with which its wrappings were fastened. “*Morbleu*,” he laid back the last layer of cloth, “it *is* a plate, Friend Trowbridge. And such a plate! Men have died for less — *cordieu*, I think men have died for *this*, unless I am more mistaken than I think.”

Under the flickering gaslight there lay a disk of yellow metal some thirteen or fourteen inches in diameter, its outer edge decorated with a row of small, oblong ornaments, like a border of dominoes, an inner circle, three inches or so smaller than the plate’s perimeter, serving as a frame for the bas-relief figure of a dancing man crowned with a feather headdress and brandishing a two-headed spear in one hand and a hook-ended war-club in the other.

“It is gold, my friend,” he breathed almost reverently. “Solid, virgin gold, hammered by hand a thousand years

ago, if a day. Pure Mayan it is, from Chichen-Itzá or Uxmal, and worth its weight in diamonds.”

“Um’m, perhaps,” I agreed doubtfully “but nothing you’ve said means anything to me.”

“No matter,” he retorted shortly. “Let us see — ah, what have we here?” In a corner of the small open fireplace, innocent of any trace of ash or cinder, lay a tiny wisp of charred paper. Darting forward he retrieved the bit of refuse and spread it before him on the table.

“Um’m?” he muttered non-committally, staring at the relic as though he expected it to speak.

The paper had been burned to a crisp and had curled up on itself with the action of the flame, but the metallic content of the ink in which its message had been scribbled had bleached to a dark, leaden gray, several shades lighter than the carbonized surface of the note itself.

“*Regardez vous*, my friend,” he commanded, taking a pair of laboratory tweezers from his dinner-coat pocket and straightening the paper slightly with a careful pressure. “Can not you descry words on this so black background?”

“No — yes!” I replied, looking over his shoulder and straining my eyes to the utmost.

“*Bien*, we shall read it together,” he responded. “Now to begin:”

“*ar al*,” we spelled out laboriously, as he turned the charred note gingerly to and fro beneath the lambent light. “*red ils av ot Murphy. Lay low an ...*” the rest of the message was lost in the multitude of heat-wrinkles on the paper’s blackened surface.

“*Mordieu*, but this is too bad!” he exclaimed when our united efforts to decipher further words proved fruitless. “There is no date, no signature, no anything. *Hélas*, we stand no nearer an answer to our puzzle than at first!”

He lighted one of his evil-smelling French cigarettes and took several lung-filling, thoughtful puffs, then threw the half-smoked tube into the fireplace and began re-wrapping the golden plate. “My friend,” he informed me, his little blue eyes twinkling with sardonic laughter, “I lie. A moment since I did declare we were still at sea, but now I think we are, like Columbus, in sight of land. Moreover, again like Columbus, I think it is the coast of Central America which we do sight. Behold, we have established the motive for Monsieur Craven’s murder, and we know how it was accomplished. There now remains only to ascertain who this Monsieur Murphy was and who inscribed this note of warning to the late Monsieur Craven.”

“Well,” I exclaimed impatiently, “I’m glad you’ve found out why and how Craven was killed. All I’ve seen here tonight is a policeman’s tragic death and a silly-looking plate from Uxbridge, or some other absurd place.”

He produced another cigarette and felt thoughtfully through his pockets for a match. “Those who know not what

they see oftentimes see nothing, my friend," he returned with a sarcastic smile. "Come, let us go out into the air. This place — pah! — it has the reek of death on it."

We waited at the front gate until Costello and Callaghan arrived with the police ambulance. As the litter-bearers passed us on their grisly errand, de Grandin leaned from my car and whispered to Costello. "Tomorrow night, *cher sergent*. Perhaps we shall come to the end of the riddle then, and apprehend those who slew your friend, as well."

"Can ye, now, doctor?" the Irishman returned eagerly. "By gorry, I'll be present with bells — an' a couple o' guns — on if ye can trace th' murderin' devil for me."

"*Très bien*," de Grandin assented. "Meet us at Dr. Trowbridge's house about eight o'clock; if you please."

"Now, what's it all mean?" I demanded as I turned the car toward home. "You're as mysterious as a magician at the county fair. Come, out with it!"

"Listen, my friend," he bade. "The wise man who thinks he knows whereof he speaks retains silence until his thought becomes a certainty. Me, I have wisdom. Much experience has given it to me. Let us say no more of this matter until we have ascertained light on certain things which are yet most dark. Yes."

"But—"

"*Je suis le roi de ces montagnes ...*"

he sang in high good humor, nor could all my threats or entreaties make him say one word more concerning the mystery of Craven's death, or Schippert's, or the queer, golden plate we found in the deserted house.

"*Bon soir, sergent*," de Grandin greeted as Costello entered the study shortly after nine o'clock the following evening. "We have awaited you with impatience."

"Have ye, now?" the Irishman replied. "Sure, it's too bad entirely that I've delayed th' party, but I've had th' devil's own time gettin' here this night. All sorts o' things have been poppin' up, sor."

"*Eh bien*, perhaps we shall pop up something more before the night is ended," the Frenchman returned. "Come, let us hasten; we have much to do before we seek our beds."

"All right," Costello, agreed as he prepared to follow, "where are we goin', if I may ask?"

"Ah, too many questions spoil the party of surprise, my friend," de Grandin answered with a laugh as he led the way to the car.

"Do you know the Rugby Road, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked as he climbed into the front seat beside me.

"Uh, yes," I replied without enthusiasm. The neighborhood he mentioned was in a suburb at the extreme east end of town, not at all noted for its odor of sanctity. Frankly, I had not much stomach for driving out there after dark, even

with Sergeant Costello for company, but de Grandin gave me no time for temporizing.

"*Bien*," he replied enthusiastically. "You will drive us with all celerity, if you please, and pause when I give the signal. Come, my friend; haste, I pray you. Not only may we save another life — we may apprehend those assassins who did Craven and the poor Schippert to death."

"All right," I agreed grudgingly, "but I'm not very keen on it."

Half an hour's run brought us to the winding, tree-shaded trail known as Rugby Road, a thoroughfare of broken pavements, tumbledown houses and wide spaces of open, uncultivated fields. At a signal from my companion I brought up before the straggling picket fence of a deserted-looking cottage, and the three of us swarmed out and advanced along the grass-choked path leading to the ruinous front stoop.

"I'm thinkin' we've had our ride for our pains, sor," Costello asserted as de Grandin's third imperative knock brought no response from beyond the weather-scarred door.

"Not we," the Frenchman denied, increasing both tempo and volume of his raps. "There is someone here, of a certainty, and here we shall stand until we receive an answer."

His persistence was rewarded, for a shuffling step finally sounded beyond the panels, and a cautious voice demanded haltingly, "Who's there?"

"*Parbleu*, friend, you are over long in honoring the presence of those who come to aid you!" de Grandin complained with testy irrelevancy. "Have the kindness to open the door."

"Who's there?" the voice repeated, this time with something like a tremor in it.

"*Nom d'un homard!*" the Frenchman ejaculated. "What does it matter what names we bear? We are come to help you escape 'the red devils' — those same demons who did away with Murphy and Craven. Quick, open, for the time is short!"

The man inside appeared to be considering de Grandin's statement, for there was a brief period of silence, then the sound of bolts withdrawing and a chain-lock being undone. "Quick — step fast!" the voice admonished as the door swung inward a scant ten inches without disclosing the person behind it. Next moment we stood in a dimly lighted hallway, surveying a perspiring little man in tattered pajamas and badly worn carpet slippers. He was an odd-looking bit of humanity, undersized, thin almost to the point of emaciation, with small, deep-sunken eyes set close together, a head almost denuded of hair and a mouth at once weak and vicious. I conceived an instant dislike for him, nor was my regard heightened by his greeting.

"What do you know about 'the red devils'?" he de-

manded truculently, regarding us with something more than suspicion. “If you’re in cahoots with ’em—” he placed his hand against the soiled front of his jacket, displaying the outline of a revolver strapped to his waist.

“*Ah bah*, Deacons,” de Grandin advised, “be not an utter fool. Were we part of their company, you know how much safety the possession of that toy would afford. Murphy was an excellent shot, so was Craven, but” — he waved an expressive hand — “what good were all their weapons?”

“None, by God!” the other answered with a shudder. “But what’s a little pip squeak like you goin’ to be able to do to help me?”

“*Morbleu* — a pip squeak — *I?*” The diminutive Frenchman bristled like a bantam game-cock, then interrupted himself to ask, “Why do you barricade yourself like this? Think you to escape in that way?”

“What d’ye want me to do?” the other replied sullenly. “Go out an’ let ’em fill me full o’—”

“*Tiens*, the chances are nine to one that they will get you in any case,” de Grandin cut in cheerfully. “We have come to offer you the tenth chance; my friend. Now attend me carefully: Have you a cellar beneath this detestable ruin of a house, and has it a floor of earth?”

“Huh? Yes,” the other replied, looking at the Frenchman as though he expected him to proclaim himself Emperor of China with his next breath. “What of it?”

“*Parbleu*, much of it, stupid one! Quick, make haste, repair instantly to the cellar and bring me a panful of earth. Be swift, the night is too hot for us to remain long baking in this hell-hole of yours.”

“Lookee here—” the other began, but de Grandin shut him off.

“Do as I bid!” he thundered, his little eyes blazing fiercely. “At once, right away, immediately, or we leave you to your fate. *Cordieu*, am I not Jules de Grandin? I will be obeyed!”

With surprising meekness our host descended to the cellar and struggled up the rickety stairs in a few minutes, a dishpan full of clayey soil from the unpaved floor in his hands.

“*Bien!*” De Grandin carried the earth to the kitchen sink and proceeded to moisten it with water from the tap, then began kneading it gently with his long, tapering fingers,

“Do you seat yourself between me and the light, my friend,” he commanded, looking up from his work to address Deacons. “I would have a clear-cut view of your profile.”

“Sa-a-ay—” the other began protestingly.

“Here, now, you, do what Dr. de Grandin tells ye, or I’ll mash ye to a pulp,” Costello cut in, evidently feeling he had already taken too little part in the proceedings. “Turn your ugly mug, now, like he tells ye, or I’ll be turnin’ it for ye,

an’ turnin’ it so far ye’ll have to walk backwards to see where ye’re goin’, too.”

Under Costello’s chaperonage Deacons sat sullenly while de Grandin deftly punched and pounded the mass of soggy clay into a rough simulacrum of his nondescript profile. “*Parbleu*, Trowbridge, my friend,” he remarked with a grin, “when I was a lad studying at the *Beaux Arts* and learning I should never make an artist, little did I think I should one day apply such little skill as I absorbed in modeling such a *cochon* as that” — he indicated Deacons with a disdainful nod — “in earth scooped from his own cellar floor! *Eh bien*, he who tracks a mystery does many strange things before he reaches his trail’s end, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Now, then,” he gave the clay a final scrape with his thumb, “let us consider the two of you. Be so good as to stand beside my masterpiece, *Monsieur*,” he waved an inviting hand to his model and strode across the room to get a longer perspective on his work.

Deacons complied, still muttering complainingly about “fellers that comes to a man’s house an’ orders ’im about like he was a bloomin’ servant.”

The Frenchman regarded his handiwork through narrowed eyelids, turning his head first one side, then the other. Finally he gave a short grunt of satisfaction. “*Ma foi*,” he looked from Costello to me, then back to Deacons and the bust. “I think I have bettered the work of *le bon Dieu*. Surely my creation from earth does flatter His. Is it not so, my friends?”

“Sure, it is,” Costello commended, “but if it ain’t askin, too much, I’d like to know what’s th’ idea o’ all th’ monkey business?”

De Grandin wiped the clay from his hands on the none-too-clean towel which hung from a nail in the kitchen door. “We are about to demonstrate the superiority of Aryan culture to the heathen in his blindness,” he replied.

“Are we, now?” Costello answered. “Sure, that’s fine. When do we start?”

“Now, immediately, right away. Deacons” — he turned curtly to our host — “Do you smoke a pipe? Habitually? *Bien*. You will put your pipe in that image’s mouth, if you please. Careful, I do not wish my work spoiled by your clumsiness. Good.” He regarded the image a thoughtful moment, then drawled to himself. “And — now — ah, *pardieu*, the very thing!” Seizing a roll of clothesline from the corner of the room he made it fast to a leg of the table on which the statuette rested, then began dragging it slowly toward him.

“Once more I would have your so generous criticism, *Sergent*,” he requested of Costello. “Will you stand in the doorway, there, and observe the statue as it passes the light? Does its outline resemble the profile of our handsome friend yonder?”

“It does,” the Policeman asserted after a careful inspection through half-closed eyes. “If I seen it at fifty foot or so in a bad light I’d think it were th’ man himself, mebbe.”

“Good, fine, excellent,” de Grandin replied. “Those are the precise conditions under which I propose exhibiting my work to the audience I doubt not waits to examine it. *Parbleu*, we must hope their sense of artistic appreciation is not too highly developed. Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, will you assist me with the table? I would have it in the next room, please.”

When we had placed the table some five feet from the living room window which overlooked the cottage’s shabby side yard, de Grandin turned to Costello and me, his face tense with excitement. “Let us steal to the back door, my friends,” he directed, “and you, *Sergent*, do you have your pistol ready, for it may be that we shall have quick and straight shooting to do before we age many minutes.

“Deacons,” he turned at the doorway, speaking with a sharp, rasping note of command in his voice, “do you seat yourself on the floor, out of sight from the window, and draw the table toward you slowly with that rope when you hear my command. Slowly, my friend, mind you; about the pace a man might walk if he were in no hurry. Much depends upon your exact compliance with my orders. Now—”

Tiptoeing to the window, he seized the sliding blind, ran it up to its full height, then unbarred the shutters, flinging them wide, and dodged nimbly back from the window’s opening.

“*Sergent* — Trowbridge!” he whispered tensely. “Attention; let us go, *allons!* Be ready,” he flung the command to Deacons over his shoulder as he slipped from the room, “begin drawing in the rope when you hear the back door open!”

Silently as a trio of ghosts we stole out into the moonless, humid night, skirted the line of the house wall, and crouched in the shadow of a dilapidated rain-barrel.

“D’ye think anyone will—” Costello began in a hoarse whisper, but:

“*S-s-sh!*” de Grandin shut him off. “Observe, my friends; look yonder!”

A clump of scrub maple and poplar grew some forty feet from the house, and as we obeyed the Frenchman’s imperative nod, a portion of the dense shadow thrown by the trees appeared to detach itself from the surrounding gloom and drift slowly toward the lighted window across which the crudely modeled bust of Deacons was being pulled.

“Careful, my friends; no noise!” de Grandin warned, so low the syllables were barely audible above the murmuring night noises. The drifting shadow was joined by another, the two merging into one almost imperceptible blot of black-

ness.

Nearer, still nearer the creeping patch of gloom approached, then, with the suddenness of a wind-driven cloud altering shape, the ebon blotch changed from horizontal to vertical, two distinct shapes — squat, crooked-legged human shapes — became visible against the darkness of the night’s background, and a wild, eery, bloodcurdling yell rent the heavy, grass-scented air.

Two undersized, screaming shapes ran wildly toward the dimly lit window, but Detective Sergeant Costello was quicker than they. “I’ve got ye, ye murderin’ devils!,” he roared, leaping from his ambush and flourishing his revolver. “Stick up your paws, or I’ll make, a fly-net out o’ th’ pair of yez!”

“Down — down, fool!” de Grandin shrieked despairingly, as he strove futilely to drag the big Irishman back into the shadow.

He gave up the attempt and leaped forward with lithe, catlike grace, interposing himself between the detective and the shadowy forms. Something shone dimly in the night’s starless air, two flashes of intense orange flame spurted through the darkness, and the twin roar of a French army pistol crashed and reverberated against the house wall.

The racing shadows halted abruptly in their course, seemed to lean together an instant, to merge like a mass of vapor jostled by the wind, then slumped suddenly downward and lay still.

“Blessed St. Patrick!” Costello murmured, turning the prostrate forms over, inspecting the gaping wounds torn by de Grandin’s soft-nosed bullets with a sort of pathetic awe. “That’s what I call some shootin’, Dr. de Grandin, sor. I knew ye was a clever little devil — askin’ your pardon — but—”

“*Parbleu*, my friend, when shooting is necessary, I shoot,” de Grandin replied complacently. “But we have other things of more importance to observe, if you please. Turn your flashlight here, if you will.”

Sharply silhouetted against the circle of brilliance cast by the electric torch were two slender, thorn-like splinters of wood, their hard, pointed tips buried to a depth of a quarter-inch in the clapboard’s crumbling surface.

“It was such as these which killed Craven and Comrade Schippert,” the Frenchman explained shortly. “Had I not fired when I did, these” — he pointed gingerly to the thorns — “would have been in you, my friend, and you, I doubt not, would have been in heaven. *Morbleu*, as it was, I did despair of drawing you back before they had pierced you with their darts, and *le bon Dieu* knows I shot not a moment too soon!”

“But — howly Mither! — what th’ devil is it, annyway, sor?” th’ big detective demanded in a fever of mystification.

De Grandin blew methodically down the barrel of his

pistol to clear the smoke fumes away before restoring the weapon to his shoulder holster. “They are darts, my friend. Arrows from blowguns — arrows of sure and certain death, for with them every hit is a fatal one. In South and Central America the Indians use them in blowguns for certain classes of hunting, and sometimes in war, and when they blow one of them into a jaguar, fierce and tenacious of life as the great cat is, he dies before he can fall from his tree to the earth. Beside the venom in which these darts are steeped the poison of the cobra or the rattlesnake is harmless as water.

“But come” — he turned again toward the house — “let us go in. Me, I think I have all this sad and sordid story by heart, but there is certain information I would get from the excellent Deacons, before we write the last chapter.”

“Now, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin leveled his unwinking, steel-hard stare at the little man cowering in the cottage’s shabby living room, “you have spent much time in Central America, I take it. You and your compatriots, Murphy and Craven, were grave-robbers, *n’est-ce-pas*?”

“Huh? What’s that?” Costello interrupted incredulously. “Grave-robbers, did ye say, sor? Stiff-stealers?”

“*Non, non*,” the Frenchman returned with a quick smile, then turned a stern face toward Deacons. “Not stealers of corpses, my friend, but stealers of treasure. *Morbleu*, do I not know their ilk? But of course. My friends, I was with de Lesseps when he strove to consummate the wedding of the Atlantic with the Pacific at Panama. I was for a time with the French engineers when Diaz drove the railway across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and in that time I learned much of gentry such as these. In all Central America there is great store of gold and silver and turquoise buried in the graveyards and ruined cities of the native peoples whom the pig-ignorant Spaniards destroyed in their greed for gold and power. Today brave men of science do risk their lives that these priceless relics of a forgotten people may be brought to light, and fellows such as Deacons and his two dead partners hang about the head-quarters of exploring parties waiting for them to map the course to the ancient ruins, then rush in and steal each scrap of gold on which they can lay their so unclean hands. They are vandals more vile than the Spaniards who went before them, for they steal not only from the dead, but from the treasure-house of science as well.”

“We didn’t do nothin’ worse than th’ highbrows did.” Deacons defended sullenly. “You never heard of us tryin’ to alibi ourselves by claimin’ to be workin’ for some university, ’stead o’ bein’ just plain thieves. Them scientists are just as bad as we was, on’y they was *gentlemen*, an’ could git away with their second-story work.”

“About ten years ago,” de Grandin went on as if Deacons

had not spoken, “this fellow, together with Craven, Murphy and three others, stumbled on the ruins of an old Mayan city in Yucatan. Only the good God knows how they found it, but find it they did, and with it they found a perfect El Dorado of golden relics.

“The local Indians — poor, ignorant, oppressed wretches — had lost all knowledge of their once so splendid ancestors, and retained nothing of the ancient Mayan culture but a few perverted legends and a deep, idolatrous veneration for the ruins of their vanished forebears’ sacred cities. When they beheld Deacons and his companions pawing over the bodies in the tombs, kicking the skeletons about as though they were but rubbish, and snatching frantically at anything and everything with the glint of gold upon it — *cordieu*, how many priceless pieces of copal and obsidian these so ignorant ignoramus must have thrown away! — they swooped down on the camp and the robbers had to shoot their way to freedom. Three of them were slain, but three of them escaped and won through to the coast. They made their way back to this country with their booty and—”

“Say” — Deacons looked at the Frenchman as a bird might regard a serpent — “how’d you find all this out?”

“*Parbleu*, my friend,” the other smiled tolerantly, “Jules de Grandin is not to be fooled by such as you!”

“*Sergent*” — he turned again to Costello — “while you and Callaghan did seek the ambulance to bear away the body of poor Schippert last night, Friend Trowbridge and I investigated the house where Monsieur Craven died. It was not hard for us to see the place was one occupied by a man much used to living alone and being his own servant in all ways — a sailor, perhaps, or a man much accustomed to the out-o-the-way places of the world. That was the first domino with which we had to begin building.

“Now, when we came to examine his *table de cuisine* we did find an ancient Mayan plate engraved with an effigy of a priest in full sacrificial regalia. This plate was the only thing of its kind among the dead man’s effects and was carefully wrapped in a cotton rag. Evidently he had retained it as a souvenir. Those who knew not the goldsmithing trade in ancient Central America might easily have mistaken the plate for a piece of Oriental brass; but I, who know many things, realized it was of solid, unalloyed gold intrinsically worth from five to seven thousand dollars, perhaps, but priceless from the anthropologist’s standpoint.

“Now, I ask me, ‘what would a man like this Monsieur Craven, comfortably off, but not rich, be doing with such a relic among his things unless he himself had brought it from Yucatan?’

“‘Nothing,’ I say to me.

“‘Quite right,’ I reply. ‘Jules de Grandin, you do not make mistakes.’

“Also there was the coroner’s report that this Monsieur Deadman had been dead for several days when he was found, and your piece of intelligence that his head have disappeared. Also, again, we know from you and the other officers that he had *not* been dead several days, but only several hours when discovered. What is the answer to that?”

“*Hélas*, we found it out only through your poor friend’s death! Officer Schippert had pricked himself on what he thought was a thorn — so much like thorns do these accursed darts look that the police and coroner’s attachés might have seen that one a thousand times, yet never recognized it for what it was. But our poor friend was wounded by it, and almost at once he died.

“Now, what was such a dart as this doing in the Craven yard? Why did the Poor Schippert have to scratch himself on a thing which should not have been in existence in that latitude and longitude? It is to seek the answer.

“We carried Schippert into the house, and what do we see? Almost at once he had begun to become *livide* — discolored. Yes. I have seen men shot with such arrows while I worked under the tropic sun, I had handled those splinters of death, and had seen the corpses assume the appearance of the long dead almost as I watched them. When I saw the appearance of the poor Schippert, and beheld the dart by which he died, I say to me, ‘This is the answer. This is why the physicians at the coroner’s office declare that my friend, the good Costello, speaks words of foolishness when he insists Craven was not long dead when found.’ Yes.

“Also, you have told me of the missing head. I know from experience and hearsay that those Indians do take the heads of their enemies as your Apaches once took the scalps of theirs, and preserve them as trophies. Everything points one way.

“You see, we have these parts of our puzzle” — he checked the facts off on his fingers — “a man who brought a golden plate from Yucatan is found dead in his front yard. He is undoubtedly the victim of an Indian blowgun dart, for his appearance and the dart which we have found too late to save the poor Schippert, all say so. Very good. No one knew anything about him, but he was apparently of those fortunate ones who can live in some comfort without working. From this I reason he might once have possessed other Indian gold which he has sold.

“Now, while I think of these things, I notice a piece of burned paper in his fireplace, and on it I read these fragments of words:

ar al red ils av ot Murphy. Lay low an ...

“What does it mean?”

“I think some more, and decide what was written originally was:

Dear Pal: The red devils have got Murphy. Lay low and...

“Who are these ‘red devils’? Because an Indian dart have killed both Craven and Schippert, must we not assume they are Indians? I think so. Most likely they were natives of Yucatan who had shipped as sailors on some tramp steamer and come to this land to wreak vengeance on those who despoiled their sacred cities and burying places. I have observed instances of such before. In Paris we have known of it, for there is no sort of crime with which the face of man is blackened which has not been at least once investigated by the *Service de Sûreté*.

“Now, from all this, it was most apparent the writer of this burned note had been warning Craven that one Murphy had been translated to another — though probably not a better — world, and that Craven must lie low, or he would doubtless share the same fate. So much is plain; *but who was Murphy, and who had written the warning?*

“I decided to shoot at the only target in sight. Next day I interviewed Dr. Symington, of the New York Museum of Natural History, asking him if he remembered Mayan relics being bought from a man named Craven or Murphy, or from anyone who mentioned any of those names in his conversation.

“A desperate chance, you say? But certainly. Yet it was by taking desperate chances that we turned back the *sale boche*; it was by taking desperate chances that the peerless Wright brothers learned to fly; it was by taking a desperate chance that I, Jules de Grandin, triumphed!

“Friend Symington had heard such names. Eight years ago one Michael Murphy had sold the Museum a small piece of Mayan jewelry, a little statuette of hammered rose-gold. He had boasted of exploits in Central America when he obtained this statue, told how he, together with Arthur Craven and Charles Deacons, had a fortune in bullion within their grasp, only to lose it when the outraged Indians attacked their camp and killed three of their companions. And that he spoke truth there was small doubt, for so greatly did he fear the Indian vengeance that he refused an offer of five thousand dollars and expenses to guide a party from the Museum to the place where he found the Indian gold.

“Very good. We have got the answer to our questions: ‘Whom have the “red devils” gotten?’ and ‘Who wrote the warning letter to Craven?’

“But where is this Charles Deacons? In the directory of this city there are three of him listed, but only one of him is labeled as retired, and it was to him I looked for further light. I assume the Deacons I seek lives, as Craven did, on the proceeds of his thefts. I further assume he goes in deadly fear of the Indians’ flying vengeance by day and by night. I find his address here, and” — he waved his hand in a gesture of finality — “here we come. *Voilà!*”

I started to put a question, but Costello was before me.

“How did ye know th’ murderin’ heathens would be here tonight, Dr. de Grandin?” he demanded.

“*Eh bien*, by elimination, of course,” the Frenchman replied in high good humor. “Three men were sought by the Indians. Two of them had already been disposed of, therefore, unless Deacons had already fallen to their flying death, they still remained in the vicinity, awaiting a chance to execute him. We found him alive, hence we knew they had still one-third of their task to perform. So I did bait our trap with Deacons’ dummy, for well I knew they would shoot their poisoned darts at him the moment they saw his shadow pass the lighted open window. *Morbleu*, my friend, how near your own foolish courage came to making you, instead, their victim!”

“Thanks to you, sor, I’m still alive an kickin’,” Costello

acknowledged. “Shall I be ringin’ th’ morgue wagon for th’ fellies ye shot, sor?”

“I care not,” de Grandin responded indifferently, “dispose of them as you will.”

“Well, say” — Deacons suddenly seemed to emerge from his trance, and advanced, toward de Grandin, his lean hand extended — “I cert’ny got to thank you for pullin’ me out of a mighty tight hole, sir.”

De Grandin took no notice of the proffered hand. “*Pardieu, Monsieur*,” he responded coldly, “it was from no concern for you that I undertook this night’s work. Those, Indians had slain a friend of my friend, Sergeant Costello. I came not to save you, but to execute the murderers. You were but the stinking goat with which our tiger-trap was baited.”

The White Lady of the Orphanage

“DR. TROWBRIDGE? Dr. de Grandin?” our visitor looked questioningly from one of us to the other. “I’m Trowbridge,” I answered, “and this is Dr. de Grandin. What can we do for you?”

The gentle-faced, white-haired little man bowed rather nervously to each of us in turn, acknowledging the introduction. “My name is Gervaise, Howard Gervaise,” he replied. “I’m superintendent of the Springville Orphans’ Home.”

I indicated a chair at the end of the study table and awaited further information.

“I was advised to consult you gentlemen by Mr. Willis Richards, of your city,” he continued. “Mr. Richards told me you accomplished some really remarkable results for him at the time his jewelry was stolen, and suggested that you could do more to clear up our present trouble than anyone else. He is president of our board of trustees, you know,” he added in explanation.

“U’m?” Jules de Grandin murmured noncommittally as he set fire to a fresh cigarette with the glowing butt of another. “I recall that Monsieur Richards. He figured in the affair of the disembodied hand, Friend Trowbridge, you remember. *Parbleu*, I also recall that he paid the reward for his jewels’ return with very bad grace. You come poorly introduced, my friend” — he fixed his uncompromising cat-stare on our caller — “however, say on. We listen.”

Mr. Gervaise seemed to shrink in upon himself more than ever. It took small imaginative powers to vision him utterly cowed before the domineering manner of Willis Richards, our local nabob. “The fact is, gentlemen,” he began with a soft, deprecating cough, “we are greatly troubled at the orphanage. Something mysterious — most mysterious — is taking place there. Unless we can arrive at some solution we shall be obliged to call in the police, and that would be most unfortunate. Publicity is to be dreaded in this case, yet we are at a total loss to explain the mystery.”

“U’m,” de Grandin inspected the tip of his cigarette carefully, as though it were something entirely novel, “most mysteries cease to be mysterious, once they are explained, *Monsieur*. You will be good enough to proceed?”

“Ah —” Mr. Gervaise glanced about the study as though to take inspiration from the surroundings, then coughed apologetically again. “Ah — the fact is, gentlemen, that several of our little charges have — ah — mysteriously disappeared. During the past six months we have missed no less than five of the home’s inmates, two boys and three girls and only day before yesterday a sixth one disappeared

— vanished into air, if you can credit my statement.”

“Ah?” Jules de Grandin sat forward a little in his chair, regarding the caller narrowly. “They have disappeared, vanished, you do say? Perhaps they have decamped?”

“No-o,” Gervaise denied, “I don’t think that’s possible, sir. Our home is only a semi-public institution, you know, being supported entirely by voluntary gifts and benefits of wealthy patrons, and we do not open our doors to orphan children as a class. There are certain restrictions imposed. For this reason, we never entertain a greater number than we are able to care for in a fitting manner, and conditions at Springville are rather different from those obtaining in most institutions of a similar character. The children are well fed, well clothed and excellently housed, and — as far as anyone in their unfortunate situation can be — are perfectly contented and happy. During my tenure of office, more than ten years, we have never had a runaway; and that makes these disappearances all the harder to explain. In each case the surrounding facts have been essentially the same, too. The child was accounted for at night before the signal was given to extinguish the lights, and — and next morning he just wasn’t there. That’s all there is to say. There is nothing further I can tell you.”

“You have searched?” de Grandin asked.

“Naturally. The most careful and painstaking investigations have been made in every case. It was not possible to pursue the little ones with hue and cry, of course, but the home has been to considerable expense in hiring private investigators to obtain some information of the missing children, all without result. There is no question of kidnaping, either, for, in every case, the child was known to be safely inside not only the grounds, but in the dormitories, on the night preceding the disappearance. Several reputable witnesses vouch for that in each instance.

“U’m?” de Grandin commented once more. “You say you have been at considerable expense in the matter, *Monsieur*?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Very good. You will please be at some more considerable expense. Dr. Trowbridge and I are *gens d’affaires* — businessmen — as well as scientists, *Monsieur*, and while we shall esteem it an honor to serve the fatherless and motherless orphans of your home, we must receive an adequate consideration from Monsieur Richards. We shall undertake the matter of ascertaining the whereabouts of your missing charges at five hundred dollars apiece. Do you agree?”

“But that would be three thousand dollars —” the visitor began.

“Perfectly,” de Grandin interrupted. “The police will undertake the case for nothing.”

“But we can not have the police, as I have just explained—”

“You can not have us for less,” the Frenchman cut in. “This Monsieur Richards, I know him of old. He desires not the publicity of a search by the gendarmes, and, though he loves me not, he has confidence in my ability, otherwise he would not have sent you. Go to him and say Jules de Grandin will act for him for no less fee than that I have mentioned. Meantime, will you smoke?”

He passed a box of my cigars to the caller, held a lighted match for him, and refused to listen to another word concerning the business which had brought Gervaise on the twenty-mile jaunt from Springville.

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*,” he informed me the following morning at breakfast, “I assure you it pays handsomely to be firm with these captains of industry, such as Monsieur Richards. Before you had arisen, my friend, that man of wealth was haggling with me over the telephone as though we were a pair of dealers in second-hand furniture. *Morbleu*, it was like an auction. Bid by bid he raised his offer for our services until he met my figure. Today his attorneys prepare a formal document, agreeing to pay us five hundred dollars for the explanation of the disappearance of each of those six little orphans. A good morning’s business, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“De Grandin,” I told him, “you’re wasting your talents in this work. You should have gone into Wall Street.”

“*Eh bien*,” he twisted the tips of his little blond mustache complacently, “I think I do very well as it is. When I return to *la belle France* next month I shall take with me upward of fifty thousand dollars — more than a million francs — as a result of my work here. That sum is not to be sneezed upon, my friend. And what is of even more value to me, I take with me the gratitude of many of your countrymen whose burdens I have been able to lighten. *Mordieu*, yes, this trip has been of great use to me, my old one.”

“And —” I began.

“And tomorrow we shall visit this home of the orphans where Monsieur Gervaise nurses his totally inexplicable mystery. *Parbleu*, that mystery shall be explained, or Jules de Grandin is seven thousand francs poorer!

“All arrangements have been made,” he confided as we drove over to Springville the following morning. “It would never do for us to announce ourselves as investigators, my friend, so what surer disguise can we assume than that of being ourselves? You and I, are we not physicians? But certainly. Very well. As physicians we shall appear at the home, and as physicians we shall proceed to inspect all the

little ones — separately and alone — for are we not to give them the Schick test for diphtheria immunity! Most assuredly.”

“And then —?” I began, but he cut my question in two with a quick gesture and a smile.

“And then, my friend, we shall be guided by circumstances, and if there are no circumstances, *cordieu*, but we shall make them! *Allons*, there is much to do before we handle Monsieur Richards’ check.”

However dark the mystery overhanging the Springville Orphans’ Home might have been, nothing indicating it was apparent as de Grandin and I drove through the imposing stone gateway to the spacious grounds. Wide, smoothly kept lawns, dotted here and there with beds of brightly blooming flowers, clean, tastefully arranged buildings of red brick in the Georgian style, and a general air of prosperity, happiness and peace greeted us as we brought our car to a halt before the main building of the home. Within, the youngsters were at chapel, and their clear young voices rose pure and sweet as bird-songs in springtime to the accompaniment of a mellow-toned organ:

“There’s a home for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
Where Jesus reigns in glory,
A home of peace and joy;
No earthly home is like it,
Nor can with it compare ...”

We tiptoed into the spacious assembly room, dimly lit through tall, painted windows, and waited at the rear of the hall till the morning exercises were concluded. Right and left de Grandin shot his keen, stock-taking glance, inspecting the rows of neatly clothed little ones in the pews, attractive young female attendants, and the mild-faced, gray-haired lady of matronly appearance who presided at the organ. “*Mordieu*, Friend Trowbridge,” he muttered in my ear, “truly, this is mysterious. Why should any of the *pauvres orphelins* voluntarily quit such a place as this?”

“S-s-sh!” I cut him off. His habit of talking in and out of season, whether at a funeral, a wedding or other religious service, had annoyed me more than once. As usual, he took the rebuke in good part and favored me with an elfish grin, then fell to studying an elongated figure representing a female saint in one of the stained-glass windows, winking at the beatified lady in a highly irreverent manner.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” Mr. Gervaise greeted us as the home’s inmates filed past us, two by two. “Everything is arranged for your inspection. The children will be brought to you in my office as soon as you are ready for them. Mrs. Martin” — he turned with a smile to the white-haired

organist who had joined us — “these are Dr. de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge. They are going to inspect the children for diphtheria immunity this morning.”

To us he added: “Mrs. Martin is our matron. Next to myself she has entire charge of the home. We call her ‘Mother Martin,’ and all our little ones love her as though she were really their own mother.”

“How do you do?” the matron acknowledged the introduction, favoring us with a smile of singular sweetness and extending her hand to each of us in turn.

“*Madame*,” de Grandin took her smooth, white hand in his, American fashion, then bowed above it, raising it to his lips, “your little charges are indeed more than fortunate to bask in the sunshine of your ministrations!” It seemed to me he held the lady’s hand longer than necessity required, but like all his countrymen my little friend was more than ordinarily susceptible to the influence of a pretty woman, young or elderly.

“And now, *Monsieur*, if you please —” He resigned Mother Martin’s plump hand regretfully and turned to the superintendent, his slim, black brows arched expectantly.

“Of course,” Gervaise replied. “This way, if you please.”

“It would be better if we examined the little ones separately and without any of the attendants being present,” de Grandin remarked in a businesslike tone, placing his medicine case on the desk and unfolding a white jacket.

“But surely you can not hope to glean any information from the children!” the superintendent protested. “I thought you were simply going to make a pretense of examining them as a blind. Mrs. Martin and I have questioned every one of them most carefully, and I assure you there is absolutely nothing to be gained by going over that ground again. Besides, some of them have become rather nervous, and we don’t want to have their little heads filled with disagreeable notions, you know. I think it would be much better if Mother Martin or I were present while the children are examined. It would give them greater confidence, you know —”

“*Monsieur*” — de Grandin spoke in the level, toneless voice he assumed before one of his wild outbursts of anger — “you will please do exactly as I command. Otherwise —” He paused significantly and began removing the clinical smock.

“Oh, by no means, my dear sir,” the superintendent hastened to assure him. “No, no; I wouldn’t for the world have you think I was trying to put difficulties in your way. Oh, no; I only thought —”

“*Monsieur*,” the little Frenchman repeated, “from this time onward, until we dismiss the case, I shall do the thinking. You will kindly have the children brought to me, one at a time.”

To see the spruce little scientist among the children was

a revelation to me. Always tart of speech to the verge of bitterness, with a keen, mordant wit which cut like a razor or scratched like a briar, de Grandin seemed the last one to glean information from children naturally timid in the presence of a doctor. But his smile grew brighter and brighter and his humor better and better as child after child entered the office, answered a few seemingly idle questions and passed from the room. At length a little girl, some four or five years old, came in, the hem of her blue pinafore twisted between her plump baby fingers in embarrassment.

“Ah,” de Grandin breathed, “here is one from whom we shall obtain something of value, my friend, or I much miss my guess.

“*Holà, ma petite tête de chou!*” he exclaimed, snapping his fingers at the tot. “Come hither and tell Dr. de Grandin all about it!”

His “little cabbage-head” gave him an answering smile, but one of somewhat doubtful quality. “Dr. Grandin not hurt Betsy?” she asked, half confidently, half fearsomely.

“*Parbleu*, not I, my pigeon,” he replied as he lifted her to the desk. “*Regardez-vous!*” from the pocket of his jacket he produced a little box of bonbons and thrust them into her chubby hand. “Eat them, my little onion,” he commanded. “*Tête du diable*, but they are an excellent medicine for loosening the tongue!”

Nothing loth, the little girl began munching the sweet-meats, regarding her new friend with wide, wondering eyes. “They said you would hurt me — cut my tongue out with a knife if I talked to you,” she informed him, then paused to pop another chocolate button into her mouth.

“*Mort d’un chat*, did they, indeed?” he demanded. “And who was the vile, detestable one who so slandered Jules de Grandin? I shall — *s-s-sh!*” he interrupted himself, turning and crossing the office in three long, catlike leaps. At the entrance he paused a moment, then grasped the handle and jerked the door suddenly open.

On the sill, looking decidedly surprised, stood Mr. Gervaise.

“Ah, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin’s voice held an ugly, rasping note as he glared directly into the superintendent’s eyes, “you are perhaps seeking for something? Yes?”

“Er — yes,” Gervaise coughed softly, dropping his gaze before the Frenchman’s blazing stare. “Er — that is — you see, I left my pencil here this morning, and I didn’t think you’d mind if I came to get it. I was just going to rap when —”

“When I saved you the labor, *n’est-ce-pas?*” the other interrupted. “Very good, my friend. Here” — hastening to the desk he grabbed a handful of miscellaneous pencils, pens and other writing implements, including a stick of marking chalk — “take these, and get gone, in the name of the good God.” He thrust the utensils into the astonished

superintendent's hands, then turned to me, the gleam in his little blue eyes and the heightened color in his usually pale cheeks showing his barely suppressed rage. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," he almost hissed, "I fear I shall have to impress you into service as a guard. Stand at the outer door, my friend, and should anyone come seeking pens, pencils, paint-brushes or printing presses, have the goodness to boot him away. Me, I do not relish having people looking for pencils through the keyhole of the door while I interrogate the children!"

Thereafter I remained on guard outside the office while child after child filed into the room, talked briefly with de Grandin, and left by the farther door.

"Well, did you find out anything worth while?" I asked when the examination was finally ended.

"U'm," he responded, stroking his mustache thoughtfully, "yes and no. With children of a tender age, as you know, the line of demarcation between recollection and imagination is none too clearly drawn. The older ones could tell me nothing; the younger ones relate a tale of a 'white lady' who visited the dormitory on each night a little one disappeared, but what does that mean? Some attendant making a nightly round? Perhaps a window curtain blown by the evening breeze? Maybe it had no surer foundation than some childish whim, seized and enlarged upon by the other little ones. There is little we can go on at this time, I fear.

"Meanwhile," his manner brightened, "I think I hear the sound of the dinner gong. *Parbleu*, I am as hungry as a carp and empty as a kettledrum. Let us hasten to the refectory."

Dinner was a silent meal. Superintendent Gervaise seemed ill at ease under de Grandin's sarcastic stare, and the other attendants who shared the table with us took their cue from their chief and conversation languished before the second course was served. Nevertheless, de Grandin seemed to enjoy everything set before him to the uttermost, and made strenuous efforts to entertain Mrs. Martin, who sat immediately to his right.

"But *Madame*," he insisted when the lady refused a serving of the excellent beef which constituted the roast course, "surely you will not reject this so excellent roast! Remember, it is the best food possible for humanity, for not only does it contain the nourishment we need, but great quantities of iron are to be found in it, as well. Come, permit that I help you to that which is at once food and tonic!"

"No, thank you," the matron replied, looking at the juicy roast with a glance almost of repugnance. "I am a vegetarian."

"How terrible!" de Grandin commiserated, as though she had confessed some overwhelming calamity.

"Yes, Mother Martin's been subsisting entirely on vegetables for the last six months," one of the nurses, a

plump, red-cheeked girl, volunteered. "She used to eat as much meat as any of us, but all of a sudden she turned against, it, and — oh, Mrs. Martin!"

The matron had risen from her chair, leaning half-way across the table, and the expression on her countenance was enough to justify the girl's exclamation. Her face had gone pale — absolutely livid — her lips were drawn back against her teeth like those of a snarling animal, and her eyes seemed to protrude from their sockets as they blazed into the startled girl's. It seemed to me that not only rage, but something like loathing and fear were expressed in her blazing orbs as she spoke in a low, passionate voice: "Miss Bosworth, what I used to do and what I do now are entirely my own business. Please do not meddle with my affairs!"

For a moment silence reigned at the table, but the Frenchman saved the situation by remarking, "*Tiens, Madame*, the fervor of the convert is ever greater than that of those to the manner born. The Buddhist, who eats no meat from his birth, is not half so strong in defense of his diet as the lately converted European vegetarian!"

To me, as we left the dining hall, he confided, "A charming meal, most interesting and instructive. Now, my friend, I would that you drive me home at once, immediately. I wish to borrow a dog from Sergeant Costello."

"What!" I responded incredulously. "You want to borrow a—"

"Perfectly. A dog. A police dog, if you please. I think we shall have use for the animal this night."

"Oh, all right," I agreed. The workings of his agile mind were beyond me, and I knew it would be useless to question him.

Shortly after sundown we returned to the Springville home, a large and by no means amiable police dog, lent us by the local constabulary, sharing the car with us.

"You will engage Monsieur Gervaise in conversation, if you please," my companion commanded as we stopped before the younger children's dormitory. "While you do so, I shall assist this so excellent brute into the hall where the little ones sleep and tether him in such manner that he can not reach any of his little room-mates, yet can easily dispute passage with anyone attempting to enter the apartment. Tomorrow morning we shall be here early enough to remove him before any of the attendants who may enter the dormitory on legitimate business can be bitten. As for others —" He shrugged his shoulders and prepared to lead the lumbering brute into the sleeping quarters.

His program worked perfectly. Mr. Gervaise was nothing loth to talk with me about the case, and I gathered that he had taken de Grandin's evident dislike much to heart. Again and again he assured me, almost with tears in his eyes, that

he had not the least intention of eavesdropping when he was discovered at the office door, but that he had really come in search of a pencil. It seemed he used a special indelible lead in making out his reports, and had discovered that the only one he possessed was in the office after we had taken possession. His protestations were so earnest that I left him convinced de Grandin had done him an injustice.

Next morning I was at a loss what to think. Arriving at the orphanage well before daylight, de Grandin and I let ourselves into the little children's dormitory, mounted the stairs to the second floor where the youngsters slept, and released the vicious dog which the Frenchman had tethered by a stout nail driven into the floor and a ten-foot length of stout steel chain. Inquiry among the building's attendants elicited the information that no one had visited the sleeping apartment after we left, as there had been no occasion for anyone connected with the home to do so. Yet on the floor beside the dog there lay a ragged square of white linen, such as might have been ripped from a night-robe or a suit of pajamas, reduced almost to a pulp by the savage brute's worrying, and — when Superintendent Gervaise entered the office to greet us, he was wearing his right arm in a sling.

"You are injured, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked with mock solicitude, noting the superintendent's bandaged hand with dancing eyes.

"Yes," the other replied, coughing apologetically, "yes, sir. I — I cut myself rather badly last night on a pane of broken glass in my quarters. The window must have been broken by a shutter being blown against it, and —"

"Quite so," the Frenchman agreed amiably. "They bite terrifically, these broken window-panes, is it not so?"

"Bite?" Gervaise echoed, regarding the other with a surprised, somewhat frightened expression. "I hardly understand you — oh, yes, I see," he smiled rather feebly. "You mean cut."

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin assured him solemnly as he rose to leave, "I did mean exactly what I said; no more, and certainly no less."

"Now what?" I queried as we left the office and the gaping superintendent behind us.

"*Non, non*," he responded irritably. "I know not what to think, my friend. One thing, he points this way, another, he points elsewhere. Me, I am like a mariner in the midst of a fog. Go you to the car, Friend Trowbridge, and chaperone our so estimable ally. I shall pay a visit to the laundry, meantime."

None too pleased with my assignment, I re-entered my car and made myself as agreeable as possible to the dog, devoutly hoping that the hearty breakfast de Grandin had provided him had taken the edge off his appetite. I had no wish to have him stay his hunger on one of my limbs. The animal proved docile enough, however, and besides opening

his mouth once or twice in prodigious yawns which gave me an unpleasantly close view of his excellent dentition, did nothing to cause me alarm.

When de Grandin returned he was fuming with impatience and anger. "*Sacré nom d'un grillon!*" he swore. "It is beyond me. Undoubtedly this Monsieur Gervaise is a liar, it was surely no glass which caused the wound in his arm last night; yet there is no suit of torn pajamas belonging to him in the laundry."

"Perhaps he didn't send them to be washed," I ventured with a grin. "If I'd been somewhere I was not supposed to be last night and found someone had posted a man-eating dog in my path, I'd not be in a hurry to send my torn clothing to the laundry where it might betray me."

"*Tiens*, you reason excellently, my friend," he complimented, "but can you explain how it is that there is no torn night-clothing of Monsieur Gervaise at the washrooms today, yet two ladies' night-ropes — one of Mère Martin's, one of Mademoiselle Bosworth's — display exactly such rents as might have been made by having this bit of cloth torn from them?" He exhibited the relic we had found beside the dog that morning and stared gloomily at it.

"H'm, it looks as if you hadn't any facts which will stand the acid test just yet," I replied flippantly; but the seriousness with which he received my commonplace rejoinder startled me.

"*Morbleu*, the acid test, do you say?" he exclaimed. "*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu*, it may easily be so! Why did I not think of it before? Perhaps. Possibly. Who knows! It may be so!"

"What in the world —" I began, but he cut me short with a frantic gesture.

"*Non, non*, my friend, not now," he implored. "Me, I must think. I must make this empty head of mine do the work for which it is so poorly adapted. Let us see, let us consider, let us ratiocinate!"

"*Parbleu*, I have it!" He drew his hands downward from his forehead with a quick, impatient motion and turned to me. "Drive me to the nearest pharmacy, my friend. If we do not find what we wish there, we must search elsewhere, and elsewhere, until we discover it. *Mordieu*, Trowbridge, my friend, I thank you for mentioning that acid test! Many a wholesome truth is contained in words of idle jest, I do assure you."

Five miles out of Springville a gang of workmen were resurfacing the highway, and we were forced to detour over a back road. Half an hour's slow driving along this brought us to a tiny Italian settlement where a number of laborers originally engaged on the Lackawanna's right of way had bought up the swampy, low-lying lands along the creek and converted them into model track gardens. At the head of the

single street composing the hamlet was a neatly whitewashed plank building bearing the sign *Farmacia Italiana*, together with a crudely painted representation of the Italian royal coat of arms.

“Here, my friend,” de Grandin commanded, plucking me by the sleeve. “Let us stop here a moment and inquire of the estimable gentleman who conducts this establishment that which we would know.”

“But what —?” I began, then stopped, noting the futility of my question. Jules de Grandin had already leaped from the car and entered the little drug store.

Without preamble he addressed a flood of fluent Italian to the druggist, receiving monosyllabic replies which gradually expanded both in verbosity and volume, accompanied by much waving of hands and lifting of shoulders and eyebrows. What they said I had no means of knowing, since I understood no word of Italian, but I heard the word *acido* repeated several times by each of them during the three minutes’ heated conversation.

When de Grandin finally turned to leave the store, with a grateful bow to the proprietor, he wore an expression as near complete mystification and surprise as I had ever seen him display. His little eyes were rounded with mingled thought and amazement, and his narrow red lips were pursed beneath the line of his slim blond moustache as though he were about to emit a low, soundless whistle.

“Well?” I demanded — as we regained the car. “Did you find out what you were after?”

“Eh?” he answered absently. “Did I find — Trowbridge, my friend, I know not what I found out, but this I know: those who lighted the witch-fires in olden days were not such fools as we believe them. *Parbleu*, at this moment they are grinning at us from their graves, or I am much mistaken. Tonight, my friend, be ready to accompany me back to that orphans’ home where the devil nods approval to those who perform his business so skillfully.”

That evening he was like one in a muse, eating sparingly and seemingly without realizing what food he took, answering my questions absent-mindedly or not at all, even forgetting to light his customary cigarette between dinner and dessert. “*Nom d’un champignon*,” he muttered, staring abstractedly into his coffee cup, “it must be that it is so; but who would believe it?”

I sighed in vexation. His habit of musing aloud but refusing to tell the trend of his thoughts while he arranged the factors of a case upon his mental chess-board was one which always annoyed me, but nothing I had been able to do had swerved him from his custom of withholding all information until he reached the climax of the mystery. “*Non, non*,” he replied when I pressed him to take me into his confidence, “the less I speak, the less danger I run of

showing myself to be one great fool, my friend. Let me reason this business in my own way, I beseech you.” And there the matter rested.

Toward midnight he rose impatiently and motioned toward the door. “Let us go,” he suggested. “It will be an hour or more before we reach our destination, and that should be the proper time for us to see what I fear we shall behold, Friend Trowbridge.”

We drove across country to Springville through the early autumn night in silence, turned in at the orphanage gates and parked before the administration building, where Superintendent Gervaise maintained his living quarters.

“*Monsieur*,” de Grandin called softly as he rapped gently on the superintendent’s door, “it is I, Jules de Grandin. For all the wrong I have done you I humbly apologize, and now I would that you give me assistance.”

Blinking with mingled sleep and surprise, the little, gray-haired official let us into his rooms and smiled rather fatuously at us. “What is it you’d like me to do for you, Dr. de Grandin?” he asked.

“I would that you guide us to the sleeping apartments of *Mère Martin*. Are they in this building?”

“No,” Gervaise replied wonderingly. “Mother Martin has a cottage of her own over at the south end of the grounds. She likes the privacy of a separate house, and we—”

“*Précisément*,” the Frenchman agreed, nodding vigorously. “I well understand her love of privacy, I fear. Come, let us go. You will show us the way?”

Mother Martin’s cottage stood by the southern wall of the orphanage compound. It was a neat little building of the semi-bungalow type, constructed of red brick, and furnished with a low, wide porch of white-painted wood. Only the chirping of a cricket in the long grass and the long-drawn, melancholy call of a crow in the near-by poplars broke the silence of the starlit night as we walked noiselessly up the brick path leading to the cottage door. Gervaise was about to raise the polished brass knocker which adorned the white panels when de Grandin grasped his arm, enjoining silence.

Quietly as a shadow the little Frenchman crept from one of the wide, shutterless front windows to the other, looking intently into the darkened interior of the house, then, with upraised finger warning us to caution, he tiptoed from the porch and began making a circuit of the house, pausing to peer through each window as he passed it.

At the rear of the cottage was a one-story addition which evidently housed the kitchen, and here the blinds were tightly drawn, though beneath their lower edges there crept a faint, narrow band of lamplight.

“*Ah — bien!*” the Frenchman breathed, flattening his aquiline nose against the window-pane as though he would look through the shrouding curtain by virtue of the very intensity of his gaze.

A moment we stood there in the darkness, de Grandin's little waxed moustache twitching at the ends like the whiskers of an alert tom-cat, Gervaise and I in total bewilderment, when the Frenchman's next move filled us with mingled astonishment and alarm. Reaching into an inner pocket, he produced a small, diamond-set glass-cutter, moistened it with the tip of his tongue and applied it to the window, drawing it slowly downward, then horizontally, then upward again to meet the commencement of the first down-stroke, thus describing an equilateral triangle on the pane. Before the cutter's circuit was entirely completed, he drew what appeared to be a square of thick paper from another pocket, hastily tore it apart and placed it face downward against the glass. It was only when the operation was complete that I realized how it was accomplished. The "plaster" he applied to the window was nothing more nor less than a square of fly-paper, and its sticky surface prevented any telltale tinkle from sounding as he finished cutting the triangle from the window-pane and carefully lifted it out by means of the gummed paper.

Once he had completed his opening he drew forth a small, sharp-bladed penknife, and working very deliberately, lest the slightest sound betray him proceeded to slit a peep-hole through the opaque window-blind.

For a moment he stood there, gazing through his spy-hole, the expression on his narrow face changing from one of concentrated interest to almost incredulous horror, finally to fierce, implacable rage.

"*À moi, Trowbridge, à moi, Gervaise!*" he shouted in a voice which was almost a shriek as he thrust his shoulder unceremoniously against the pane, bursting it into a dozen pieces, and leaped into the lighted room beyond.

I scrambled after him as best I could, and the astounded superintendent followed me, mouthing mild protests against our burglarious entry of Mrs. Martin's house.

One glance at the scene before me took all thought of our trespass from my mind.

Wheeled about to face us, her back to a fiercely glowing coal-burning kitchen range, stood the once placid Mother Martin, enveloped from throat to knees in a commodious apron. But all semblance of her placidity was gone as she regarded the trembling little Frenchman who extended an accusing finger at her. Across her florid, smooth-skinned face had come such a look of fiendish rage as no flight of my imagination could have painted. Her lips, seemingly shrunk to half their natural thickness, were drawn back in animal fury against her teeth, and her blue eyes seemed forced forward from her face with the pressure of hatred within her. At the corners of her twisting mouth were little flecks of white foam, and her jaw thrust forward like that of an infuriated ape. Never in my life, on any face, either bestial or human, had I seen such an expression. It was a

revolting parody of humanity on which I looked, a thing so horrible, so incomparably cruel and devilish, I would have looked away if I could, yet felt my eyes compelled to turn again to the evil visage as a fascinated bird's gaze may be held by the glitter in the serpent's film-covered eye.

But horrid as the sight of the woman's transfigured features was, a greater horror showed behind her, for, protruding half its length from the fire-grate of the blazing range was something no medical man could mistake after even a split-second's inspection. It was the unfleshed radius and ulna bones of a child's forearm, the wrist process still intact where the flesh and periosteum had not been entirely removed in dissection. On the tile-topped kitchen table beside the stove stood a wide-mouthed glass bowl filled with some liquid about the shade of new vinegar, and in this there lay a score of small, glittering white objects — a child's teeth. Neatly dressed, wound with cord like a roast, and, like a roast, placed in a wide, shallow pan, ready for cooking, was a piece of pale, veal-like meat.

The horror of it fairly nauseated me. The thing in woman's form before us was a cannibal, and the meat she had been preparing to bake was — my mind refused to form the words, even in the silence of my inner consciousness.

"You — *you,*" the woman cried in a queer, throaty voice, so low it was scarcely audible, yet so intense in its vibrations that I was reminded of the rumbling of an infuriated cat's cry. "How — did — you — find — ?"

"*Eh bien, Madame,*" de Grandin returned, struggling to speak with his customary cynical flippancy, but failing in the attempt, "how I did find out is of small moment. What I found, I think you will agree, is of the great import."

For an instant I thought the she-fiend would launch herself at him, but her intention lay elsewhere. Before any of us was aware of her move she had seized the glass vessel from the table, lifted it to her lips and all but emptied its contents down her throat in two frantic swallows. Next instant, frothing, writhing, contorting herself horribly, she lay on the tiled floor at our feet, her lips thickening and swelling with brownish blisters as the poison she had drunk regurgitated from her esophagus and welled up between her tightly set teeth.

"Good heavens!" I cried, bending forward instinctively to aid her, but the Frenchman drew me back. "Let be, Friend Trowbridge," he remarked. "It is useless. She has taken enough hydrochloric acid to kill three men, and those movements of hers are only mechanical. Already she is unconscious, and in another five minutes she will have opportunity to explain her so strange life to One far wiser than we.

"Meantime," he assumed the cold, matter-of-fact manner of a morgue attendant performing his duties, "let us gather up these relics of the poor one" — he indicated the partially

cremated arm-bones and the meat in the shining aluminum pan — “and preserve them for decent interment. I —”

A choking, gasping sound behind us turned our attention to the orphanage superintendent. Following more slowly through the window in de Grandin’s wake he had not at first grasped the significance of the horrors we had seen. The spectacle of the woman’s suicide had unnerved him, but when de Grandin pointed to the relics in the stove and on the table, the full meaning of our discovery had fallen on him. With an inarticulate cry he had dropped to the floor in a dead faint.

“*Pardieu*,” the Frenchman exclaimed, crossing to the water-tap and filling a tumbler, “I think we had best bestow our services on the living before we undertake the care of the dead, Friend Trowbridge.”

As he re-crossed the kitchen to minister to the unconscious superintendent there came an odd, muffled noise from the room beyond. “*Qui vive?*” he challenged sharply, placing the glass of water on the dresser and darting through the door, his right hand dropping into his jacket pocket where the ready pistol lay. I followed at his heels, and, as he stood hesitating at the threshold, felt along the wall, found the electric switch and pressed it, flooding the room with light. On the couch beneath the window, bound hand and foot with strips torn from a silk scarf and gagged with another length of silk wound about her face, lay little Betsy, the child who had informed us she feared being hurt when we made our pretended inspection of the home’s inmates the previous day.

“*Morbleu*,” de Grandin muttered as he liberated the little one from her bonds, “another?”

“Mother Martin came for Betsy and tied her up,” the child informed us as she raised herself to a sitting posture. “She told Betsy she would send her to heaven with her papa and mamma, but Betsy must be good and not make a fuss when her hands and feet were tied.”

She smiled vaguely at de Grandin. “Why doesn’t Mother Martin come for Betsy?” she demanded. “She said she would come and send me to heaven in a few minutes, but I waited and waited, and she didn’t come, and the cloth over my face kept tickling my nose, and —”

“Mother Martin has gone away on business, *ma petite*,” the Frenchman interrupted. “She said she could not send you to your papa and mama, but if you are a very good little girl you may go to them some day. Meantime” — he fished in his jacket pocket, finally produced a packet of chocolates — “here is the best substitute I can find for heaven at this time, *chérie*.”

“Well, old chap, I’ll certainly have to admit you went right to the heart of the matter,” I congratulated as we drove homeward through the paling dawn, “but I can’t for the life

of me figure out how you did it.”

His answering smile was a trifle wan. The horrors we had witnessed at the matron’s cottage had been almost too great a strain for even his iron nerve. “Partly it was luck,” he confessed wearily, “and partly it was thought.

“When first we arrived at the home for orphans I had nothing to guide me, but I was convinced that the little ones had not wandered off voluntarily. The environment seemed too good to make any such hypothesis possible. Everywhere I looked I saw evidences of loving care, and faces which could be trusted. But somewhere, I felt, as an old wound feels the coming changes of the weather, there was something evil, some evil force working against the welfare of those poor ones. Where could it be, and by whom was it exerted? ‘This is for us to find out,’ I tell me as I look over the attendants who were visible in the chapel.

“Gervaise, he is an old woman in trousers. Never would he hurt a living thing, no, not even a fly, unless it bit him first.

“*Mère Martin*, she was of a saintly appearance, but when I was presented to her I learn something which sets my brain to thinking. On the softness of her white hands are stains and callouses. Why? I hold her hand longer than convention required, and all the time I ask me, ‘What have she done to put these hardnesses on her hands?’

“To this I had no answer, so I bethought me perhaps my nose could tell what my sense of touch could not. When I raised her hand to my lips I made a most careful examination of it, and also I did smell. Trowbridge, my friend, I made sure those disfigurements were due to HCl — what you call hydrochloric acid in English.

“*Morbleu*, but this is extraordinary,’ I tell me. ‘Why should one who has no need to handle acid have those burns on her skin?’

“‘That are for you to answer in good time,’ I reply to me. And then I temporarily forget the lady and her hands, because I am sure that Monsieur Gervaise desires to know what we say to the young children. *Eh bien*, I did do him an injustice there, but the wisest of us makes mistakes, my friend, and he gave me much reason for suspicion.

“When the little Betsy was answering my questions she tells me that she has seen a ‘white lady,’ tall and with flowing robes, like an angel, come into the dormitory where she and her companions slept on many occasions, and I have ascertained from previous questions that no one enters those sleeping quarters after the lights are out unless there is specific need for a visit. What was I to think? Had the little one dreamed it, or has she seen, this so mysterious ‘white lady’ on her midnight visits? It is hard to say where recollection stops and romance begins in children’s tales, my friend, as you well know, but the little Betsy was most sure the ‘white lady’ had come only on those nights when

her little companions vanished.

“Here we had something from which to reason, though the morsel of fact was small. However, when I talk further with the child, she informed me it was *Mère* Martin who had warned her against us, saying we would surely cut her tongue with a knife if she talked to us. This, again, was worthy of thought. But Monsieur Gervaise had been smelling at the door while we were interrogating the children, and he had also disapproved of our seeing them alone. My suspicion of him would not die easily, my friend; I was stubborn, and refused to let my mind take me where it would.

“So, as you know, when we had posted the four-footed sentry inside the children’s door, I made sure we would catch a fish in our trap, and next morning I was convinced we had, for did not Gervaise wear his arm in a sling! Truly, he did.

“But at the laundry they showed me no torn pajamas of his, while I found the gowns of both Mademoiselle Bosworth and Madame Martin torn as if the dog had bitten them. More mystery. Which way should I turn, if at all?

“I find that Gervaise’s window really had been broken, but that meant nothing; he might have done it himself in order to construct an alibi. Of the reason for Mademoiselle Bosworth’s torn robe I could glean no trace; but behind my brain, at the very back of my head, something was whispering at me; something I could not hear, but which I knew was of importance.

“Then, as we drove away from the home, you mentioned the acid test. My friend, those words of yours let loose the memory which cried aloud to me, but which I could not clearly understand. Of a suddenness I did recall the scene at luncheon, how Mademoiselle Bosworth declared *Mère* Martin ate no meat for six months, and how angry Madame Martin was at the mention of it. *Parbleu*, for six months the little ones had been disappearing — for six months Madame Martin had eaten no meat, yet she were plump and well-nourished. She had the look of a meat-eater!”

“Still,” I protested, “I don’t see how that put you on the track.”

“No?” he replied. “Remember, my friend, how we stopped to interview the druggist. Why think you we did that?”

“Hanged if I know,” I confessed.

“Of course not,” he agreed with a nod. “But I know. ‘Suppose,’ I say to me, ‘someone have eaten the flesh of these poor disappeared children? What would that one do with the bones?’

“‘He would undoubtedly bury or burn them,’ I reply.

“‘Very good, but more likely he would burn them, since buried bones, may be dug up, and burned bones are only ashes; but what of the teeth? They would resist fire such as

can be had in the ordinary stove, yet surely they might betray the murderer.’

“‘But of course,’ I admit, ‘but why should not the murderer reduce those teeth with acid, hydrochloric acid, for instance?’

“‘Ah-ha,’ I tell me, ‘that are the answer. Already you have one whose hands are acid-stained without adequate explanation, also one who eats no meat at table. Find out, now, who have bought acid from some neighboring drug store, and perhaps you will have the answer to your question.’

“The Italian gentleman who keeps the pharmacy tells me that a lady of very kindly mien comes to him frequently and buys hydrochloric acid, which she calls muriatic acid, showing she are not a chemist, but knows only the commercial term for the stuff. She is a tall, large lady with white hair and kind blue eyes.

“‘It are *Mère* Martin!’ I tell me. ‘She are the “white lady” of the orphanage!’

“Then I consult my memory some more, and decide we shall investigate this night.

“Listen, my friend: In the Paris *Sûreté* we have the history of many remarkable cases, not only from France, but other lands as well. In the year 1849 a miscreant named Swiatek was haled before the Austrian courts on a charge of cannibalism, and in the same year there was another somewhat similar case where a young English lady — a girl of much refinement and careful education and nurture — was the defendant. Neither of these was naturally fierce or bloodthirsty, yet their crimes were undoubted. In the case of the beggar we have a transcription of his confession. He did say in part: When first driven by dire hunger to eat of human flesh he became, as the first horrid morsel passed his lips, as it were a ravening wolf. He did rend and tear the flesh and growl in his throat like a brute beast the while. From that time forth he could stomach no other meat, nor could he abide the sight or smell of it. Beef, pork or mutton filled him with revulsion. And had not Madame Martin exhibited much the same symptoms at table? Truly.

“Things of a strange nature sometimes occur, my friend. The mind of man is something of which we know but little, no matter how learnedly we prate. Why does one man love to watch a snake creep, while another goes into ecstasies of terror at sight of a reptile? Why do some people hate the sight of a cat, while others fear a tiny, harmless mouse as though he were the devil’s brother-in-law? None can say, yet these things are. So I think it is with crime.

“This Madame Martin was not naturally cruel. Though she killed and ate her charges, you will recall how she bound the little Betsy with silk, and did it in such a way as not to injure her, or even to make her uncomfortable. That meant mercy? By no means, my friend. Myself, I have seen

peasant women in my own land weep upon and fondle the rabbit they were about to kill for *déjeuner*. They did love and pity the poor little beast which was to die, but *que voulez vous?* One must eat.

“Some thought like this, I doubt not, was in Madame Martin’s mind as she committed murder. Somewhere in her nature was a thing we can not understand; a thing which made her crave the flesh of her kind for food, and she answered the call of that craving even as the taker of drugs is helpless against his vice.

“*Tiens*, I am convinced that if we searched her house we should have the explanation of the children’s disappearance, and you yourself witnessed what we saw. It was well she took the poison when she did. Death, or incarceration in a madhouse, would have been her portion had she lived, and” — he shrugged his shoulders — “the world is better off without her.”

“U’m, I see how you worked it, out,” I replied, “but will Mr. Richards be satisfied? We’ve accounted for one of the children, because we found part of her skeleton in the fire,

but can we swear the rest disappeared in the same manner? Richards will want a statistical table of facts before he parts with three thousand dollars, I imagine.”

“*Parbleu*, will he, indeed?” de Grandin answered, something like his usual elfish grin spreading across his face. “What think you would be the result were we to notify the authorities of the true facts, leading up to Madame Martin’s suicide? Would not the newspapers make much of it. *Cordieu*, I shall say they would, and the home for orphans over which Monsieur Richards presides so pompously would receive what you call ‘the black eye.’ *Morbleu*, my friend, the very black eye, indeed! No, no; me, I think Monsieur Richards will gladly pay us the reward, nor haggle over terms.

“Meanwhile, we are at home once more. Come, let us drink the cognac.”

“Drink cognac?” I answered. “Why, in heaven’s name?”

“*Parbleu*, we shall imbibe a toast to the magnificent three thousand dollars Monsieur Richards pays us tomorrow morning!”

The Poltergeist

“AND SO, Dr. de Grandin,” our visitor concluded, “this is really a case for your remarkable powers.”

Jules de Grandin selected a fresh cigarette from his engine-turned silver case, tapped its end thoughtfully against his well-manicured thumb-nail and regarded the caller with one of his disconcertingly unwinking stares. “Am I to understand that all other attempts to effect a cure have failed, *Monsieur*?” he asked at length.

“Utterly. We’ve tried everything in reason, and out of it,” Captain Loudon replied. “We’ve had some of the best neurologists in consultation, we’ve employed faith-healers, spiritualistic mediums, even had her given ‘absent treatment,’ all to no avail. All the physicians, all the cultists and quacks have failed us; now —”

“Now, I do not think I care to be numbered among those quacks, *Monsieur*,” the Frenchman returned coldly, expelling a double column of smoke from his nostrils. “Had you called me into consultation with an accredited physician—”

“But that’s just it,” the captain interrupted. “Every physician we’ve had has been confident he could work a cure, but they’ve all failed. Julia is a lovely girl — I don’t say it because she’s my daughter, I state it as a fact — and was to have been married this fall, and now this — this disorder has taken complete possession of her and it’s wrecking her life. Robert — Lieutenant Proudfit, her fiancé — and I are almost beside ourselves, and as for my daughter, I fear her mind will give way and she’ll destroy herself unless *somebody* can do *something*!”

“Ah?” the little Frenchman arched the narrow black brows which were such a vivid contrast to his blond hair and moustache. “Why did not you say so before, *Monsieur le Capitaine*? It is not merely the curing of one nervous young lady that you would have me undertake, but the fruition of a romance I should bring about? *Bien*, good, very well; I accept. If you will also retain my good friend Dr. Trowbridge, so that there shall be a locally licensed and respected physician in the case, my powers which you have been kind enough to call remarkable are entirely at your disposal.”

“Splendid!” Captain Loudon agreed, rising. “Then it’s all arranged. I can expect you to —”

“One moment, if you please,” de Grandin interrupted, raising his slender, womanishly small hand for silence. “Suppose we make a *précis* of the case before we go further.” He drew a pad of note-paper and a pencil toward him as he continued:

“Your daughter, Mademoiselle Julie, how old is she?”

“Twenty-nine.”

“A most charming age,” the little Frenchman commented, scribbling a note. “And she is your only child?”

“Yes.”

“Now, these manifestations of the *outré*, these so unusual happenings, they began to take place about six months ago?”

“Just about; I can’t place the time exactly.”

“No matter. They have assumed various mystifying forms? She has refused food, she has had visions, she shouts, she sings uncontrollably, she speaks in a voice which is strange to her — at times she goes into a deathlike trance and from her throat issue strange voices, voices of men, or other women, even of little children?”

“Yes.”

“And other apparently inexplicable things occur. Chairs, books, tables, even such heavy pieces of furniture as a piano, move from their accustomed places when she is near, and bits of jewelry and other small objects are hurled through the air?”

“Yes, and worse than that, I’ve seen pins and needles fly from her work-basket and bury themselves in her cheeks and arms,” the captain interrupted, “and lately she’s been persecuted by scars — scars from some invisible source. Great weals, like the claw-marks from some beast, have appeared on her arms and face, right while I looked on, and I’ve been wakened at night by her screams, and when I rush into her room I find the marks of long, thin fingers on her throat. It’s maddening, sir; terrifying. I’d say it was a case of demoniacal possession, if I didn’t disbelieve all that sort of supernaturalism.”

“U’m,” de Grandin looked up from the pad on which he had been industriously scribbling. “There is nothing in the world, or out of it, which is supernatural, my friend; the wisest man today can not say where the powers and possibilities of nature begin or end. We say, ‘Thus and so is beyond the bounds of our experience,’ but does that therefore put it beyond the bounds of nature? I think not. Myself, I have seen such things as no man can hear me relate without calling me a liar, and my good, unimaginative friend Trowbridge has witnessed such wonders as no writer of fiction would dare set down on paper, yet I do declare we have never yet seen that which I would call supernatural.”

“But come, let us go, let us hasten to your house, *Monsieur*; I would interview Mademoiselle Julie and see for myself some of these so remarkable afflictions of hers.

“Remember,” he turned his fixed, unwinking stare on our patron as we paused for our outdoor things in the hall, “remember, if you please, *Monsieur*, I am not like those quacks, or even those other physicians who have failed you. I do not say I can work a cure. I can but promise to try. Good, we shall see what we shall see. Let us go.”

Robert Beauregard Loudon was a retired navy captain, a widower with more than sufficient means to gratify his rather epicurean tastes, and possessed one of the finest houses in the fashionable new west side suburb. The furnishings spoke of something more than wealth as we surveyed them; they proclaimed that vague, but nevertheless tangible thing known as “background” which is only to be had from generations of ancestors to the manor born. Original pieces of mahogany by Sheraton and Chippendale and the Brothers Adam, family portraits from the brush of Benjamin West, silver in the best tradition of the early Eighteenth Century smiths, even the dignifiedly aloof, elderly colored butler, announced that our patient’s father was in every way an officer and a gentleman in the best sense of the term.

“If you will give Hezekiah your things,” Captain Loudon indicated the solemn old Negro with a nod, “I’ll go up and tell my daughter you’re here. I know she will be glad to—”

A clanking, banging noise, like a tin can bumping over the cobbles at the tail of some luckless terrier, interrupted his remarks, and we turned in amazement toward the wide, curving staircase at the further end of the long central hall. The noise grew louder, almost deafening, then ceased as abruptly as it began, and a young girl rounded the curve of the staircase, coming slowly toward us.

She was more than middle height, slender and supple as a willow withe, and carried herself with the bearing of a young princess. A lovely though almost unfashionably long gown of white satin and chiffon draped its uneven hem almost to her ankles, and about her slender bare shoulders and over her arms hung a richly embroidered shawl of Chinese silk. One hand rested lightly on the mahogany rail of the balustrade, as though partly for support, partly for guidance, as she slowly descended the red-carpeted steps. This much we saw at first glance, but our second look remained riveted on her sweet, pale face.

Almost unbeautifully long it was, pale with the rich, creamy pallor which is some women’s birthright and not the result of poor health, and her vivid, scarlet lips showed in contrast to her ivory cheeks like a rose fallen in the snow. Brows as delicate as those of a French doll, narrow, curving brows which needed no plucking to accentuate their patrician lines, dipped sharply together above the bridge of her small nose, and lashes which even at the distance we stood from her showed their vivid blackness veiled her eyes.

At first I thought her gaze was on the steps before her, and that she made each forward movement with slow care lest she fall from weakness or nervous exhaustion, but a second’s scrutiny of her face, told me the truth. The girl walked with lowered lids. Whether in natural sleep or in some supernatural trance, she was descending the stairs with tightly closed eyes.

“*La pauvre petite*,” de Grandin exclaimed under his breath, his gaze fixed on her. “*Grand Dieu*, Friend Trowbridge, but she is beautiful! Why did I not come here before?”

Out of the empty air, apparently some six feet above the girl’s proudly poised head, a burst of mocking, maniacal laughter answered him, and from the thick-piled carpet suddenly rose again the clang-bang racket we had heard before she came into view.

“*Hélas!*” De Grandin turned a pitying glance on the girl’s father, then: “*Nom de Dieu!*” he cried, ducking his head suddenly and looking over his shoulder with rounded eyes. Against the wall of the apartment, some twenty feet distant, there hung a stand of arms, one or two swords, a spear and several bolos, trophies of the captain’s service in the Philippines. As though seized by an invisible hand, one of the bolos had detached itself from the wall, hurtled whistling through the air and embedded itself nearly an inch deep in the white wainscoting behind the little Frenchman, missing his cheek by the barest fraction of a centimeter as it flew whirring past.

The clanking tumult beneath the girl’s feet subsided as quickly as it commenced, she took an uncertain step forward and opened her eyes. They were unusually long, purple rather than blue in color, and held such an expression of changeless melancholy as I had never seen in one so young. It was the look of one foredoomed to inescapable death by an incurable disease.

“Why” — she began with the bewildered look of one suddenly roused from sleep — “why — Father! What am I doing here? I was in my room, lying down, when I thought I heard Robert’s voice. I tried to get up, but ‘It’ held me down, and I think I fell asleep. I —”

“*Daughter*,” Captain Loudon spoke gently, the sobs very near the surface, for all his iron self-control, “these gentlemen are Dr. de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge. They’ve come to —”

“Oh,” the girl made an impatient gesture which yet seemed somewhat languid, as though even remonstrance were useless, “more doctors! Why did you bring them, Father? You know they’ll be just like all the rest. Nothing can help me — nothing seems any good!”

“*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin bent forward in a formal, European bow, heels together, elbows stiffly at sides, “but I think you will find us most different

from the rest. To begin, we come to cure you and give you back to the man you love; and in the second place, I have a personal interest in this case.”

“A personal interest?” she inquired, acknowledging his bow with a negligent nod.

“*Morbleu*, but I have. Did not the — the thing which troubles you, hurl a bolo-knife at me? *Sacré nom*, no *fantôme*, no *lutin* shall throw knives at Jules de Grandin, then boast of the exploit to his ghostly fellows. *Nom d’un petit Chinois*, I think we shall show them something before we are finished!”

“Now, *Mademoiselle*, we must ask your pardon for these questions,” he began when he had reached the drawing room. “To you it is an old and much-told tale, but we are ignorant of your case, save for such information as your father has imparted. Tell us, if you please, when did these so strange manifestations begin?” The girl regarded him silently a moment, her brooding, plum-colored eyes staring almost resentfully into his agate-blue ones.

“It was about six months ago,” she began in a lifeless monotone, like a child reciting a rote-learned but distasteful lesson. “I had come home from a dance in New York with Lieutenant Proudfit, and it must have been about three o’clock in the morning, for we had not left New York until midnight, and our train was delayed by a heavy sleet-storm. Lieutenant Proudfit was stopping overnight with us, for we are — we were — engaged, and I had said good-night to him and gone to my room when it seemed I heard something fluttering and tapping at my window, like a bird attracted by the light, or — I don’t know what made me think so, but I got the impression, somehow — a bat beating its wings against the panes.

“I remember being startled by the noise, at first, then I was overcome with pity for the poor thing, for it was bitter cold outside and the sleet was driving down like whiplashes with the force of the east wind. I went over to the window and opened it to see what was outside. I” — she hesitated a moment, then went forward with her narrative — “I was partly undressed by this time, and the cold wind blowing through the open window cut like a knife, but I looked out into the storm to see if I could find the bird, or whatever it was.”

“Ah?” de Grandin’s little eyes were sparkling with suppressed excitement, but there was neither humor nor warmth in their flash. Rather, they were like two tiny pools of clear, adamant-hard ice reflecting a cloudless winter sky and bright, cold winter sunshine. “Proceed, if you please,” he commanded, his voice utterly toneless. “You did open your window to the tapping which was outside. And what did you next?”

“I looked out and said, ‘Come in, you poor creature!’” the

girl replied. “Even though I thought it was a bat at the pane, my reason told me it couldn’t be, for bats aren’t about in the dead of winter, and if it had been one, much as I hate the things, I couldn’t have slept with the thought of its being outside in my mind.”

“Ah!” de Grandin repeated, his voice raised slightly in interrogation. “And so you did invite what was outside to come in?” Level as his tone was, there was a certain pointedness in the way he spoke the words, almost as though they were uttered in faintly shocked protest.

“Of course,” she returned. “I know it was silly for me to speak to a bird that way, as if it could understand, but, you know, we often address animals in that way. At any rate, I might have saved myself the chilling I got, for there was nothing there. I waited several minutes till the cold wind almost set my teeth to chattering, but nothing was visible outside, and there were no further flutterings at the window.”

“Probably not,” the Frenchman commented dryly. “What then, please?”

“Why, nothing — right away. It seemed as though the room had become permanently chilled, though, for even after I’d closed the window the air was icy cold, and I had to wrap my dressing gown about me while I made ready for bed. Then —” She stopped with an involuntary shudder.

“Yes, and then?” he prompted, regarding her narrowly while his lean white fingers tapped a devil’s tattoo on his chair arm.

“Then the first strange thing happened. As I was slipping my gown off, I distinctly felt a hand grasp me about the upper arm — a long, thin, deathly cold hand!”

She looked up defiantly, as though expecting some skeptical protest, but: “Yes,” he nodded shortly. “And after that?”

The girl regarded him with a sort of wonder. “You believe me — believe I actually felt something grasp me?” she asked incredulously.

“Have you not said so, *Mademoiselle*?” he returned a thought irritably. “Proceed, please.”

“But every other doctor I’ve talked to has tried to tell me I didn’t — couldn’t have actually felt such a thing,” she persisted.

“*Mademoiselle!*” the little man’s annoyance cut through the habitual courtesy with which he treated members of the gentler sex as a flame cuts through wax. “We do waste time. We are discussing you and your case, not the other physicians or their methods. They have failed. We shall give them none of our valuable time. *Bien*. You were saying —”

“That I felt a long, cold hand grasp me about the arm, and a moment later, before I had a chance to cry out or even shrink away, something began scratching my skin. It was like a long, blunt fingernail — a human nail, not the claw of

an animal, you understand. But it had considerable force behind it, and I could see the skin turning white in its wake. Dr. de Grandin” — she leaned forward, staring with wide, frightened eyes into his face — “the welts formed letters!”

“U’ m?” he nodded unexcitedly. “You do recall what they spelled?”

“They didn’t spell anything. It was like the ramblings of a Ouija board when the little table seems wandering about from letter to letter without spelling any actual words. I made out a crude, printed *D*, then a smaller *r*, then an *a*, and finally a *c* and *u* — Dr-a-c-u. That was all. You see, it wasn’t a word at all.”

De Grandin was sitting forward on the extreme edge of his chair, his hands grasping its arms as though he were about to leap from his seat. “*Dracu*,” he repeated softly to himself, then, still lower, “*Dieu de Dieu!* It is possible; but why?”

“Why, what is it?” the girl demanded, his tense attitude reflecting itself in her widened eyes and apprehensive expression.

He shook himself like a spaniel emerging from the water. “It is nothing, *Mademoiselle*,” he assured her with a resumption of his professionally impersonal manner. “I did think I recognized the word, but I fear I must have been mistaken. You are sure there were no other letters?”

“Positive. That was all; just those five, no more.”

“Quite yes. And after that?”

“After that all sorts of terrible things began happening to me. Father has told you how chairs and tables rise up when I come near them, and how little objects fly through the air?”

He nodded, smiling. “But of course,” he returned, “and I, myself, did see one little thing fly through the air. *Parbleu*, it did fly unpleasantly close to my head! And these so strange sleeps you have?”

“They come on me almost any time, mostly when I’m least expecting them. One time I was seized with one while on the train and” — her face flushed bright coral at the recollection — “and the conductor thought I was drunk!”

“*Bête!*” de Grandin murmured. “And you have not heard the voices — the noises which sometimes accompany you, *Mademoiselle*?”

“No, I’ve been told of them; but I know nothing of what occurs while I’m in one of these trances. I don’t even dream; at least, I have no dreams I can remember when I wake up. I only know that I am apt to fall asleep at any time, and frequently wander about while unconscious, waking up in some totally different place. Once I walked half-way to the city while asleep, and narrowly escaped being run down by a taxicab when I came to in the middle of the street.”

“But this is villainous!” he burst out. “This is infamous; this must not be allowed. *Mordieu*, I shall not permit it!”

Something of the girl’s weary manner returned as she asked, “How are you going to stop it? The others all said—”

“*Chut!* The others! We shall not discuss them, if you please, *Mademoiselle*. Me, I am not as the others; I am Jules de Grandin!

“First, my friend,” he turned to me, “I would that you obtain a competent nurse, one whose discretion is matched only by her ability. You know one such? *Très bien*. Hasten, rush, fly to procure her at once. Bid her come to us with all celerity and be prepared to serve until relieved.

“Next” — he seized a pad and scribbled a prescription — “I would that *Monsieur le Capitaine* has this filled and administers one dose dissolved in hot water at once. It is Somnol, a harmless mixture of drugs, pleasant to the taste and of undoubted efficacy in this case. It will act better than chloral.”

“But I don’t want to take chloral,” the girl protested. “I have enough trouble with sleep as it is; I want something to ward off sleep, not to induce it.”

“*Mademoiselle*,” he replied with something like a twinkle in his keen little eyes, “have you never heard of combating the devil with flames? Take the medicine as directed. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall return soon, and we shall not rest until we have produced a cure, never doubt it.”

“This is the strangest case I ever saw,” I confided as we drove toward town. “The girl’s symptoms all point to hysteria of the most violent sort, but I’m hanged if I can account for those diabolical noises which accompanied her down the stairs, or that laugh we heard when she reached the hall, or —”

“Or the knife which nearly split the head of Jules de Grandin?” he supplied. “No, my friend, I fear medical science can not account for those things. Me, I, see part of it, but not all, *parbleu*, not near enough. Do you recall the ancient medical theory concerning icterus?”

“Jaundice?”

“But of course.”

“You mean it used to be considered a disease, rather than a symptom?”

“Precisely. One hundred, two hundred years ago the craft knew the yellow color of the patient’s skin was due to diffused bile in the system, but what caused the diffusion? Ah, that was a question left long unanswered. So it is with this poor girl’s case. Me, I recognize the symptoms, and some of their cause is plain to me, but — ten thousand little red devils! — why? Why should she be the object of this persecution? One does not open a window in the wintertime to bid a non-existent bat or bird enter one’s house, only to fall victim to such tricks as have plagued *Mademoiselle Loudon* since that winter’s night. No, *morbleu*, there was a reason for it, the thing which tapped at her pane, being

outside that night, Friend Trowbridge, and the writing on her arm, that too, came not without cause!"

I listened in amazement to his tirade, but one of his statements struck a responsive chord in my memory. "You spoke of 'writing' on her arm, de Grandin," I interposed. "When she described it I thought you seemed to recognize some connection between the incomplete word and her symptoms. Is 'dakboo' a complete word, or the beginning of one?"

"*Dracu*," he corrected shortly. "Yes, my friend, it is a word. It is Rumanian for devil, or, more properly, demon. You begin to see the connection?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do," I retorted.

"So am I," he replied laconically, and lapsed into moody silence from which my best attempts at conversation failed to rouse him.

Lulled into counterfeit rest by the drug de Grandin prescribed, Julia Loudon passed the night comfortably enough, and seemed brighter and happier when we called to interview her next morning.

"*Mademoiselle*," de Grandin announced, after the usual medical mummery of taking temperature and pulse had been completed, "the day is fine. I prescribe that you go for a drive this morning; indeed, I strongly urge that you accompany Dr. Trowbridge and me forthwith. He has a number of calls to make, and I would observe what effect the fresh air has upon you. I venture to say you have had little enough of it lately."

"I haven't," the girl confessed. "You see, since that time when I wandered off in my sleep, I've been afraid to go anywhere by myself, and I've even shrunk from going out with Father or Rob — Lieutenant Proudfit. I've been afraid of embarrassing them by one of my seizures. But it will be all right for me to go if you and Dr. Trowbridge are along, I know," she smiled wistfully at him.

"Of a surety," he agreed, twisting the ends of his trim little blond moustache. "Have no fear, dear lady; I shall see no harm comes to you. Make haste, we would be off."

Miss Loudon turned to mount the stairs, a suggestion of freedom and returning health in the spring of her walk, and de Grandin turned a puzzled countenance to Captain Loudon and me. "Your daughter's case is far simpler than I had supposed, *Monsieur le Capitaine*," he announced. "So much I have been accustomed to encountering what unthinking persons call the supernatural that I fear I have become what you Americans call 'hipped' on the subject. Now, when first *Mademoiselle* detailed her experiences to me, I was led to certain conclusions which, happily, have not seemed justified by what we have since observed. Medicine is helpful in most cases of the kind, but I had feared —"

A perfect pandemonium of cacophonous dissonances, like the braying of half a dozen jazz bands suddenly gone crazy, interrupted his speech. Clattering tin cans, jangling cowbells, the wailings of tortured fiddles and discordant shrieks of wood-wind instruments all seemed mingled with shouts of wild, demoniac laughter as a bizarre figure emerged in view at the turn of the stairs and half leaped, half fell to the hall.

For an instant I failed to recognize patrician Julia Loudon in the grotesque thing before us. Her luxuriant black hair had escaped from the Grecian coronel in which she habitually wore it and hung fantastically about her breast and shoulders, half veiling, half disclosing a face from which every vestige of serenity had disappeared and on which a leer — no other word expresses it — of mingled craft and cunning and idiotic stupidity sat like a toad enthroned upon a fungus. She was bare-armed and barelegged; indeed, the only garment covering her supple, white body was a Spanish shawl wound tightly about bust and torso, its fringed ends dragging over the floor behind her flying feet as she capered like a female satyr across the hall drugged to the bedlam accompaniment of infernal noises which seemed to hover over her like a swarm of poisonous flies above a wounded animal struggling through the mire of a swamp.

"*Ai, ai, ai-ee!*" she cried in a raucous voice, bending this way and that in time to the devilish racket. "Behold my work, foolish man, behold my mastery! Fool that you are, to try to take mine from me! Today I shall make this woman a scandal and disgrace, and tonight I shall require her life. *Ai, ai, ai-ee!*"

For a fleeting instant de Grandin turned an appalled face to me, and I met his flying glance with one no less surprised, for the voice issuing from the girl's slender throat was not her own: No tone or inflection of it was reminiscent of Julia Loudon. Every shrilling syllable spoke of a different individual, a personality instinct with evil vivacity as hers seemed instinct with sweetness and melancholy.

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin exclaimed between set teeth, springing toward the girl, then halting in horrified amazement as though congealed to ice in his tracks. From every side of the room, like flickering beams of light, tiny bits of metal flew toward the girl's swaying body, and in an instant her arms, legs, throat, even her cheeks, were encrusted with glittering pins and needles buried point-deep in her creamy skin like the torture-implements driven into the bodies of the pain-defying fakirs of India. Almost it seemed as though the girl had suddenly become a powerful electro-magnet to which every particle of movable metal in the apartment had leaped.

For an instant she stood swaying there, the cruel points embedded in her flesh, yet seemingly causing no pain, then

a wild, heart-rending shriek broke from her lips, and her eyes opened wide in sudden terror and consternation. Instantly it was apparent she had regained consciousness, realized her position, her almost complete nudity and the biting, stinging points of the countless needles all at once.

“Quick, Trowbridge, my friend!” de Grandin urged, leaping forward. “Take her, my old one. Do not permit her to fall — those pins, they will surely impale her if she drops.”

Even as I seized the fainting girl in my arms, the Frenchman was furiously garnering the pins from her flesh, cursing volubly in mingled French and English as he worked.

“*Parbleu*,” he swore, “it is the devil’s work, of a surety. By damn, I shall have words to say to this accursed *dracu* who sticks pins in young ladies and throws knives at Jules de Grandin!”

Following him, I bore the swooning girl up the stairs, placed her on her bed and turned furiously in search of the nurse. What could the woman have been thinking of to let her patient leave her room in such a costume? “Miss Stanton,” I called angrily. “Where are you?”

A muffled sound, half-way between a scream and an articulate cry, and a faint, ineffectual tap-tap on the door of the closet answered me. Snatching the door of the clothes-press open, I found her lying on the floor, half smothered by fallen dresses, her mouth gagged by a Turkish towel, wrists tied behind her and ankles lashed together with knotted silk stockings.

“A-a-ah, oh!” she gasped as I relieved her of her fetters and helped her, half fainting, to her feet. “It took me, Dr. Trowbridge. I was helpless as a baby in its hands.”

De Grandin looked up from his ministrations to Julia Loudon. “What was the ‘It’ which took you, *Mademoiselle*?” he inquired, folding back the shawl from the girl’s injured limbs and deftly shoving her beneath the bedclothes. “Was it *Mademoiselle Loudon*?”

“No!” the nurse gasped, her hands still trembling with fright and nervousness. “Oh, no, not Miss Loudon, sir. It was — I don’t know what. Miss Loudon came upstairs a few moments ago and said you and Dr. Trowbridge were taking her motoring, and she must change her clothes. She began removing her house dress, but kept taking off her garments until she was — she was—” she hesitated a moment, catching her breath in long, laboring gasps.

“*Mordieu*, yes!” de Grandin cut in testily. “We do waste time, *Mademoiselle*. She did remove her clothing until she was what? Completely nude?”

“Yes,” the nurse replied with a shudder. “I was about to ask her if she needed to change all her clothes, when she turned and looked at me, and her face was like the face of a devil, sir. Then something seemed to come down on me like

a wet blanket. No, not like a blanket, either. It clung to me and bore me down, and smothered me all at once, but it was transparent, sir. I could feel it, but I couldn’t see it. It was like a — like a terrible, big jelly-fish, sir. It was cold and slimy and strong, strong as a hundred giants. I tried to call out, and *it* oozed into my mouth — choked me; ugh!” She shuddered at the recollection. “Then I must have fainted, for the next thing I knew everything was dark, and I heard Dr. Trowbridge calling me, so I tried to call out and kicked as hard as I could, and —”

“And *voilà* — here you are!” de Grandin interrupted. “I marvel not you are *nerveuse*, *Mademoiselle*. *Cordieu*, are we not all so!

“Attend me, Trowbridge, my friend,” he commanded, “do you remain with *Mademoiselle Stanton* and the patient. Me, I shall go below and procure three drinks of brandy for us — yes, *morbleu*, four I shall obtain, for one I shall drink myself immediately, right away, at once, before I return. Meantime, watch well *Mademoiselle Julie*, for I think she will require much watching before all is done.”

A moment later the clatter of his heels sounded on the polished boards of the hall floor as he hastened below stairs in search of stimulant.

“It is damnable, damnable, my friends!” the little Frenchman cried a few moments later as he, Captain Loudon and I conferred in the lower hall. “This *poltergeist*, it has complete possession of the poor *Mademoiselle Julie*, and it has manifested itself to *Mademoiselle Stanton* as well. *Pardieu*, if we but knew whence it comes, and why, we might better be able to combat it; but all, all is mystery. It comes, it wreaks havoc, and it remains. *Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*” He strode fiercely back and forth across the rug, twisting first one, then the other end of his diminutive moustache until I thought he would surely drag the hairs from his lip.

“If only we could —” he began again, striding across the hall and bringing up before a buhl cabinet which stood between two low windows. “If only we could — ah! What — who is this, *Monsieur le Capitaine*, if you please?”

His slender, carefully manicured forefinger pointed to an exquisite little miniature which stood in a gold easel-frame on the cabinet’s top.

Looking over his shoulder, I saw the picture of a young girl, black-haired, oval-faced, purple-eyed, her red lips showing against the pallor of her face almost like a wound in healthy flesh. There was a subtle something of difference — more in expression than in feature — from the original, nevertheless I recognized the likeness as a well-executed portrait of Julia Loudon, though it had been made, I imagined, several years earlier. “Why,” I exclaimed in astonishment at his question, “why, it is Miss Loudon, de

Grandin!”

Ignoring my remark, he kept his fixed, unwinking stare upon the captain, repeating, “This lady, *Monsieur*, she is who?”

“It’s a picture of my niece, Julia’s cousin,” Captain Loudon returned shortly; then: “Don’t you think we could occupy our time better than with trifles like that? My daughter —”

“Trifles, *Monsieur!*” de Grandin cut in. “There are *no* trifles in a case such as this. All, all is of the importance. Tell me of this young lady, if you please. There is a so remarkable resemblance, yet a look in the eyes which is not the look of your daughter. I would know much of her, if you please.”

“She was my niece, Anna Wassilko,” the captain replied. “That picture was made in St. Petersburg — Petrograd — or Leningrad, as it is called now — before the World War.”

“Ah?” de Grandin stroked his moustache gently, as though making amends for the furious pulling to which he had subjected it a moment before. “You did say ‘was,’ *Monsieur*. May I take it, then, that she ‘is’ no more?” He cast a speculative glance at the portrait again, then continued: “And her name, so different from yours, yet her appearance so like your daughter’s. Will you not explain?”

Captain Loudon looked as though he would like to wring the inquisitive little Frenchman’s neck, but complied with his request instead. “My wife was a Rumanian lady,” he began, speaking with evident annoyance. “I was stationed for duty at our legation at Bukharest in 1895, and there I met my wife, who was a Mademoiselle Seracki. I was married before returning to floating service, and my wife’s twin sister, Zoë, married Leonidas Wassilko, a young officer attached to the Russian embassy, about the same time.

“Things were beginning to move a little, even in those days. One or two near-quarrels with European nations over the Monroe Doctrine had warned even the lunkheads at Washington that we’d best be getting some sort of navy in the water, and there was no time for a protracted honeymoon after our marriage. I had to leave my bride of two months and report for duty to the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. Anna, my wife, stayed on at Bukharest for a time, then moved from one port to another along the European coast so as to be fairly near me when I could get infrequent furloughs. Finally I was moved to the China station, and she went to live with her sister and brother-in-law at St. Petersburg. Our baby Julia and their little girl, Anna, were born on the same day and resembled each other even more than their mothers did.

“Following the Spanish War and my transfer to home service, my wife divided her time between America and Europe, spending almost as much time in Russia as she did in Washington. Julia and Anna were educated together in a

French convent and later went to the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg.

“Anna joined up as a nurse in the Russian Red Cross at the outbreak of the World War, and was in France when the Revolution broke. That probably saved her life. Both her parents were shot by the Bolsheviks as reactionaries, and she came to live with us after the Armistice.

“Somehow, she didn’t take very well to American ways, and when Robert — Lieutenant Proudfit — came along and began paying court to Julia, Anna seemed to take it as a sort of personal affront. Seems she had some sort of fool idea she and Julia were more than cousins, and ought to remain celibate to devote their lives to each other. To tell the truth, though, I rather fancy she was more than a little taken by Proudfit herself, and when he preferred Julia to her — well, it didn’t please her any too much.”

“Ah?” de Grandin breathed, a trace of the heat-lightning flash which betokened excitement showing in his cool eyes. “And Mademoiselle Anna, she is —”

“She — died, poor child,” Loudon responded.

“She did commit suicide?” the Frenchman’s words were so low we could scarcely hear them.

“I didn’t say that,” the captain returned coldly.

“*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur le Capitaine,*” the other shot back, “but you did not say otherwise, and, the pause before you mentioned her death — surely that was something more than a tribute of momentary regret?”

“Humph! Yes, you’re right. The poor youngster committed suicide by drowning herself about six months ago.”

“Six months, did you say?” the little Frenchman’s face was so near his host’s that I feared the spike of his waxed mustache would scratch the captain’s cheek. “Six months ago she did drown herself. In the ocean? And Mademoiselle Julie’s engagement to Lieutenant Proudfit, it was announced — when?”

“It had just been announced — but look here, I say, see here —” Captain Loudon began violent protest, but de Grandin was grinning mirthlessly at him.

“I look there, *Monsieur,*” he replied, “and I see there. *Parbleu,* I see far past! Six months, six months, everything, it dates from six months of yore! The death of Mademoiselle Anna, the engagement of Mademoiselle Julie, the tapping at her window, the beginning of these so strange signs and wonders — all are six months old. *Grâce à Dieu,* my friend, I begin to see the light at last. Come, Trowbridge, my friend, first for the information, then the action!”

Turning on his heel, he mounted the stairs, three at a time, beckoning me violently as he did so.

“Mademoiselle — Mademoiselle Julie!” he cried, bursting into the patient’s room with hardly a perceptible

pause between his knock and the nurse's summons to enter. "You have not told me all, *Mademoiselle*, no, nor near all! This, *Mademoiselle* Anna, who was she; and what relation was there between you and her? Of haste, speak quickly, it is important that I should know all!"

"Why," Miss Loudon looked at him with startled eyes, "she was my cousin."

"But yes, that much I know. What I desire to learn is if there was some close bond, some secret understanding between you."

The girl regarded him fixedly a moment, then: "Yes, there was. Both of us were in love with Lieutenant Proudfit; but he seemed to prefer me, for some reason. When Anna saw he was proof against all her wiles — and she was an accomplished coquette — she became very morose, and talked constantly of suicide. I tried to laugh her out of the idea, but she persisted. Finally, I began to believe she was serious, and I told her, 'If you kill yourself, so will I, then there'll be two of us dead and nobody any the happier.'"

"Ah?" de Grandin regarded her intently. "And then?"

"She gave me one of those queer, long looks of hers, and said, 'Maybe I hold you to that promise, cousin. *Jizn kopyeka* — life is but a kopeck — maybe we spend him, you and I.' And that was all she said at the time. But two months later, just before Lieutenant Proudfit and I announced our engagement, she left me a note:

Have gone to spend my kopeck. Remember your promise and do likewise.

"Next morning —"

"Yes?" de Grandin prompted.

"Next morning they took her from the bay — drowned."

"A-a-h!" he let the single syllable out slowly through his teeth with a sort of hissing finality. "A-a-ah, at last, *Mademoiselle*, I do understand."

"You mean —"

"*Parbleu*, I mean nothing less. Tonight, she did say? *Morbleu*, to-night we shall see what we shall see!"

"Stay you here, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "Me, I go to procure that which is necessary for our work this night!"

He was through the door like a shot, rushing down the stairs three steps at a stride, banging the front door behind him without a word of farewell or explanation to his astounded host.

Darkness had fallen when he returned, a small black bag in his hand and an expression of unbridled excitement on his face. "Any change in our patient?" he demanded as he entered the house. "Any further manifestations of that accursed *poltergeist*?"

"No," I reported, "everything has been singularly calm this afternoon."

"Ah, so? Then we shall have the harder fight tonight. The enemy, she does marshal his forces!"

He tiptoed to the sickroom, entered quietly, and took a seat beside the bed, detailing his experiences in the city with lively interest. Once or twice it seemed to me the patient's attention wandered as he continued his recital, but his conversation never faltered. He had seen the beautiful flowers in Fifth Avenue! The furs in the shops were of the exquisiteness! Never was there such a parade of beauty, culture and refinement as could be found in that so wonderful street!

I listened open-mouthed with wonder. Time given to extraneous matters when he was engaged in a case was time wasted according to his ideas, I knew, yet here he sat and chattered like a gossiping magpie to a girl who plainly took small interest in his talk.

Eight o'clock struck on the tall clock in the hall below, still he related humorous incidents in his life, and described the chestnut trees and the whistling blackbirds at St. Cloud or the students' masked balls in the Latin Quarter. "What ails the man?" I muttered to myself. "He rambles on like a wound-up phonograph!"

It must have been about a quarter of nine when the change began to show itself in our patient. From polite inattention her attitude toward the Frenchman became something like open hostility. In another five minutes she seemed to have lost all remembrance of his presence, and lay with her eyes turned toward the ceiling. Then, gradually but surely, there came into her already too thin face a pinched, drawn look, the sure sign of physical and nervous exhaustion.

"Ah-ha, we do begin to commence!" de Grandin exclaimed exultantly, reaching beneath his chair and opening the little black bag he had deposited there.

From the satchel he produced an odd-looking contrivance, something like the toy rotary fans to be bought at novelty shops — the sort of fan which consists of three twisted blades, like reversed propeller wings, and which is made to whirl by the pressure of the thumb against a trigger fitted in the handle. But this fan, instead of having blades of colored metal, was supplied with brightly nicked arms which shone in the lamplight like a trio of new mirrors.

"Observe, *Mademoiselle*; behold!" de Grandin cried sharply, signing to me to turn the electric bulbs on full strength at the same time.

The girl's languid gaze lowered from the ceiling a moment and rested on the little Frenchman. Instantly he advanced the mirror-fan to within six inches of her face and began spinning it violently with quick, sharp jerks at the rotating loop. "*Regardez, si'l vous plaît*," he ordered,

spinning the whirling mirrors faster and faster.

The three bright pieces of metal seemed to merge into a single disk, but from their flying it seemed that countless tiny rays of light fell away, like water scattered from a swiftly turning paddle-wheel. For an instant the girl regarded the bright, whirling mirrors without interest, then her eyes seemed gradually to converge toward the bridge of her nose as they sought to follow the fan's rotations, and a fixed, rapt expression began to steal over her features.

"Sleep, sleep and rest. Sleep and hear no orders from those who wish you ill. Sleep, sleep — *sleep!*" de Grandin commanded in low, earnest tones.

Slowly, peacefully, her lids lowered over her fascinated eyes, her breast rose and fell convulsively once or twice, then her gentle breathing told us she had obeyed his command and lay fast in quiet sleep.

"What —" I began, but he waved me back impatiently.

"Another time, my friend," he promised with a quick gesture of warning. "At present we must not talk; there is too much at stake."

All through the night he sat beside the bed, raising his whirling mirrors and commanding sleep in tones of suppressed fury each time the girl stirred on her pillow. And each time his order was implicitly obeyed. The patient slept continuously till the first faint streaks of dawn began to show against the eastern sky.

"Now, then," he cried, springing from his chair, reopening his black bag and bringing forth — of all things! — a hyssop of mistletoe bough. Around and around the room he dashed with a sort of skipping step, for all the world like a country woman fanning flies from the house in summertime.

"Anna Wassilko, Anna Wassilko, who has wandered beyond the bounds of the tomb," he ordered as he waved his little brush-broom, "I command that you return whence you came. To Death you have said, 'Thou art my lord and my master,' and to the Grave, 'Thou art my lover and my betrothed.' Your business in this world is done, Anna Wassilko; get you to the world you chose for your dwelling place when you cast your body into the sea!"

Near the window, where the dimming electric bulbs' light mingled with the beams of the waning moon and the flushing rays of the coming morning, he repeated his command three times, waving his brush forward and outward toward the ocean which surged and boomed on the beach a quarter-mile away.

Something seemed to brush by him, something invisible, but tangible enough to stir the white scrim curtains trailing lazily in the still air, and for a moment I thought I caught the faint penumbra of a shadow cast against the ivory wall. A monstrous thing it was, large as a lion, yet like nothing I had ever seen or imagined, for it seemed to resemble both a bat

and fox, with long, pointed snout, claw-armed forepaws and great, spike-edged wings extending to each side from close behind the head.

"Get you gone, unfortunate one," de Grandin cried, striking directly at the shadow with his sprigs of mistletoe. "Poor soul who would collect the wager of a thoughtless promise, hie you back to your own place and leave the ordering of other lives to God."

The terrible shadow rested against the pale wall another fraction of a second, then, like smoke borne away in a rising breeze, it was gone.

"Gone," de Grandin repeated softly, closing the window and shutting off the lights. "Call the nurse, I pray you, Friend Trowbridge. Her duties will be simpler hereafter. A little medicine, a little tonic, and much rest and food will see Mademoiselle Julie as well as ever."

Together we tiptoed into the hall, roused the sleeping nurse and turned the patient over to her care.

"And now the other time you spoke of last night has come, I suppose?" I said, rather huffily, as we drove home. "You were close-mouthed enough about it all while it was happening. Will you explain now?"

"Most certainly," he returned in high good humor, lighting a cigarette, breathing in a great lungful of smoke, then discharging the vapor with a sigh of gusty content. "It was most simple — like everything else — when once I knew the answer.

"To begin: When first Captain Loudon explained his daughter's case, it seemed like one of simple hysteria to me, and one which any capable physician could cure. 'Why, then,' I ask me, 'does *Monsieur le Capitaine* seek the services of Jules de Grandin? I am not a great physician.' I have no answer, and at first I decline the case, as you know.

"But when we go to his house and behold Mademoiselle Julie all unconscious as she wandered about, I was of another mind; and when I hear the noises which accompanied her, I was of still a third mind. But when that evil one hurled a knife at my head, I said to me, '*Parbleu*, it is the challenge! Shall Jules de Grandin fly from such a contest?'

"Now, across the Rhine from France, those *boches* have some words which are most expressive. Among them is *poltergeist*, which signifies a pelting ghost, a ghost which flings things around the house. But more often he is not a ghost at all, he is some evil entity which plagues a man, or more frequently a woman. Not for nothing, my friend, did the ancients refer to Satan as the Prince of the Powers of the Air, for there are many very evil things in the air which we can no more see than we can behold the germs of disease. Yes." He nodded solemn affirmation.

"But when Mademoiselle Julie tells me of the mark which

came on her arm, and I recognized the Rumanian word for demon, I think some more. And when she tells me of the bird or bat which fluttered at her window and yet was not there, I recognize many things in common with other cases I have observed.

“Foolish people, my friend, sometimes say, ‘Come in,’ when they think the wind has blown their door ajar. It is not well to do so. Who knows what invisible terror awaits without, needing only the spoken invitation unthinkingly made to enter? For attend me, my friend, very rarely can the evil ones come in unless they are first invited, and very rarely can they be gotten out once they have been bidden to enter. So all these things fit together in my mind, and I say to me, ‘*Morbleu*, we have here a *poltergeist*, and nothing else. Certainly.’

“But why should a *poltergeist* attach his evil self to that sweet Mademoiselle Julie? True, she are very pretty, but there are other pretty women in the world of whom the *poltergeister* do not seek shelter.

“Then when the demon tell us he hold her completely in his power and makes her to dance almost nude in her father’s house and sticks pins and needles in her, I hear something else. I hear him promise to take her life.

“Why? What have she done that she must die?”

“Then I see the picture of Anna Wassilko. Very like Mademoiselle Julie she was, but there was a subtle something in her face which makes me know she was not the same. And what story does *Monsieur le Capitaine* tell when I ask about her? Ah, now we begin to see the light! She were Rumanian by birth and partly by ancestry. Very good. She had gone to school with her cousin, Mademoiselle Julie. Again good. She had lived in the same house here, she had loved the same man, and she had committed suicide; best of all. I need now only a little reassuring as to the reason why — the result I already know.

“You know what Mademoiselle Julie told us; it all fitted in well with the theory I had formed. But there was work to be done that night.

“The demon which made Julie do all kinds of things she knew not of had promised to take her life. How to circumvent her? That were the question.

“I think. ‘This young woman goes off into trances, and does all manner of queer things without knowing of them,’ I inform me. ‘Would she not do much the same in a state of hypnosis!’ Assuredly, Very well, then.

“I procure me a set of whirling mirrors, not because there is any magic in them but because they are the easiest thing to focus the subject’s attention. Last night I use them, and hypnotize Mademoiselle Julie before the poltergeist has a chance to conquer her consciousness. Hypnotism, when all is said and done, is the rendering of a subject’s objective mind passive while the mind of the operator is substituted for that of the subject. The *poltergeist*, which was really the *revenant* of Anna, had substituted *her* mind for Julie’s on former occasions; now I get there first, and place my mind in her brain. There is no room for the other, and Mademoiselle Julie can not take suggestions or brain-hints from the ghost and destroy herself. No, Jules de Grandin is already in possession of her brain-house, and he says ‘No Admission’ to all others who try to come in. Mademoiselle Julie slept peacefully through the night, as you did observe.”

“But what was all that monkey business with the mistletoe?” I demanded.

“*Tiens*, my friend, the monkey’s business had nothing to do with that,” he assured me. “Do you, perhaps, remember what the mistletoe stands for at Noël?”

“You mean a kiss?”

“What else? It is the plant held sacred to lovers in this day, but in the elder times it was the holy bush of the Druids. With it they cast many spells, and with it they cast out many evil-workers. Not by mistake is it the lover’s tree today, for it is a powerful charm against evil and will assuredly lay the unhappy ghost of one who dies because of unfortunate love. *Voilà* — you do catch the connection?”

“I never heard that before —” I began, but he cut me short with a chuckle.

“Much you have never heard, Trowbridge, my friend,” he accused, “yet all of it is true, none the less.”

“And that hideous shadow?”

He sobered instantly. “Who can say? In life Mademoiselle Anna was beautiful, but she went forth from the world uncalled and in an evil way, my friend. Who knows what evil shape she is doomed to wear in the next life? The less we think on that subject the better for our sleep hereafter.

“Come, we are at your house once more. Let us drink one glass of brandy for luck’s sake, then to sleep. *Mordieu*, me, I feel as though I had been stranger to my bed since my fifth birthday!”

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

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The Gods of East and West

“T IENS, Friend Trowbridge, you work late tonight.” Jules de Grandin, debonair in faultlessly pressed dinner clothes, a white gardenia sharing his lapel buttonhole with the red ribbon of the Légion d’Honneur, paused at the door of my consulting-room, glimpsed the box of coronas lying open on the table, and straightaway entered, seating himself opposite me and selecting a long, black cigar with all the delighted precision of a child choosing a bonbon from a box of sweets.

I laid aside the copy of Baring’s *Diagnosis in Diseases of the Blood* I had been studying and helped myself to a fresh cigar. “Have a pleasant time at the Medical Society dinner?” I asked, somewhat sourly.

“But yes,” he agreed, nodding vigorously while his little blue eyes shone with enthusiasm. “They are a delectable crowd of fellows, those New York physicians. I regret you would not accompany me. There was one gentleman in particular, a full-blooded Indian, who — but you do not listen, my friend; you are *distract*. What is the trouble?”

“Trouble enough,” I returned ungraciously. “A patient’s dying for no earthly reason that I can see except that she is.”

“Ah! You interest me. Have you made a tentative diagnosis?”

“Half a dozen, and none of ’em checks up. I’ve examined her and re-examined her, and the only thing I’m absolutely certain of is that she’s fading away right before my eyes, and nothing I can do seems an earthly bit of good.”

“U’m. Phthisis, perhaps?”

“Not a bit of it. I’ve tested her sputum numerous times; every result is negative. There isn’t a thing wrong with her organically, and her temperature is almost always normal, fluctuating slightly at times one way or the other, but hardly ever more than one or two degrees. I’ve made several blood counts, and while she runs slightly under the million mark, the deficiency isn’t enough to cause alarm. About the only objective symptoms she displays are a steady falling off in weight and a progressive pallor, while subjectively she complains of loss of appetite, slight headaches and profound lassitude in the morning.”

“U’m,” he repeated thoughtfully, expelling a twin cloud of smoke from his narrow nostrils and regarding the ash of his cigar as though it were something of intense interest, “and how long has this condition of affairs obtained?”

“About three months. She’s a Mrs. Chetwynde, wife of a likable young chap who’s superintending a piece of railway construction for an English company in Burma. He’s been

away about six months or so, and while she would naturally be expected to pine for him to some extent — they’ve been married only a couple of years — this illness has been going on only since about the middle of August.”

“U’m!” He knocked the ash from his cigar with a deft motion of his little finger and inhaled a great lungful of strong, fragrant smoke with careful deliberation. “This case interests me, Friend Trowbridge. These diseases which defy diagnosis are the things which make the doctor’s trade exciting. With your permission I will accompany you when next you visit Madame Chetwynde. Who knows? Together we may find the doormat under which the key of her so mysterious malady lies hidden. Meantime, I famish for sleep.”

“I’m with you,” I agreed as I closed my book, shut off the light and accompanied him upstairs to bed.

The Chetwynde cottage was one of the smallest and newest of the lovely little dwellings in the Rookwood section of town. Although it contained but seven rooms, it was as completely a piece of art as any miniature painted on ivory, and the appointments and furnishings comported perfectly with the exquisite architectural artistry of the house. Jules de Grandin’s round little eyes danced delightedly as he took in the perfect harmony existing inside and out when we parked my car before the rose-trellised porch and entered the charming reception hall. “*Eh bien*, my friend,” he whispered as we followed the black-and-white-uniformed maid toward the stairs, “whatever her disease may be, she has the *bon goût* — how do you say? good taste? — this Madame Chetwynde.”

Lovely as a piece of Chinese porcelain — and as frail — Idoline Chetwynde lay on the scented pillows of her Louis Treize bed, a negligée of knife-plaited crêpe de chine trimmed with fluffy black marabou shrouding her lissom form from slender neck to slender ankles, but permitting occasional high-lights of ivory body to be glimpsed through its sable folds. Little French-heeled mules of scarlet satin trimmed with black fur were on her stocking-less feet, and the network of veins showed pale violet against the dead-white of her high-arched insteps. Her long, sharp-chinned face was a rich olive hue in the days of her health, but now her cheeks had faded to the color of old ivory, and her fine, high forehead was as pale and well-nigh as translucent as candle-wax. The long, beautifully molded lips of her expressive mouth were more an old rose than a coral red,

and her large gray eyes, lifted toward the temples like those of an Oriental, shone with a sort of patient resignation beneath the “flying gull” curve of her intensely black brows. Her hair, cut short as a boy’s at the back, had been combed across her forehead from right to left and plastered down with some perfumed unguent so that it surmounted her white face like a close-wrapped turban of gleaming ebon silk. Diamond studs, small, but very brilliant, flickered lambently in the lobes of her low-set ears. Some women cast the aura of their feminine allure about them as a bouquet of roses exudes its perfume. Idoline Chetwynde was one of these.

“Not so well this morning, thank you, Doctor,” she replied to my inquiry. “The weakness seems greater than usual, and I had a dreadful nightmare last night.”

“H’umph, nightmare, eh?” I answered gruffly. “We’ll soon attend to that. What did you dream?”

“I — I don’t know,” she replied languidly, as though the effort of speaking were almost too much for her. “I just remember that I dreamed something awful, but what it was I haven’t the slightest notion. It really doesn’t matter, anyway.”

“*Pardonnez-moi, Madame*, but it matters extremely much,” de Grandin contradicted. “These things we call dreams, they are sometimes the expression of our most secret thoughts; through them we sometimes learn things concerning ourselves which we should not otherwise suspect. Will you try to recall this unpleasant dream for us?”

As he spoke he busied himself with a minute examination of the patient, tapping her patellar tendons, feeling along her wrists and forearms with quick, practiced fingers, lifting her lids and examining the pupils of both her luminous eyes, searching on her throat, neck and cardiac region for signs of abrasions. “*Eh bien*,” and “*morbleu, c’est étrange!*” I heard him mutter to himself once or twice, but no further comment did he make until he had completed his examination.

“Do you know, Dr. Trowbridge,” Mrs. Chetwynde remarked as de Grandin rolled down his cuffs and scribbled a memorandum in his notebook, “I’ve been gone over so many times I’ve begun to feel like an entry at the dog show. It’s really not a bit of use, either. You might just as well save yourselves and me the trouble and let me die comfortably. I’ve a feeling I shan’t be here much longer, anyway, and it might be better for all concerned if —”

“*Zut!*” de Grandin snapped the elastic about his pocketbook with a sharp report and leveled a shrewd, unwinking stare at her. “Say not so, *Madame*. It is your duty to live. *Parbleu*, the garden of the world is full to suffocation with weeds; flowers like yourself should be most sedulously cultivated for the joying of all mankind.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” Mrs. Chetwynde smiled slowly in acknowledgment of the compliment and pressed the ebony-

and-silver bell which hung over the ornamental head of her bed.

“*Madame* has called?” The swart-visaged maid servant appeared at the door of the chamber with a promptitude which led me to suspect her ear had never been far from the keyhole.

“Yes, Dr. Trowbridge and Dr. de Grandin are leaving,” her mistress replied in a tired voice.

“*Adieu, Madame*,” de Grandin murmured in farewell, leaning forward and possessing himself of the slender hand our hostess had not troubled to lift as we turned to go.

“We go, but we shall return anon, and with us, unless I greatly mistake, we shall bring you a message of good cheer. No case is hopeless until —”

“Until the undertaker’s been called?” Mrs. Chetwynde interrupted with another of her slow, tired smiles as the little Frenchman pressed his lips to her pale fingers and turned to accompany the maid and me from the room.

“Be careful — sir,” the maid cautioned, with just enough space between the command and the title of courtesy to rob her utterance of all semblance of respect. De Grandin, turning from the stairs into the hall, had almost collided with a statuette which stood on a pedestal in a niche between the staircase and the wall. To me it seemed the woman bent a look of almost venomous hate on him as he regained his footing on the highly polished floor and wheeled about to stare meditatively at the figurine into which he had nearly stumbled.

“This way — if you please, sir,” the servant admonished, standing by the front door and offering his hat in a most suggestive manner.

“Ah, yes, just so,” he agreed, turning from the statue to her, then back again. “And do you suffer from the mosquitoes here at this time of year, *Mademoiselle*?”

“Mosquitoes?” the woman’s reply was half word, half scornful sniff at the little foreigner’s irrelevant remark.

“Precisely, the mosquito, the gnat, the *mousquite*,” he rejoined with a humorous lift of his brows. “The little, buzzing pests, you know.”

“No, sir!” The answer served notice there was no more to be said on the subject.

“Ah? Perhaps it is then that *Madame* your mistress delights in the incense which annoys the moths, yes?”

“No, sir!”

“*Parbleu, ma vierge*, there are many strange things in the world, are there not?” he returned with one of his impish grins. “But the strangest of all are those who attempt to hold information from me.”

The servant’s only reply was a look which indicated clearly that murder was the least favor she cared to bestow on him.

“*Lá, lá*,” he chuckled as we descended the steps to my

car. "I did her in the eye, as the Englishmen say, that time, did I not, my friend?"

"You certainly had the last word," I admitted wonderingly, "but you'll have to grant her the last look, and it was no very pleasant one, either."

"*Ah bah*," he returned with another grin, "who cares how old pickle-face looks so long as her looks reveal that which I seek? Did not you notice how she stiffened when I hinted at the odor of incense in the house? There is no reason why they should not burn incense there, but, for some cause, the scent is a matter of utmost privacy — with the maid, at least."

"U'm?" I commented.

"Quite right; my friend, your objection is well taken," he responded with a chuckle. "Now tell me something of our fair patient. Who is she, who were her forebears, how long has she resided here?"

"She's the wife of Richard Chetwynde, a naturalized Englishman, who's been working on an engineering job in India, as I told you last night," I replied. "As to her family, she was a Miss Millatone before her marriage, and the Millatones have been here since the Indians — in fact, some of them have been here quite as long, since an ancestress of hers was a member of one of the aboriginal tribes — but that was in the days when the Swedes and Dutch were contending for this part of the country. Her family are rather more than well to do, and —"

"No more, my friend; you have told me enough, I think," he interrupted. "That strain of Indian ancestry may account for something which has caused me much wonderment. Madame Chetwynde is a rarely beautiful woman; my friend, but there is that indefinable something about her which tells the careful observer her blood is not entirely Caucasian. No disgrace, that; *parbleu*, a mixture of strain is often an improvement of the breed, but there was a certain — how shall I say it? — foreignness about her which told me she might be descended from Orientals, perhaps; perhaps from the Turk, the Hindoo, the —"

"No," I cut in with a chuckle, "she's what you might call a hundred and ten per cent American."

"U'm," he commented dryly, "and therefore ten per cent nearer the bare verities of nature than the thinner-blooded European. Yes. I think we may win this case, my friend, but I also think we shall have much study to do."

"Oh" — I looked at him in surprise — "so you've arrived at a hypothesis?"

"Hardly that, my friend. There are certain possibilities but as yet Jules de Grandin has not the courage to call them probabilities. Let us say no more for the time being. I would think, I would cogitate, I would meditate upon the matter." Nor could all my urging extract a single hint concerning the theory which I knew was humming like a gyroscope inside

his active little brain as we drove home through the rows of brilliant maple trees lining the wide streets of our pretty little city.

A spirited altercation was underway when we arrived at my house. Taking advantage of the fact that office hours were over and no patients within earshot, Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, was engaged in the pleasing pastime of expressing her unvarnished opinion with all the native eloquence of a born Irishwoman. "Take shame to yerself, Katy Rooney," she was advising her niece as de Grandin and I opened the front door "sure, 'tis yerself as ought to be ashamed to set foot in me kitchen an' tell me such nonsense! Afther all th' doctor's been afther doin' fer yez, too! Desertin' th' pore lady while she's sick an' in distriss, ye are, an' widout so much as sayin' by yer lave to th' doctor. Wurra, 'tis Nora McGinnis that's strainin' ivery nerve in her body to kape from takin' her hand off th' side o' yer face!"

"Take shame ter meself, indade!" an equally belligerent voice responded. "'Tis little enough ye know of th' goin's on in that there house! S'posin' 'twas you as had ter live under th' same roof wid a haythen statchoo, an' see th' mistress ye wuz takin' yer wages from a-crawlin' on her hands-an' knees before th' thing as if she was a haythen or a Protestant or sumpin, instid of a Christian woman! When first I come to Missis Chetwynde's house th' thing was no larger nor th' span o' me hand, an' ivery day it's growed an' growed until it's as long as me arm this minit, so it is, an' no longer ago than yestiddy it wunk it's haythen eye at me as I was passin' through th' hall. I tell ye, Nora darlin', what wid that black statchoo a-standin' in th' hall an' gittin' bigger an' bigger day be day, an' th' missis a-crawlin' to it on her all-fours, an' that slinky, sneaky English maid o' her 'n actin' as if I, whose ancistors wuz kings in Ireland, wuz no better than th' dirt benathe her feet, an' belike not as good, I'd not be answerable for me actions another day — th' saints hear me when I say it!"

I was striding toward the kitchen with intent to bring the argument to an abrupt close when de Grandin's fingers suddenly bit into my arm so sharply, that I winced from the pressure. "No, no, Friend Trowbridge," he whispered fiercely in my ear, "let us hear what else she has to say. This information is a gift from heaven no less!" Next moment he was in the kitchen, smiling ingratiatingly at the two angry women.

"Dr. de Grandin, sor," began Nora, anxious to refer the dispute to his arbitration, "'tis meself that's ashamed to have to own this gurrul as kin o' mine. When Mrs. Chetwynde waz taken sick, Dr. Trowbridge got her to go over an' cook fer th' pore lady, fer all our family's good cooks, though I do say it as shouldn't. An' now, bad cess to her, she fer up

an' lavin' th' pore lady in th' midst of her trouble, like as if she were a Scandinavian or Eyetalian, or some kind o' stinkin' furriner, beggin' yer pardon, sor."

"Faith, Doctor," the accused Kathleen answered in defense, "I'm niver th' one to run out from a good situation widout warnin', but that Chetwynde house is no Christian place at all, at all. 'Tis some kind o' haythen madhouse, no less."

De Grandin regarded her narrowly a moment, then broke into one of his quick smiles. "What was it you did say concerning a certain statue and Madame Chetwynde?" he asked.

"Sure, an' there's enough ter say," she replied, "but th' best part of it's better left unsaid, I'm thinkin'. Mrs. Chetwynde's husband, as belike you know, sor, is an engineer in India, an' he's forever sendin' home all sorts o' furrin knickknacks fer souvenirs. Some o' th' things is reel pretty an' some of 'em ain't so good. It were about three months ago, just before I came wid her, he sent home th' statchoo of some old haythen goddess from th' furrin land. She set it up on a pedistal like as if it were th' image of some blessed saint, an' there it stands to this day, a-poisonin' th' pure air o' th' entire house.

"I niver liked th' looks o' th' thing from th' first moment I clapped me two eyes on it, but I didn't have ter pass through th' front end o' th' house much, an' when I did I turned me eyes away, but one day as I was passin' through th' hall I looked at it, an' ye can belave me or not, Doctor, but th' thing had growed half a foot since last time I seen it!"

"Indeed?" de Grandin responded politely. "And then —"

"Then I sez to meself, sez I, 'I'll jist fix *you*, me beauty, that I will,' an' th' next evenin', when no one wuz lookin', I sneaked into th' hall an' doused th' thing 'wid howly wather from th' church font!"

"Ah? And then —" de Grandin prompted gently, his little eyes gleaming with interest.

"Ouch, Doctor darlin', if I hadn't seen it I wouldn't a' belaved it! May I niver move off'n this spot if th' blessed wather, didn't boil an' stew as if I'd poured it onto a red-hot stove!"

"Parbleu!" the Frenchman murmured.

"Th' next time I went past th' think, so help me hivin, if it didn't grin at me!"

"*Mordieu*, do you say so! And then —?"

"An' no longer ago than yestiddy it wunk its eye at me as I went by!"

"And you did say something concerning Madame Chetwynde praying to this —"

"Doctor" — the woman sidled nearer and took his lapel between her thumb and forefinger — "Doctor, 'tis meself as knows better than to bear tales concernin' me betters, but I

seen sumpin last week that give me th' cowl'd shivers from me big toes to me eye-teeth. I'd been shlapin' as peaceful as a lamb that hadn't been born yet, when all of a suddent I heard sumpin downstairs that sounded like burglars. 'Bad cess ter th' murtherin' scoundrils,' says I, 'comin' here to kill pore definselless women in their beds!' an' wid that I picks up a piece o' iron pipe I found handy-like beside me door an' shtarts ter crape downstairs ter lane it agin th' side o' their heads.

"Dr. de Grandin, sor, 'tis th' blessed truth an' no lie I'm tellin' ye. When I come to th' head o' th' stheps, there was Mrs. Chetwynde, all barefooty, wid some sort o' funny-lookin' thing on her head, a-lightin' haythen punk-sthicks before that black haythen image an' a-go'in' down on her two knees to it!

"'Katy Rooney,' sez I to meself, 'this is no fit an' proper house fer you, a Christian woman an' a good Catholic, to be livin' in, so it's not,' an' as soon as iver I could I give me notice to Mrs. Chetwynde, an' all th' money in th' mint couldn't hire me to go back to that place agin, sor."

"Just so," the little Frenchman agreed, nodding his sleek blond head vigorously. "I understand your reluctance to return; but could you not be induced by some consideration greater than money?"

"Sure, an' I'd not go back there fer —" Katy began, but he cut her short with a sudden gesture.

"Attend me, if you please," he commanded. "You are a Christian woman, are you not?"

"To be sure, I am."

"Very good. If I told you your going back to Madame Chetwynde's service until I give you word to leave might be instrumental in saving a Christian soul — a Christian body, certainly — would you undertake the duty?"

"I'd do most annything ye towld me to, sor," the woman replied soberly, "but th' blessed saints know I'm afeared to shlope under th' same roof wid that there black thing another night."

"U'm," de Grandin took his narrow chin in his hand and bowed his head in thought a moment, then turned abruptly toward the door. "Await me here," he commanded. "I shall return."

Less than two minutes later he reentered the kitchen, a tiny package of tissue paper, bound with red ribbon, in his hand. "Have you ever been by the Killarney lakes?" he demanded of Katy, fixing his level, unwinking stare on her.

"Sure, an' I have that," she replied fervently. "More than onct I've sthoo'd beside th' blue wathers an' —"

"And who is it comes out of the lake once each year and rides across the water on a great white horse, attended by —" he began, but she interrupted with a cry that was almost a scream of ecstasy:

"'Tis th' O'Donohue himself! Th' brave O'Donohue, a-

ridin' his grrate white harse, an' a-headin' his band o' noble Fayneans, all ridin' an' prancin' ter set owld Ireland free!"

"Precisely," de Grandin replied. "I too, have stood beside the lake, and with me have stood certain good friends who were born and bred in Ireland. One of those once secured a certain souvenir of the O'Donohue's yearly ride. Behold!"

Undoing the tissue paper parcel he exhibited a tiny ring composed of two or three strands of white horsehairs loosely plaited together. "Suppose I told you these were from the tail of the O'Donohue's horse?" he demanded. "Would you take them with you as a safeguard and re-enter Madame Chetwynde's service until I gave you leave to quit?"

"Glory be, I would that, sor!" she replied. "Faith, wid three hairs from th' O'Donohue's horse, I'd take service in th' Divil's own kitchen an' brew him as foine a broth o' brimsthone as iver he drank, that I would. Sure, th' O'Donohue is more than a match fer any murtherin' haythen that iver came out of India, I'm thinkin, sor."

"Quite right," he agreed with a smile. "It is understood, then, that you will return to Madame Chetwynde's this afternoon and remain there until you hear further from me? Very good."

To me, as we returned to the front of the house, he confided: "A pious fraud is its own excuse, Friend Trowbridge. What we believe a thing is, it is, as far as we are concerned. Those hairs, now, I did extract them from the mattress of my bed; but our superstitious Katy is brave as a lion in the belief that they came from the O'Donohue's horse."

"Do you mean to tell me you actually take any stock in that crazy Irishwoman's story, de Grandin?" I demanded incredulously.

"*Eh bien,*" he answered with a shrug of his narrow shoulders, "who knows what he believes, my friend? Much she may have imagined, much more she may have made up from the activity of her superstitious mind; but if all she said is truth I shall not be so greatly surprised as I expect to be before we have finished this case."

"Well!" I returned, too amazed to think of any adequate reply.

"Trowbridge, my friend," he informed me at breakfast the following morning, "I have thought deeply upon the case of Madame Chetwynde, and it is my suggestion that we call upon the unfortunate lady without further delay. There are several things I should very much like to inspect in her so charming house, for what the estimable Katy told us yesterday has thrown much light on things which before were entirely dark."

"All right," I assented. "It seems to me you're taking a fantastic view of the case, but everything I've done thus far

has been useless, so I dare say you'll do no harm by your tricks."

"*Morbleu,* I warrant I shall not!" he agreed with a short nod. "Come, let us go."

The dark-skinned maid who had conducted us to and from her mistress the previous day met us at the door in answer to my ring and favored de Grandin with an even deeper scowl than she had shown before, but she might as well have been a graven image for all the attention he bestowed on her. However:

"*Mon Dieu,* I faint, I am ill, I shall collapse, Friend Trowbridge!" he cried in a choking voice as we approached the stairs. "Water, I pray you; a glass of water, if you please!"

I turned to the domestic and demanded a tumbler of water, and as she left to procure it, de Grandin leaped forward with a quick, catlike movement and pointed to the statuette standing at the foot of the stairs. "Observe it well, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded in a low, excited voice. "Look upon its hideousness, and take particular notice of its height and width. See, place yourself here, and draw a visual line from the top of its head to the woodwork behind, then make a mark on the wood to record its stature. Quick, she will return in a moment, and we have no time to lose!"

Wonderingly, I obeyed his commands, and had scarcely completed my task when the woman came with a goblet of ice-water. De Grandin pretended to swallow a pill and wash it down with copious drafts of the chilled liquid, then followed me up the stairs to Mrs. Chetwynde's room.

"*Madame,*" he began without preliminary when the maid had left us, "there are certain things I should like to ask you. Be so good as to reply, if you please. First, do you know anything about the statue which stands in your hallway below?"

A troubled look flitted across our patient's pale face. "No, I can't say I do," she replied slowly. "My husband sent it back to me from India several months ago, together with some other curios. I felt a sort of aversion to it from the moment I first saw it, but somehow it fascinated me, as well. After I'd set it up in the hall I made up my mind to take it down, and I've been on the point of having it taken out half a dozen times, but somehow I've never been able to make up my mind about it. I really wish I had, now, for the thing seems to be growing on me, if you understand what I mean. I find myself thinking about it — it's so adorably ugly, you know — more and more during the day, and, somehow, though I can't quite explain, I think I dream about it at night, too. I wake up every morning with the recollection of having had a terrible nightmare the night before, but I'm never able to recall any of the incidents of my dream except that the statue figures in it somehow."

"U'm," de Grandin murmured noncommittally. "This is

of interest, *Madame*. Another question, if you please, and, I pray you, do not be offended if it seems unduly personal. I notice you have a *penchant* for attar of rose. Do you employ any other perfume?"

"No," she said wonderingly.

"No incense, perhaps, to render the air more fragrant?"

"No, I dislike incense, it makes my head ache. And yet" — she wrinkled her smooth brow in a puzzled manner — "and yet I've thought I smelled a faint odor of some sort of incense, almost like Chinese punk, in the house more than once. Strangely enough, the odor seems strongest on the mornings following one of my unremembered nightmares."

"H'm," de Grandin muttered, "I think, perhaps, we begin to see a fine, small ray of light. Thank you, *Madame*; that is all."

"The moon is almost at the full, Friend Trowbridge," he remarked apropos of nothing, about eleven o'clock that night. "Would it not be an ideal evening for a little drive?"

"Yes, it would not," I replied. "I'm tired, and I'd a lot rather go to bed than be gallivanting all over town with you, but I suppose you have something up your sleeve, as usual."

"*Mais oui*," he responded with one of his impish smiles, "an elbow in each, my friend — and other things, as well. Suppose we drive to Madame Chetwynde's."

I grumbled, but complied.

"Well, here we are," I growled as we passed the Chetwynde cottage. "What do we do next?"

"Go in, of course," he responded.

"Go in? At this hour of night?"

"But certainly; unless I am more mistaken than I think; there is that to be seen within which we should do well not to miss."

"But it's preposterous," I objected. "Who ever heard of disturbing a sick woman by a call at this hour?"

"We shall not disturb her, my friend," he replied. "See I have here the key to her house. We shall let ourselves in like a pair of wholly disreputable burglars and dispose ourselves as comfortably as may be to see what we shall see, if anything."

"The key to her house!" I echoed in amazement. "How the deuce did you get it?"

"Simply. While the sour-faced maid fetched me the glass of water this morning I took an impression of the key in a cake of soap I had brought for that very purpose. This afternoon I had a locksmith prepare me a duplicate from the stamp I had made. *Parbleu*, my friend, Jules de Grandin has not served these many years with the *Sûreté* and failed to learn more ways than one of entering other peoples' houses!"

Quietly, treading softly, we mounted the veranda steps, slipped the Judas-key into the front door lock and let

ourselves into Mrs. Chetwynde's hall. "This way, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin ordered, plucking me by the sleeve. "If we seat ourselves in the drawing-room we shall have an uninterrupted view of both stairs and hall, yet remain ourselves in shadow. That is well, for we have come to see, not to be seen."

"I feel like a malefactor —" I began in a nervous whisper, but he cut me off sharply.

"Quiet!" he ordered in a low breath. "Observe the moon, if you please, my friend. Is it not already almost peering through yonder window?"

I glanced toward the hall window before which the black statuette stood and noticed that the edge of the lunar disk was beginning to show through the opening, and long silver beams were commencing to stream across the polished floor, illuminating the figure and surrounding it with a sort of cold effulgence. The statue represented a female figure, gnarled and knotted, and articulated in a manner suggesting horrible deformity. It was of some kind of black stone or composition which glistened as though freshly anointed with oil, and from the shoulder-sockets three arms sprang out to right and left. A sort of pointed cap adorned the thing's head, and about the pendulous breasts and twisting arms serpents twined and writhed, while a girdle of skulls, carved from gleaming white bone, encircled its waist. Otherwise it was nude, and nude with a nakedness which was obscene even to me, a medical practitioner for whom the human body held no secrets. As I watched the slowly growing patch of moonlight on the floor it seemed the black figure grew slowly in size, then shrunk again, and again increased in stature, while its twisting arms and garlands of contorting serpents appeared to squirm with a horrifying suggestion of waking into life.

I blinked my eyes several times, sure I was the victim of some optical illusion due to the moon rays against the silhouette of the statue's blackness, but a sound from the stair-head brought my gaze upward with a quick, startled jerk.

Light and faltering, but unquestionably approaching, a soft step sounded on the uncarpeted stairs, nearer, nearer, until a tall, slow-moving figure came into view at the staircase turn. Swathed from breast to insteps in a diaphanous black silk night-robe, a pair of golden-strapped boudoir sandals on her little naked feet and a veil of black tulle shrouding her face, Idoline Chetwynde slowly descended the stairs, feeling her way carefully, as though the covering on her face obscured her vision. One hand was outstretched before her, palm up, fingers close together; in the other she bore a cluster of seven sticks of glowing, smoking Chinese punk spread fanwise between her fingers, and the heavy, cloyingly sweet fumes from the joss-sticks

spiraled slowly upward, surrounding her veiled head in a sort of nimbus and trailing behind her like an evil-omened cloud.

Straight for the black image of the Indian goddess she trod, feeling each slow, careful step with faltering deliberation, halted a moment and inclined her head, then thrust the punk-sticks into a tiny bowl of sand which stood on the floor at the statue's feet. This done, she stepped back five slow paces, slipped the gilded sandals off and placed her bared feet parallel and close together, then with a sudden forward movement dropped to her knees. Oddly, with that sense for noting trifles in the midst of more important sights which we all have, I noticed that when she knelt, instead of straightening her feet out behind her with her insteps to the floor, she bent her toes forward beneath her weight.

For an instant she remained kneeling upright before the black image, which was already surrounded by a heavy cloud of punk-smoke; then, with a convulsive gesture, she tore the veil from before her face and rent the robe from her bosom, raised her hands and crossed them, palms forward, in front of her brow and bent forward and downward till crossed hands and forehead rested on the waxed boards of the floor. For a moment she remained thus in utter self-abasement, then rose upright, flinging her hands high above her head, re-crossed them before her face and dropped forward in complete prostration once more. Again and again she repeated this genuflection, faster and faster, until it seemed her body swayed forward and back thirty or forty times a minute, and the soft pat-pat of her hands against the floor assumed a rhythmic, drum-like cadence as she began a faltering chant in eager, short-breathed syllables:

Ho, Devi, consort of Siva and daughter of Himavat!
 Ho, Sakti, fructifying principle of the Universe!
 Ho, Devi, the Goddess;
 Ho, Gauri, the Yellow;
 Ho, Uma, the Bright;
 Ho, Durga, the Inaccessible;
 Ho, Chandī, the Fierce;
 Listen Thou to my Mantra!
 Ho, Kali, the Black,
 Ho, Kali, the Six-armed One of Horrid Form,
 Ho, Thou about whose waist hangs a girdle of human skulls
 as if it were a precious pendant;
 Ho, Malign Image of Destructiveness —

She paused an instant, seeming to swallow rising trepidation, gasped for breath a moment, like a timid but determined bather about to plunge into a pool of icy water, then:

Take Thou the soul and the body of this
 woman prostrate before Thee,
 Take Thou her body and her spirit, freely

and voluntarily offered,
 Incorporate her body, soul and spirit into
 Thy godhead to strengthen Thee in
 Thine undertakings.
 Freely is she given Thee, Divine Destroyer,
 Freely, of her own accord, and without reservation,
 Asking naught but to become a part of
 Thee and of Thy supreme wickedness.

Ho, Kali of Horrid Form,
 Ho, Malign Image of Destructiveness,
 He, eater-up of all that is good,
 Ho, disseminator of all which is wicked
 Listen Thou to my Mantra!

"*Grand Dieu*, forgive her invincible ignorance; she knows not what she says!" de Grandin muttered beside me, but made no movement to stop her in her sacrilegious rite.

I half rose from my chair to seize the frenzied woman and drag her from her knees, but he grasped my elbow in a viselike grip and drew me back savagely. "Not now, foolish one!" he commanded in a sibilant whisper. And so we watched the horrid ceremony to its close.

For upward of a quarter-hour, Idoline Chetwynde continued her prostrations before the heathen idol, and, either because the clouds drifting across the moon's face played tricks with the light streaming through the hall window, or because my eyes grew undependable from the strain of watching the spectacle before me, it seemed as though some hovering, shifting pall of darkness took form in the corners of the room and wavered forward like a sheet of wind-blown sable cloth until it almost enveloped the crouching woman, then fluttered back again. Three or four times I noted this phenomenon, then, as I was almost sure it was no trick of lighting or imagination, the moon, sailing serenely in the autumn sky, passed beyond the line of the window, an even tone of shadow once more filled the hall, and Mrs. Chetwynde sank forward on her face for the final time, uttered a weak, protesting little sound, half-way between a moan and a whimper, and lay there, a lifeless, huddled heap at the foot of the graven image, her white arms and feet protruding from the black folds of her robe and showing like spots of pale light against the darkness of the floor.

Once more I made to rise and take her up, but again de Grandin restrained me. "Not yet, my friend," he whispered. "We must see the tragic farce played to its conclusion."

For a few minutes we sat there in absolute silence; then, with a shuddering movement, Mrs. Chetwynde regained consciousness, rose slowly and dazedly to her feet, resumed her sandals, and walked falteringly toward the stairs.

Quick and silent as a cat, de Grandin leaped across the room, passed within three feet of her and seized a light chair, thrusting it forward so that one of its spindle legs barred her path.

Never altering her course, neither quickening nor reducing her shuffling walk, the young woman proceeded, collided with the obstruction, and would have stumbled had not de Grandin snatched away the chair as quickly as he had thrust it forward. With never a backward look, with no exclamation of pain — although the contact must have hurt her cruelly — without even a glance at the little Frenchman who stood half an arm's length from her, she walked to the stairs, felt for the bottommost tread a second, then began a slow ascent.

"*Très bon!*" de Grandin muttered as he restored the chair to its place and took my elbow in a firm grip, guiding me down the hall and through the front door.

"What in heaven's name does it all mean?" I demanded as we regained my car. "From what I've just seen I'd have no hesitancy in signing commitment papers to incarcerate Mrs. Chetwynde in an institution for the insane — the woman's suffering from a masochistic mania, no doubt of it — but why the deuce did you try to trip her up with a chair?"

"Softly, my friend," he replied, touching fire to a vile-smelling French cigarette and puffing furiously at it. "Did you help commit that poor girl to an insane asylum you would be committing a terrible crime, no less. Normal she is not, but her abnormality is entirely subjective. As for the chair, it was the test of her condition. Like you, I had a faint fear her actions were due to some mental breakdown, but did you notice her walk? *Parbleu*, was it the walk of a person in possession of his faculties? I say no! And the chair proved it. When she did stumble against it, though it must have caused her tender body much pain, she neither faltered nor cried out. The machinery which telegraphed the sensation of hurt from her leg to her brain did suffer a short-circuit. My friend, she was in a state of complete anesthesia as regarded the outward world. She. was, how do you say—"

"Hypnotized?" I suggested.

"U'm, perhaps. Something like that; although the controlling agent was one far, far different from any you have seen in the psychological laboratory, my friend."

"Then —"

"Then we would do well not to speculate too deeply until we have more pieces of evidence to fit into the picture-puzzle of this case. Tomorrow morning we shall call on Madame Chetwynde, if you please."

We did. The patient was markedly worse. Great lavender circles showed under her eyes, and her face, which I had thought as pale as any countenance could be in life, was even a shade paler than theretofore. She was so weak she could hardly lift her hand in greeting, and her voice was barely more than a whisper. On her left leg, immediately over the fibula, a great patch of violet bruise showed plainly

the effects of her collision with the chair. Throughout the pretty, cozy little cottage there hung the faint aroma of burnt joss-sticks.

"Look well, my friend," de Grandin ordered in a whisper as we descended the stairs; "observe the mark you made behind the statue's head no later than yesterday."

I paused before the horrid thing, closed one eye and sighted from the tip of its pointed cap to the scratch I had made on the woodwork behind it. Then I turned in amazement to my companion. Either my eye was inaccurate or I had made incorrect measurements the previous day. According to yesterday's marks on the woodwork the statue had grown fully two inches in height.

De Grandin met my puzzled look with an unwavering stare, as he replied to my unspoken question: "Your eye does not deceive you, my friend; the hell-hag's effigy has enhanced."

"But — but," I stammered, "that can't be!"

"Nevertheless, it is."

"But, good heavens, man; if this keeps up —"

"This will not keep up, my friend. Either the devil's dam takes her prey or Jules de Grandin triumphs. The first may come to pass; but my wager is that the second occurs."

"But, for the Lord's sake! What can we do?"

"We can do much for the Lord's sake, my friend, and He can do much for ours, if it be His will. What we can do, we will; no more and certainly no less. Do you make your rounds of mercy, Friend Trowbridge, and beseech the so excellent Nora to prepare an extra large apple tart for dinner, as I shall undoubtedly bring home a guest. Me, I hasten, I rush, I fly to New York to consult a gentleman I met at the Medical Society dinner the other night. I shall get back when I return, but, if that be not in time for an early dinner, it will be no fault of Jules de Grandin's. *Adieu*, my friend, and may good luck attend me in my errand. *Cordieu*, but I shall need it!"

"Dr. Trowbridge, may I present Dr. Wolf?" de Grandin requested that evening, standing aside to permit a tall, magnificently built young man to precede him through the doorway of my consulting-room. "I have brought him from New York to take dinner with us, and — perhaps — to aid us in that which we must do tonight without fail."

"How do you do, Dr. Wolf?" I responded formally, taking the visitor's hand in mine, but staring curiously at him the while. Somehow the name given by de Grandin did not seem at all appropriate. He was tall, several inches over six feet, with an enormous breadth of shoulder and extraordinary depth of chest. His face, disproportionately large for even his great body, was high-cheeked and unusually broad, with a jaw of implacable squareness, and the deep-set, burning eyes beneath his overhanging brows

were of a peculiarly piercing quality. There was something in the impassive nobility and steadfastness of purpose in that face which reminded me of the features of the central allegorical figure in Franz Stuck's masterpiece, *War*.

Something of my thought must have been expressed in my glance, for the young man noticed it and a smile passed swiftly across his rugged countenance, leaving it calm again in an instant. "The name is a concession to civilization, Doctor," he informed me. "I began life under the somewhat unconventional sobriquet of 'Johnny Curly Wolf,' but that hardly seemed appropriate to my manhood's environment, so I have shortened the name to its greatest common divisor — I'm a full-blooded Dakotah, you know."

"Indeed?" I replied lamely.

"Yes. I've been a citizen for a number of years, for there are certain limitations on the men of my people who retain their tribal allegiance which would hamper me greatly in my lifework. My father became wealthy by grace of the white man's bounty and the demands of a growing civilization for fuel-oil, and he had the good judgment to have me educated in an Eastern university instead of one of the Indian training schools. An uncle of mine was a tribal medicine man and I was slated to follow in his footsteps, but I determined to graft the white man's scientific medicine onto my primitive instruction. Medical work has appealed to me ever since I was a little shaver and was permitted to help the post surgeon at the agency office. I received my license to practice in '14, and was settling down to a study of pulmonary diseases when the big unpleasantness broke out in Europe."

He smiled again, somewhat grimly this time. "My people have been noted for rather bloody work in the old days, you know, and I suppose the call of my lineage was too strong for me. At any rate, I was inside a Canadian uniform and overseas within two months of the call for Dominion troops, and for three solid years I was in the thick of it with the British. When we came in I was transferred to the A.E.F., and finished my military career in a burst of shrapnel in the Argonne. I've three silver bones in each leg now and am drawing half-compensation from the government every month. I indorse the check over to the fund to relieve invalid Indian veterans of the army who aren't as well provided with worldly goods by Standard Oil as I am."

"But are you practising in New York now, Doctor?" I asked.

"Only as a student. I've been taking some special post-graduate work in diseases of the lungs and posterior poliomyelitis. As soon as my studies are completed I'm going west to devote my life and fortune to fighting those twin scourges of my people."

"Just so," de Grandin cut in, unable longer to refrain from taking part in the conversation. "Dr. Wolf and I have had

many interesting things to speak of during our trip from New York, Friend Trowbridge, and now, if all is prepared, shall we eat?"

The young Indian proved a charming dinner companion. Finely educated and highly cultured, he was indued with extraordinary skill as a raconteur, and his matter-of-fact stories of the "old contemps'" titanic struggle from the Marne and back, night raids in the trenches and desperate hand-to-hand fights in the blackness of No Man's Land, of the mud and blood and silent heroism of the dressing-stations and of the phantom armies which rallied to the assistance of the British at Mons were colorful as the scenes of some old Spanish tapestry. Dinner was long since over and eleven o'clock had struck, still we lingered over our cigars, liqueurs and coffee in the drawing-room. It was de Grandin who dragged us back from the days of '15 with a hasty glance at the watch strapped to his wrist.

"*Parbleu*, my friends," he exclaimed, "it grows late and we have a desperate experiment to try before the moon passes the meridian. Come, let us be about our work."

I looked at him in amazement, but the young Indian evidently understood his meaning, for he rose with a shrug of his broad shoulders and followed my diminutive companion out into the hall where a great leather kit bag which bore evidence of having accompanied its owner through Flanders and Picardy rested beside the hall rack. "What's on the program?" I demanded, trailing in the wake of the other two, but de Grandin thrust hat and coat into my hands, exclaiming:

"We go to Madame Chetwynde's again, my friend. Remember what you saw about this time last night? *Cordieu*, you shall see that which has been vouchsafed to few men before another hour has passed, or Jules de Grandin is wretchedly mistaken!"

Piling my companions into the back seat, I took the wheel and drove through the still, moonlit night toward the Chetwynde cottage. Half an hour later we let ourselves quietly into the house with de Grandin's duplicate key and took our station in the darkened parlor once more.

A quick word from de Grandin gave Dr. Wolf his cue, and taking up his travel-beaten bag the young Indian let himself out of the house and paused on the porch. For a moment I saw his silhouette against the glass panel of the door, then a sudden movement carried him out of my line of vision, and I turned to watch the stairs down which I knew Idoline Chetwynde would presently come to perform her unholy rites of secret worship.

The ticking pulse-beats of the little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece sounded thunderous in the absolute quiet of the house; here and there a board squeaked and cracked in the gradually lowering temperature; somewhere outside, a motor horn tooted with a dismal, wailing note. I felt my

nerves gradually tightening like the strings of a violin as the musician keys them up before playing, and tiny shivers of horripilation pursued each other down my spine and up my forearms as I sat waiting in the shadowy room.

The little French clock struck twelve sharp, silvery chimes. It had arrived, that hideous hour which belongs neither to the day which is dead nor to the new day stirring in the womb of Time, and which we call midnight for want of a better term. The moon's pale visage slipped slowly into view through the panes of the window behind the Indian statue and a light, faltering step sounded on the stairs above us.

"*Mon Dieu,*" de Grandin whispered fervently, "grant that I shall not have made a mistake in my calculations!" He half rose from his chair, gazing fixedly at the lovely, unconscious woman walking her tranced march toward the repellent idol, then stepped softly to the front window and tapped lightly on its pane with his fingertips.

Once again we saw Idoline Chetwynde prostrate herself at the feet of the black statue; once more her fluttering, breathless voice besought the evil thing to take her soul and destroy her body; then, so faint I scarcely heard it through the droning of the praying woman's words, the front door gave a soft click as it swung open on its hinges.

Young Dr. Wolf, once Johnny Curly Wolf, medicine man of the Dakotahs, stepped into the moonlit hall.

Now I understood why he had hidden himself in the shadows of the porch when he left the house. Gone were his stylishly cut American clothes, gone was his air of well-bred sophistication. It was not the highly educated, cultured physician and student who entered the Chetwynde home, but a medicine man of America's primeval race in all the panoply of his traditional office. Naked to the waist he was, his bronze torso gleaming like newly molded metal from the furnace. Long, tight-fitting trousers of beaded buckskin encased his legs, and on his feet were the moccasins of his forefathers. Upon his head was the war-bonnet of eagle feathers, and his face was smeared with alternate streaks of white, yellow and black paint. In one hand he bore a bullhide tom-tom, and in his deep-set, smoldering eyes there burned the awful, deadly earnestness of his people.

Majestically he strode down the hall, paused some three or four paces behind the prostrate woman, then, raising his tom-tom above his head, struck it sharply with his knuckles.

Toom, toom, toom, toom! the mellow, booming notes sounded, again and still again. Bending slightly at the knees, he straightened himself, repeated the movement, quickened the cadence until he was rising and sinking a distance of six inches or so in a sort of stationary, bobbing dance. "Manitou, Great Spirit of my fathers!" he called in a strong, resonant voice. "Great Spirit of the forest dwellers and of

the people of the plains, hear the call of the last of Thy worshippers:

"Hear my prayer, O Mighty Spirit,
As I do the dance before Thee,
Do the dance my fathers taught me,
Dance it as they danced before me,
As they danced it in their lodges,
As they danced it at their councils
When of old they sought Thy succor.

"Look upon this prostrate woman,
See her bow in supplication
To an alien, wicked spirit.
Thine she is by right of lineage,
Thine by right of blood and forebears.
In the cleanly air of heaven
She should make her supplication,
Not before the obscene statue
Of, god of alien people.

"Hear my prayer, O Mighty Spirit,
Hear, Great Spirit of my fathers,
Save this woman of Thy people,
Smite and strike and make impotent
Demons from across the water,
Demons vile and wholly filthy,
And not seemly for devotion
From a woman of Thy people."

The solemn, monotonous intoning ceased, but the dance continued. But now it was no longer a stationary dance, for, with shuffling tread and half-bent body, Johnny Curly Wolf was circling slowly about the Hindoo idol and its lone worshiper.

Something — a cloud, perhaps — drifted slowly across the moon's face, obscuring the light which streamed into the hall. An oddly shaped cloud it was, something like a giant man astride a giant horse, and on his brow there seemed to be the feathered war-bonnet of the Dakotahs. The cloud grew in density. The moon rays became fainter and fainter, and finally the hall was in total darkness.

In the west there sounded the whistling bellow of a rising wind, shaking the casements of the house and making the very walls tremble. Deep and rumbling, growing louder and louder as it seemed to roll across the heavens on iron wheels, a distant peal of thunder sounded, increased in volume, finally burst in a mighty clap directly over our heads, and a fork of blinding, jagged lightning shot out of the angry sky. A shivering ring of shattered glass and of some heavy object toppling to a fall, a woman's wild, despairing shriek, and another rumbling, crashing peal of thunder deafened me.

By the momentary glare of a second lightning-flash I beheld a scene stranger than any painted by Dante in his

vision of the underworld. Seemingly, a great female figure crouched with all the ferocity of a tigress above the prostrate form of Idoline Chetwynde, its writhing, sextuple arms grasping at the woman's prone body or raised as though to ward off a blow, while from the window looking toward the west there leaped the mighty figure of an Indian brave armed with shield and war-club.

Johnny Curly Wolf? No! For Johnny Curly Wolf circled and gyrated in the measures of his tribal ghost-dance, and in one hand he held his tom-tom, while with the other he beat out the rhythm of his dance-music.

It was but an instant that the lightning showed me this fantastic tableau, then all was darkness blacker than before, and a crashing of some stone thing shattered into half a thousand fragments broke through the rumble of the thunder.

"Lights! *Grand Dieu*, lights, Friend Trowbridge!" de Grandin screamed in a voice gone high and thin with hysteria.

I pressed the electric switch in the hall and beheld Johnny Curly Wolf, still in tribal costume, great beads of sweat dewing his brow, standing over the body of Idoline Chetwynde, the hall window-panes blown from their frame and scattered over the floor like tiny slivers of frozen moonlight, and, toppled from its pedestal and broken into bits almost as fine as powder, the black statue of Kali, Goddess of the East.

"Take her up, my friend," de Grandin ordered me, pointing to Mrs. Chetwynde's lifeless body. "Pick her up and restore her to her bed. *Morbleu*, but we shall have to attend her like a new-born infant this night, for I fear me her nerves have had a shock from which they will not soon recover!"

All night and far past daylight we sat beside Idoline Chetwynde's bed, watching the faint color ebb and flow in her sunken checks, taking heedful count of her feebly beating pulse, administering stimulants when the tiny spark of waning life seemed about to flicker to extinction.

About ten o'clock in the morning de Grandin rose from his seat beside the bed and stretched himself like a cat rising from prolonged sleep. "*Bon, très bon!*" he exclaimed. "She sleeps. Her pulse, it is normal; her temperature, it is right. We can safely leave her now, my friends. Anon we shall call on her; but I doubt me if we shall have more to do than wish her felicitations on her so miraculous cure. Meantime, let us go. My poor, forgotten stomach cries aloud reproaches on my so neglected mouth. I starve, I famish, I faint of inanition. Behold, I am already become but a wraith and a shadow!"

Jules de Grandin drained his third cup of coffee at a gulp and passed the empty vessel back for replenishment.

"*Parbleu*, my friends," he exclaimed, turning his quick, elfin smile from Dr. Wolf to me, "it was the beautiful adventure, was it not?"

"It might have been a beautiful adventure," I agreed grudgingly, "but just what the deuce *was* it? The whole thing's a mystery to me from beginning to end. What caused Mrs. Chetwynde's illness in the first place, what was the cause of her insane actions, and what was it I saw last night? Was there really a thunderstorm that broke the black image, and did I really see—"

"But certainly, my excellent one," he cut in with a smile as he emptied his cup and lighted a cigarette, "you did behold all that you thought you saw; no less."

"But—"

"No buts, if you please, good friend. I well know you will tease for an explanation as a pussy-cat begs for food while the family dines, and so I shall enlighten you as best I can. To begin:

"When first you told me of Madame Chetwynde's illness I knew not what to think, nor did I think anything in particular. Some of her symptoms made me fear she might have been the victim of a *revenant*, but there were no signs of blood-letting upon her, and so I dismissed that diagnosis. But as we descended the stairs after our first visit, I did behold the abominable statue in the hall. 'Ah ha,' I say to me, 'what does this evil thing do here? Perhaps it makes the trouble with Madame Idoline?' And so I look at it most carefully.

"My friends, Jules de Grandin has covered much land with his little feet. In the arctic snows and in the equatorial heat he has seen the sins and follies and superstitions of men, and learned to know the gods they worship. So he recognized that image for what it was. It is of the goddess Kali, tutelary deity of the *Thags* of India, whose worship is murder and whose service is bloodshed. She goes by many names, my friends: sometimes she is known as Devi, consort of Siva and daughter of Himavat, the Himalaya Mountains. She is the Sakti, or female energy of Siva, and is worshiped in a variety of forms under two main classes, according as she is conceived as a mild and beneficent or as a malignant deity. In her milder shapes besides Devi, 'the goddess,' she is called also Gauri, 'the yellow,' or Uma, 'the bright.' In her malignant forms she is Durga, 'the inaccessible,' represented, as a yellow woman mounted on a tiger, Chandi, 'the fierce,' and, worst of all, Kali, 'the black,' in which guise she is portrayed as dripping with blood, encircled with snakes and adorned with human skulls. In the latter form she is worshiped with obscene and bloody rites, oftener than not with human sacrifice. Her special votaries are the *Thags*, and at her dreadful name all India trembles, for the law of the English has not yet wiped out the horrid practice of *thaggee*.

“Now, when I beheld this filthy image standing in Madame Chetwynde’s home I wondered much. Still, I little suspected what we later came to know for truth, for it is a strange thing that the gods of the East have little power over the people of the West. Behold, three hundred thousand Englishmen hold in complete subjection as many million Hindoos, though the subject people curse their masters daily by all the gods whom they hold sacred. It seems, I think, that only those who stand closer to the bare verities of nature are liable to be affected by gods and goddesses which are personifications of nature’s forces. I know not whether this be so, it is but a theory of mine. At any rate, I saw but small connection between the idol and our sick lady’s illness until Friend Trowbridge told me of her strain of Indian ancestry. Then I say to me: ‘Might not she, who holds a mixture of aboriginal blood in her veins, become affected by the strength of this heathen goddess? Or perhaps it is that fused blood is weaker than the pure strain, and the evil influence, of the Black One may have found some loophole in her defense.’ One thing was most sure, in Madame Chetwynde’s house there was clearly the odor of Eastern incense, yet nowhere was there visible evidence of perfume save such as a dainty woman of the West might use. Me, I sniffed like a hound while examining her, and kissed her fingers twice in farewell to make sure. This incense which were so all unaccounted for did puzzle me.

“You recall, Friend Trowbridge, how I questioned her maid about the punk smell, and how little satisfaction I got of her. ‘There is going on here the business of monkeys,’ I tell me as we leave the house. And so I make a print of the front door key that we may enter again at our convenience and see what is what.

“*Eh bien*, my friends, did we not see a sufficiency the following night when we beheld Madame Idoline fall forward on her face and make a voluntary offer of her soul and body to the Black One? I shall say so.

“‘How to overcome this Eastern fury?’ I ask me. ‘The excellent Katy Rooney have bathed her in holy water, and the blessed fluid have burned and sizzled on her so infamous head. Clearly, the force of Western churches is of little value in this case. Ah, perhaps she *have* attacked Madame Chetwynde through her strain of primitive blood. Then what?’

“*Mort d’un chat*, all suddenly I have it! At the dinner in New York I have met the young Dr. Wolf. He is a full-blood Indian and, he have told me, a medicine man of his people, as well. Now, if this woman’s weakness is her Indian blood, may not that same blood be her strength and her protection as well? I hope so.

“So I persuade Monsieur Wolf to come with me and pit the strength of his Great Spirit against the evil force of Kali of the *Thags*. Who will win? *Le bon Dieu* alone knows, but I have hopes.”

For a moment he regarded us with a quizzical smile, then resumed:

“The Indian of America, my friends, was truly *un sauvage noble*. The Spaniard saw in him only something like a beast to be enslaved and despoiled; the Englishman saw in him only a barrier to possession of the new country, and as such to be swept back or exterminated; but to the Frenchman he was a noble character. Ha, did not my illustrious countrymen, the Sieurs La Salle and Frontenac, accord him his just dues? Certainly. His friendship was true, his courage undoubted, his religion a clean one. Why, then, could we not invoke the Indians’ Great Spirit?

“We know, my friends, or at least we think we know, that there is but one true God, almighty and everlasting, without body, parts or passions; but does that same God appear in the same manner to all peoples? *Mais non*. To the Arab he is Allah; to many so-called Christians He is but a sort of celestial Santa Claus; I greatly fear, Friend Trowbridge, that to many of your most earnest preachers He is little more than a disagreeable old man with the words ‘Thou Shalt Not!’ engraved upon His forehead. But, for all these different conceptions, He is still God.

“And what are these deities of heathendom?” He paused, looking expectantly from one of us to the other, but as we made no reply, proceeded to answer his own question: “They are nothing, and yet they are something, too. They are the concentrated power of thought, of mistaken belief, of misconception. Yet, because thoughts are truly things, they have a certain power — *parbleu*, I think a power which is not to be sneezed upon. For, years, for centuries, perhaps, that evil statue of Kali has been invoked in bloody and unseemly rites, and before her misshapen feet has been poured out the concentrated hate and wickedness of countless monkey-faced heathens. That did indue her with an evil power which might easily overcome the resistance of a sensitive nature, and all primitive peoples are more sensitive to such influences than are those whose ancestors have long been agnostic, however much and loudly they have prated of their piety.

“Very good. The Great Spirit of the Indian of America, on the other hand, being a clean and noble conception, is one of the manifestations of God Himself. For countless generations the noble Red Man had clothed him with all the attributes of nobility. Shall this pure conception of the godhead go to waste? No, my friends, ten thousand times no! You can not kill a noble thought any more than you can slay a noble soul; both are immortal.

“And so I did prevail upon the good Wolf to come with us and summon the massed thought and belief of his great people to combat the massed thought of those despicable ones who have made them a goddess in the image of their own uncleanness of mind. *Nom d’une anguille*, but the

struggle was magnificent!

“You, mean to tell me that I actually saw the Great Spirit, then?” I demanded incredulously.

“*Ah bah*, my friend,” he replied, “have I not been at pains to tell you it was the massed, the concentrated thought and belief of all the Indians, of today and for countless generations before today, which our good Wolf invoked? *Mordieu*, can I never convince you that thought, though it be immaterial, is as much a thing as — as for example, the skull in your so thick head?”

“But what about Mrs. Chetwynde’s maid?” I asked, for deep in my mind there lurked a suspicion that the woman might know more of the unholy sights we had seen than she cared to tell.

“Quite right,” he replied, nodding gravely. “I, too, suspected her once. It was because of that I induced the excellent Katy to return to Madame Idoline’s service and spy upon her. I discovered much, for Katy, like all her race, is shrewd, and when she knows what is wanted she knows how to get it. It appears the maid was fully aware of her

mistress’ subjection to the Black One, but, though she understood it not, so deep was her devotion to *Madame* her mistress that she took it on herself to cast obstacles in our way lest we prevent a continuance of *Madame’s* secret worship. Loyalty is a great, a wonderful thing, my friends. That poor woman was shocked by the spectacle of her beloved mistress casting herself before the thing of stone, but the bare fact that her mistress did it was justification enough for her. Had she been asked to do so by Madame Chetwynde, I firmly believe she would have joined in the obscene devotions and given her own body and soul to the Black One along with that of her deluded mistress whom she adored.”

“Well — I’ll be — But look here —” I began again, but:

“No more, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin commanded, rising and motioning to Dr. Wolf and me. “It is long since we have slept. Come let us retire. Me, *parbleu*, I shall sleep until your learned societies shall issue profound treatises on the discovery of a twin brother to that Monsieur Rip Van Winkle!”

Mephistopheles and Company, Ltd.

“**M**ESSIEURS LES AMERICAINS dead on the field of honor, I salute you!” Jules de Grandin drew himself rigidly to attention and raised his cupped hand to his right temple in a smart military salute before the Victory Monument in our city park.

The act was so typical of the little Frenchman that I could not forbear a smile as I glanced covertly at him. Ten thousand times a day friends and neighbors — even relatives — of the gold-starred names on the honor roll of that monument passed through the park, yet of all the passers-by Jules de Grandin was the only one who habitually rendered military honors to the cenotaph each time his steps led past it.

His sharp little blue eyes caught the flicker of my smile as we turned from the memorial, and the heat-lightning flash of resentment rose in them. “Ha, do you laugh at my face, Friend Trowbridge?” he demanded sharply. “*Cordieu*, I tell you, it would be well for your country if more persons paid honor to the brave lads who watered the fields of France with their blood that Freedom might survive! So busy you are in this peaceful land that you have no time to remember the wounds and blood and broken bodies which bought that peace; no time to remember how the *sale boche*—

“*Misère de Dieu*, what have we here?” One of his white, womanish hands grasped me so sharply by the arm that I winced under the pressure. His free hand pointed dramatically down the curving, shrub-bordered path before us.

“Eh?” I demanded. “What the deuce)?” I swallowed the remainder of my question as my gaze followed the line of his pointing finger.

A young woman in evening dress, tear-stains on her cheeks and stark, abject terror in her eyes, was running stumblingly toward us.

“*Lieber Gott!*” she cried in a horrified whisper, shrill and thin-edged as a scream, then struggled for breath in a paroxysm of sobs and glanced frightenedly behind her. “*Ach, lieber Himmel!*”

“*Favoris d’un rat*,” murmured de Grandin wonderingly, “a woman of the *boche*?”

“*Enschuldige mich, Fräulein*,” he began, making a wry face, as though the German words were quinine on his tongue, “*bitte*)”

The result of his salutation was as forceful as it was unexpected. Throwing her hands before her eyes, as though to shut out a vision too terrible for mortal sight, the girl uttered a terrified, despairing shriek, swerved sharply away

and dashed past him with a bound like that of a rabbit startled by a hound. Half a dozen fear-spurred steps farther down the path her knees seemed to melt under her, she wavered uncertainly a moment, then collapsed to the pavement with a pitiful little moan, huddled in a lovely heap of disordered dark hair and disarranged costume, shuddered tremblingly, then lay still.

“*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle*” — de Grandin flung the girl’s native tongue aside — “you seem in trouble. Is there anything — ?” He felt her wrists for a feebly fluttering pulse, then laid a tentative hand on her left breast. “*Morbleu* Trowbridge, my friend,” he exclaimed, “she has fainted unconscious! Assist me, we must take her home for treatment. I think —”

“Exguse me, zur,” a thick-toned voice cut through his words as a big young man in dinner clothes emerged from behind a clump of shrubs with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box popping from its case, “exguse me, zur, but I know the young lady, und I zhall be ver-ee gladt her to dake home if you will so kind be as to call me a cab. I—”

“*Ha*, do you say so?” The little Frenchman dropped the swooning girl’s wrist and bounded to his feet, glaring up into the other’s face with a fierce, unwinking stare. “Perhaps, then, *Monsieur*, you can tell us why Mademoiselle is running through the park at this hour of night, and why she becomes unconscious on our hands. *N’est-ce-pas?*”

The stranger drew himself up with an air of sudden hauteur. “I am not obliged to you exblanations make,” he began. “I dell you I know the young lady, und vill—”

“*Nom, d’un chat*, this is too much!” de Grandin blazed. “I make no doubt you know her entirely too well for her comfort, *Monsieur*, and that you should demand that we turn her over to you — *parbleu*, it is the insult to our intelligence; it is —”

“Look out, de Grandin!” I cried, springing forward to intercept the sudden thrust the other aimed at my friend’s face with a queer-looking, shining instrument. My move was a split-second too late, but my warning shout came in time. Even as I called, the little Frenchman wrenched himself back as though preparing to turn a reversed handspring, both his feet flew upward, and his assailant collapsed to the grass with an agonized grunt as de Grandin’s right heel caught him a devastating blow in the solar plexus.

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*,” he remarked matter-of-factly as he regarded his fallen foeman, “behold the advantage of

la savate. At handgrips I should have been as nothing against this miscreant. In the foot-boxing” — he paused, and his little round eyes shone with a momentary flash of amusement — “there he lies. Come, let us convey *Mademoiselle* to your office. I doubt not she can tell us something of much interest.”

Together we assisted the still fainting girl to the cross street and signaled a passing taxicab. As the vehicle started toward my house I demanded: “Why in the world did you knock that fellow out, de Grandin? He really might have been a friend of this young lady’s, and—”

“The good God protect us from such friends,” the little Frenchman cut in. “Attend me, if you please. As we turned away from the monument in the park I did first see this woman. She was running in a zigzag course, like a hare seeking to elude the pack, and I greatly wondered at her antics. All Americans are a little mad, I think, but” — he gave a short chuckle — “there is usually method behind their madness. That a young lady of fashionable appearance should run thus through the public park at a quarter to midnight seemed to be beyond the bounds of reason, but what I saw next gave me to think violently. Before she had gone a dozen steps, a man appeared from behind a patch of bushes and took off his hat to her, speaking words which seemed to cause her fright. She turned and ran toward the other side of the park, and another man arose from behind a bench, removed his hat and said something, whereat she flung up her hands and turned again, running toward us, and going faster with each step. A moment before I invited your attention to her, a third man — *morbleu*, it was the same one I later caressed with my heel! — addressed her. It was immediately afterward, as she came toward us with a great fear upon her, that I called your attention.”

“H’m,” I muttered, “he — flirts?”

“*Non*,” he negated. “I do not think they were making the — how do you say it? *mash*? — on her. No, it was something more serious, my friend. Listen: I did behold the faces of the men who accosted her, *and each face was as it had been aflame with fire!*”

“Wha — *what*?” I shot back. “Aflame with — whatever are you talking about?”

“I tell you no more than what I saw,” he returned equably. “Each man’s face glowed with a light like that of a long-dead carcass which shines and stinks in the swamps at night. Also, my friend, I did perceive that each man reached out and touched her with a wand like that with which the so detestable rogue would have struck me, had I not spoiled his plan with my boot.”

“My dear chap, you’re surely dreaming!” I scoffed. “Men with fiery faces accosting young women in the public park, and touching them with magic wands! This is the State of

New Jersey in the Twentieth Century, not Baghdad in the days of the Calif Haroun!”

“U’m,” he returned noncommittally. The flame of his match flared lambently as he set a cigarette alight. “Perhaps, my friend. Let us see what the young lady has to say when we have restored her to consciousness. *Pardieu*, I shall be greatly surprised if we are not astounded at her story!”

2

“A little ether, if you please, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin ordered when we had carried the swooning girl into my surgery and laid her on the examination table. “Her heart action is very slow, and the ether will stimulate —”

A deep-drawn, shuddering moan from our patient interrupted him. “*Ach, lieber Himmel!*” she exclaimed feebly, throwing out her arms with a convulsive movement as her lids fluttered a moment before unveiling a pair of cornflower-blue eyes. “Oh, God of Heaven, I am lost — destroyed — hopelessly damned! Have mercy, Mary!” Her lovely eyes, wide and shining with terror, gazed wildly about the room a moment, came to rest on de Grandin as he bent over her, and closed in sharp nictitation. “*Ach* —” she began again hysterically, but the Frenchman broke in, speaking slowly and mouthing the German words as though they had been morsels of overheated food on his tongue.

“*Fräulein*, you are with friends. We found you in trouble in the park a short time ago, and when you fainted we brought you here. If you will tell us where you live, or where you wish to go, we shall be very glad —”

“*Ach, ja, ja*, take me” — the girl burst out wildly — “take me away; take me where *he* can not get me. Almighty God, what do I say? How can I, the hopelessly damned, escape him, either in life or death? Oh, woe me; woe me!” She knit her slender, nervous fingers together with a wringing, hopeless movement, turning her face to the wall and weeping bitterly.

De Grandin regarded her speculatively a moment, twisting first one, then the other end of his little blond mustache. “I think you would best be securing the restorative, Friend Trowbridge,” he remarked; “she seems in great distress.

“Now, *Mademoiselle*,” he held the tumbler of chilled water and ether to the sobbing girl’s lips and patted her shoulder reassuringly, “you will have the kindness to drink this and compose yourself. Undoubtedly you have had many troubles, but here you are safe —”

“Safe, *safe*?” she echoed with a hysterical laugh. “*I safe*? There is no safety for me — no spot on earth or in hell where *he* can not find me, and since heaven is forever barred against me, how can I find safety anywhere?”

“*Morbleu, Mademoiselle*, I fear you distress yourself needlessly,” the Frenchman exclaimed. “Who is this so mysterious ‘he’ who pursues you?”

“*Mephistopheles!*” So softly did she breathe the name that we could scarcely recognize the syllables.

“Eh? What is it you say?” de Grandin demanded.

“Mephistopheles — the Devil — Satan! I am possessed by him, sold and bound to him irrevocably through time and all eternity. Oh, miserable me! Alas, that ever I was born!”

She sobbed hysterically a moment, then regarded him with wide, piteous eyes. “You don’t believe me,” she wailed. “No one believes me, they think I’m crazy, but—”

“*Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin interrupted, speaking with the sharp, incisive enunciation of a physician addressing a patient who refuses to control her nerves, “we have not said so. Only fools refuse to believe that which they do not understand, and Jules de Grandin is no fool. I have said it. If there is anything you would have us know, speak on, for we listen.” He drew a chair up to the couch where the girl lay, and leaned toward her. “Proceed, *Mademoiselle*.”

“My name is Mueller, Bertha Mueller,” the girl answered, dabbing at her eyes with a wisp of lace and cambric. “I am from Vienna. A year ago I came here to accept a post as instructress to the children of Herr Andreas Hopfer, who represents the *Deutsche-Rotofabrik Verein*.”

“U’ m,” de Grandin commented.

“This new country was so strange to me,” she continued, growing calmer with her recital; “nowhere, outside the house of my employer and a few of his friends, could I find anyone who spoke my mother tongue. I was lonesome. For comfort I used to sit in the park and watch the pigeons while I thought of Vienna — the old Vienna of the empire, not the poverty-stricken city of the mongrel republic. An old lady, a beautiful, white-haired lady, came to sit on a bench near mine. She seemed sad and thoughtful, too, and one day when she addressed me, my heart nearly burst with joy. She was a Frau Stoeger, and like me she came from Vienna; like me, she had lost her nearest ones in the war our envious foes forced upon us.”

De Grandin twisted fiercely at the waxed ends of his little mustache and something very like a snort of contempt escaped him, but he controlled himself with a visible effort and nodded for her to proceed.

“One afternoon, when I had told her how my noble brothers died gloriously at the Piave,” the girl went on, “she suggested that we go to a spiritualistic friend of hers and see if it were possible for us to converse with the beloved dead. I shrank from the suggestion at first, for Holy Church frowns on such attempts to pierce the veil heaven hangs between us and the blessed ones who sleep in the Lord, but she finally persuaded me, and we went to see the medium.”

“Ah?” de Grandin nodded understandingly. “I suppose

this Madame Medium told you most remarkable things?”

“*Nein, mein Herr*,” the girl negatived eagerly. “That she did not. Me she would have no intercourse with. ‘Out of my sight and out of my house!’ she cried the moment I entered the room where she sat. ‘Begone, accursed woman, you are possessed of devils!’ she told me, and moaned and screamed until I had left the building.”

“*Parbleu*, this is of the strange unusualness!” de Grandin muttered. “Proceed, *Mademoiselle*, I listen.”

“Frau Stoeger was almost as embarrassed as I at the strange reception,” the girl replied, “but she told me not to lose hope. Too late she confided that when she first went to the medium’s she, too, was bidden to depart because a minor imp had fastened on her; yet she went to a learned man who could cast out devils and had the spirit exorcized without trouble or expense, for the Herr Doktor Martulus will take no fees for his work. Now she is one of the most intimate members of the circle over which Laïla, the Medium, presides.”

“Yes? And then?” the Frenchman prompted.

“That very night we drove into the country and met the professor. He listened sympathetically to my case and gave me a little box of pills which I was to take. I followed his directions to the letter, but the pills made me very sick, so I stopped them.

“Next time I met Frau Stoeger she questioned me concerning the medicine, and when she learned it had made me ill, she said it was a very evil sign, and begged me with tears to go for another consultation.

“The moment Professor Martulus saw me he seemed greatly alarmed and called a council of his associates, telling them he was certain I was possessed by one of the major fiends, since the medicine he had given me had never before failed to drive the lesser demons from their victims. But they all assured me there was no need to fear, since Belial, Mammon and even dread Milchim could be thrown from their possession by their spells. Only one demon was proof against them, and that one was Mephistopheles, the Fiend of Fiends, Satan’s other self. If *he* claimed me for his own, my case was well-nigh hopeless.

“They took me to an inner chamber where the mystic rites began, and by their magic they sought the name of the fiend possessing me. All efforts were vain, and no response came to their questions until, in fear and trembling, the professor called upon the archfiend himself.

“The dreadful name had hardly passed his lips before the whole building shook with a terrible explosion, blinding flames shot to the ceiling, and I was half smothered by the fumes of sulfur and brimstone. Something hit me on the head, and I lost consciousness. The next thing I knew I was being rushed back to town in a speeding automobile with Frau Stoeger. When I tried to snuggle up to her for comfort,

she drew away from me and bade me never touch her, or even look at her again. I was marked by the Devil for his own, and even my breath or glance brought misfortune to those they touched.

“My good, kind sir,” — she regarded de Grandin with a steadfast, pleading stare, like a child striving desperately to convince a skeptical adult of the truth of a preposterous story — “I did not then believe. Much talk I had heard of devils in my childhood, for my nurse was a Hungarian woman, a peasant of the old Magyar stock, and as full of stories of vampires, demons and hobgoblins as a chestnut shell is of prickles, but never had I thought the tales of devils were more than fairy lore. Alas! I was soon to learn the Devil is as real today as when he bought Faustus’ soul from him.

“The very next day as I went for my regular walk in the park a little child — a pretty little girl playing with her colored nurse by the goldfish fountain — ran to me with outstretched arms, and as I stooped to clasp her to my bosom she halted, looked at me in terror, then ran screaming to her nurse, crying out that the Devil stood behind me and reached over my shoulder for her. The Negro nurse took one look at me, then made the sign of the evil eye, thus.” She bent her thumb transversely across the palm of her hand, encircling it with the second and third fingers, permitting the fore- and little fingers to stand out like a pair of horns, and thrust them toward us. “And as the woman made the sign,” the girl sobbed, “she bade me begone to hell, where Satan, my master, awaited me; then hurried from the square with the little girl.”

De Grandin pinched his little, pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. “More than a thousand damns!” he exclaimed softly. “There is the monkey’s business here, of a surety. Proceed, *Mademoiselle*.”

“I became a marked woman,” she obeyed. “People turned to stare at me in the street, and all made the sign of the horns at me, Once, as I hurried through the park after sunset, *I saw the Devil grinning at me from behind a bunch of rhododendrons!*

“Finally, I was ready to sell my soul for a moment’s peace. Then, by chance, I met Frau Stoeger again in the park. She blessed herself at sight of me, but did not run away, and when I spoke to her, she listened. I begged her on my bended knees to take me to Professor Martulus once more to see if he could break Satan’s hold from off my wretched soul.

“That night I went to see the professor once more, and he told me there was one chance in a thousand of my regaining my freedom, but only at the cost of the most terrible sacrifice of humiliation and suffering. When he told me what I should have to do — oh, do not ask me to repeat it! — I was so horrified that I fainted, but there was no help for

it. Either I must go through the ordeal he proposed or be forever devil-ridden. At last they said I might hire a substitute, but that I must pay her two thousand dollars. Where was I, a poor governess, almost a beggar, to obtain such a sum? It might as well have been a million!

“Frau Stoeger suggested that I borrow it from my employer. He is wealthy, and she knew I had the combination to his safe and access to a book of signed checks which he keeps in his library desk. When I refused she laughed and said, ‘You’ll be glad to do worse things than forge a check or steal some paltry jewelry before you’re free, my dear.’

“That was a week ago. Since then my life has been an earthly hell. Everywhere I have seen reminders of my dreadful fate. Children scream at the sight of me, women cross the street to avoid me, men turn and sneer as I pass by. Tonight I attended a party at my employer’s house, though I felt little enough like dancing. Finally, when I knew I must be alone or go mad, I went for a walk in the park.

“*Mein Herr* — believe me; oh, please believe what I say! — as I entered the square the Devil stepped from behind a patch of bushes and raised his hat to me, saying, ‘When are you coming to dwell in hell with me?’ As he finished speaking he stretched out his hand and touched me, and *it burned like a white-hot iron!*

“I was terrified at the apparition, but thought my nerves had played a trick on me, so I began to run. Fifty feet farther on, the Devil rose up again, doffed his hat as before, and asked me the same question. And again he touched me with his fiery claw. I screamed and ran like a frightened cat from a pursuing hound, and just before I met you the Devil appeared to me a third time, asked me the same question, and added, ‘I have put my mark on you three times tonight, so all who see you shall know you for mine.’ At that I went quite mad, *mein Herr*, and ran as I had never run before. When you stepped forward with your offer of help, I thought you were the fiend accosting me for a fourth time, and I must have fainted, for I know nothing more until I found myself here.”

“And how did the Devil appear, *Mademoiselle*?” asked de Grandin, edging slightly forward on his chair, his slender hands twitching with excitement.

“Very like a man, *mein Herr*. His body was like that of a man in evening dress, but his face was the face of the foul fiend and the horns which grew from his brows and the beard and mustache on his face were all aglow with the fires of hell. When he spoke, he spoke in German.”

“I doubt it not!” de Grandin acquiesced, *sotto voce*, then aloud: “And you say he touched you with his claw? Where?”

“Here!” the girl returned in a stifled whisper, laying a trembling hand on one bare shoulder. “Here and here and

here!" In quick succession her pointed finger touched her shoulder, her upper arm and the white half-moon of her bosom where the top of her bodice curved below her slender throat.

"*Sang d'un poisson!* — one thousand pale blue roosters!" de Grandin exclaimed between gasps of incredulity. At each place the girl indicated on her white skin there showed, red and angry, the seared, scorched soreness of a newly made burn; the crude design of a countenance of incomparable evil — a horned, bearded face, surmounted by the device of an inverted passion-cross.

Jules de Grandin regarded the brands on the girl's tender flesh with a wondering, speculative gaze, his lips pursed in a soundless whistle beneath the up-rearing ends of his waxed mustache; his little, round blue eyes seemed to snap and sparkle with flashes of light.

At length: "Name of an old and very immoral cockroach, this is abominable!" he flared. "Who and where is this medium of spirits?"

"They call her Laïla the Seeress," the girl replied with a shudder. "Her atelier is in Tecumseh Street; she —"

"*Très bien,*" de Grandin broke in, "you will return to her and tell her —"

"I couldn't — *I couldn't!*" the denial was a wail of mingled terror and repulsion.

"Nevertheless, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin continued as though she had not interrupted, "you will go to her tomorrow afternoon and tell her you have decided to hire a substitute to undergo the ordeal for you.

"*Parbleu,* but you will," he insisted as she made a half-frantic gesture of dissent. "You will visit her tomorrow, and Dr. Trowbridge and I will go with you. We shall pose as new-found friends who have agreed to finance your employment of an agent, and you shall suffer no harm, for we shall be with you. Meantime" — he consulted the tiny gold watch strapped to his wrist — "it grows late. Come; Dr. Trowbridge and I will take you to Monsieur Hopfer's house and see you safely within doors."

"But," she protested, snatching at his jacket sleeve as a drowning person might clutch a rope, "but, *mein Herr,* what of the Devil? I am afraid. Suppose he —"

A tiny network of wrinkles deepened suddenly about the outer corners of de Grandin's small, round eyes. From the side pocket of his dinner coat he produced a long-barreled French army revolver and patted its walnut stock affectionately. "*Mademoiselle,*" he assured her, "should *Monsieur le Diable* manifest himself to us, I think we have here the fire necessary to fight him. Come — *allons* let us go."

"Just what is your idea of mixing up in this nonsense?" I demanded somewhat coolly as we drove home from

returning Fräulein Mueller to her employer's house. "This looks like a plain case of hysteria to me, and what you expect to accomplish is more than I —"

"Indeed?" he answered sarcastically. "The brands on Mademoiselle Mueller's flesh, they, too, were perhaps marks of hysteria?"

"Well," I temporized, "I can't exactly account for them, but—"

"But you are like all other good, kind souls who see no farther than the points of their noses and declare all outside that distance to be non-existent," he interrupted with a grin. "*Non, non,* Trowbridge, my friend, I fear you are unable to recognize the beans, even when the sack has been opened for you. Consider, *mon ami,* think, cogitate and reflect on what we have witnessed this night. Recall the details of the young lady's story, if you please.

"Does not her experience point to a great, a marvelously organized criminal band as plainly as a road map indicates the motorist's route? I think yes. Alone and friendless in a strange city, she meets a woman who claims to come from her own country — after she has been told first what that country is. Is that only happen-so? I think no. The girl must have let slip the information that she has access to her master's safe and checkbook, and so she was deemed fitting prey for this criminal gang. Does not every step of her path of misfortune mark the trail these wicked ones followed to bring her to a state of desperation where she would be ready to commit larceny?"

"What of the supposed demon who accosted her in the park tonight? She thought he was one, but I saw three men rise up from behind shrubbery and address her. I, too, saw their faces shine with fire, but it was not the fire of flame, as she believed. *Mais non,* did I not say it was like the light given off by rotting carcasses? What then? The answer is simple. Me, I believe these three men who seemed but one to her, wore false beards and eyebrows — masks, perhaps — which were smeared with some sort of luminous paint, the better to simulate the popular conception of the Devil and terrify a girl already half insane with terror.

"Very well, let us proceed another step. The big young man who came upon us so suddenly, the man who claimed to know her and would have borne her off had I not argued with him with the heel of the boot — did he, too, not speak with the accent of the German tongue, even as she does? Surely. Beyond doubt, my friend, he was one of the three men with fiery faces who had addressed her a moment before, and who sought to take her from us when he thought we would rescue her.

"Another thing: I have noted the manners and customs of many men in many places, and I know the charms they employ against evil. 'What of that?' you ask. 'This,' I reply: 'Never does the American or Englishman make the sign of

the horns to ward off the evil eye. That is distinctly a continental European custom.' Therefore, when I hear the Negro nurse made the horns at Mademoiselle Mueller in the park I smell a fish in her story. Wherever that black woman — undoubtedly herself an American — learned that sign, she did not learn it from an American. An American seeing her make that sign would have understood nothing from it; but Mademoiselle Mueller is no American. She is fresh from Europe, where that sign means something, and she understood what the Negress meant when she made the horns at her — as it was intended she should."

"Well," I replied, "what's your theory, then?"

"Simply this: The child who fled from Mademoiselle Mueller, the Negro nurse who made the evil sign at her, the people who passed her in the street and turned away — all had been planted in her path for the purpose of wearing down her resistance, of obtaining her goat, as you Americans say. But listen: They demanded of her only two thousand dollars. Why? Because they thought she could get no more. Yet so elaborate a system as theirs surely would not have been organized for the tiny sum they demanded. No, men do not take elephant guns into the fields to hunt butterflies. This poor girl is but one of many victims these rogues have preyed upon. The Stoeger woman is one of their scouts who happened to fall upon her, but they must have imposed on many other foolish women — men, too, undoubtedly, and therefore —" He paused, his lips parted in an expectant grin, his little eyes gleaming with excitement and elation.

"All right; I'll bite," I replied. "Therefore —"

"Attend me, my friend," he replied irrelevantly; "have you ever been in India?"

"No!"

"Very good. I will tell you things. In that land the natives are much plagued by tigers, is it not so?"

"So I've heard."

"*Parfaitement*. When the white man comes to rid a community of the striped devil of the jungle, what does he do?"

"Do?"

"But of course! He climbs into a convenient tree and waits, does he not, and beneath the tree, for bait, he tethers a luckless goat, is it not so?"

"Why —"

"Very good, my friend. You and I are the hunters. This gang of miscreants are the tigers. The unfortunate Mademoiselle Mueller is —"

"Good heavens, man!" I exclaimed, the full purport of his scheme dawning on me. "You don't mean —"

"But certainly," he nodded with perfect aplomb, "she is the goat who lures the tigers within range of our guns."

His small, even teeth came together with a sharp, decided

click. "Come, my friend," he bade as we drew up before my house, "let us to bed. We shall have need of a good night's sleep, for tomorrow — *parbleu*, I damn think we shall have much good sport before we take the pelts from off these two-legged tigers!"

3

A Negro dwarf, whose excessively ugly features were rendered still less prepossessing by deep smallpox pits, opened the stained-glass-and-walnut door of the big house in Tecumseh Street where we called with Fräulein Mueller about four o'clock the following afternoon.

"Have you an appointment with the Sibyl?" he asked arrogantly as he ushered us into the rug-strewn hall and paused before a heavily curtained doorway.

"*La, la,*" de Grandin murmured wonderingly, "is she then a dentist or physician that one must arrange beforehand to consult her? We have no appointment, my friend; nevertheless, you will inform her that we desire to see her, and without unnecessary delay."

The undersized servitor blinked in amazement. Callers on Madame Laïla were wont to arrive in humble mien, apparently, and the little Frenchman's high-handed manner was a distinct novelty.

"Perhaps the Seeress will consent to see you, even though it's usual to arrange for a sitting beforehand," he replied in a slightly more cordial tone, presenting de Grandin with a pencil and pad of paper. "Kindly write your name on this tablet," he requested, then, as the Frenchman complied: "Tear the sheet off and put it in your pocket. It is not necessary for the Sibyl to see it in order to know your name; we only ask that you write it as a guaranty of good faith. Await me here; I will see if you can be admitted."

We had not long to wait, for the attendant returned almost before the curtains through which he had vanished had ceased to sway, and bowed formally to us. "The Sibyl will see you, Dr. de Grandin," he announced, holding the draperies aside.

I gave a slight start as my companion was addressed by name, for I had seen him stow the folded sheet of paper on which he had scribbled his signature in his waistcoat pocket.

"Laïla the Seeress sees all and knows all," the black dwarf informed me, as though reading my mind. "There are no secrets from her. This way, if you please."

The room we entered was hung with unrelieved black and lighted only by a lamp with three burners suspended from the ceiling by a bronze chain. Slightly beyond the center of the apartment sat a young woman garbed in a long loose robe of some clinging black stuff with a headdress resembling a nun's wimple of the same sable hue. Her face

denoted she was about twenty-five or twenty-six years old, though, contrary to the usual feminine custom, she appeared anxious to seem older. Her long, excessively thin arms were bare, as were her neck and feet, and the contrast of her pale flesh and black draperies in the room was an eerie one. About her waist was a wide belt of shining black leather clasped with a garnet fastening which flashed fitfully in the chamber's half-light. In one hand she held a three-foot wand tipped with an ivory hand with outspread fingers, and she was seated on a sort of three-legged stool roughly resembling an ancient Greek tripod. From a brazen censer standing on the floor before her emanated penetrating, acrid odors, while the charcoal fire in the incense pot glowed and sank to dullness alternately as though blown upon by a bellows, though no instrument from which a draft could come was visible.

"What seek ye here, oh man?" she demanded in a hollow, sepulchral voice, fixing her deep-set eyes on de Grandin.

The little Frenchman bowed with continental courtesy. "*Madame*," he explained, "we have learned this unfortunate young lady's plight and have determined to aid her. The sum of two thousand dollars is required in order to save her the pain and humiliation of a most terrifying ordeal, and this sum we are prepared to advance, provided, of course, you can offer proper guaranty —"

"Thy money perish with thee!" rejoined the Seeress furiously, half rising from her tripod; then, as though relenting: "Stay, power over the spirits have I none, but I can direct thee to one whose power is infinite.

"Woman," her glowing, cavernous orbs bored into the frightened blue eyes of the little Austrian girl, "if thou wouldst be freed from the demon who dominates thee, be at this house at precisely seven o'clock this evening. Come alone and bring the money with thee, and — perhaps — Martulus the Mighty will consent to have thee exorcized by proxy. I can promise thee naught, but what I can do, I will. Wilt thou come?"

"*Ach, ja, ja!*" Fräulein Mueller sobbed hysterically, clutching at the Sibyl's black raiment. But the Seeress had risen from her stool and stalked majestically from the room, leaving us bewildered and alone.

"*Mort d'une sèche*," de Grandin chuckled as we re-entered my study and regarded each other across the table, "but the entertainment they furnish at Madame Laïla's is worthy of the Odéon! Behold how they assault the superstitions of the caller at the very front door with their trick of name-reading. *Parbleu*, but it is droll!"

"It seemed mysterious enough to me," I admitted. "Do you know how it was done?"

"*Tiens*, my friend, am I a little, wondering boy to be mystified by the trickery of a fire-eater?" he returned with a grin. "But certainly, it was the simplest of tricks. The top

sheet of the tablet whereon I wrote my name was almost as thin as tissue paper and the pencil was so hard I had to bear down heavily in order to leave any mark at all. The second sheet of paper was coated with a thin layer of wax, and when the colored man took the tablet inside with him they simply dusted lampblack over it, then blew it off and read what I had written where the blacking remained in the pencil's impression in the wax. It is very simple."

"Well!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "What made the charcoal brazier glow and subside —"

"Enough!" he interrupted. "We have more to do than explain the cheap wonders of a cheap fortune-teller's establishment this afternoon, my friend. Do you go for a walk, a nap or a game of solitaire. Me, I have much to do between now and seven o'clock. Be sure to have your car ready and waiting at the corner of Tecumseh and Irvine Streets at fifty minutes after six, if you please. I go to perform important duties." And, lighting a cigarette, he picked up his hat and cane and set off for the corner pharmacy humming a snatch of sentimental tune:

"Le souvenir, présent céleste,
Ombre des biens que l'on n'a plus,
Est encore un plaisir qui reste,
Après tons ceux qu'on a perdus."

4

From the shelter of a convenient areaway de Grandin and I watched the door of Laïla's house as the city hall clock boomed out the hour of seven.

Falteringly, plainly in a state bordering on collapse, but more afraid of turning back than of unknown dangers before her, Fräulein Mueller mounted the mansion's wide stone steps and rang the doorbell timidly.

As soon as the black dwarf had admitted her, de Grandin leaped up the area steps and hastened across the street to the big, black limousine parked before Laïla's door. For a moment he fumbled about the car's gas tank, then sped back to where I waited and riveted his gaze on the portal through which Fräulein Mueller had vanished.

We had not long to wait. Almost before the Frenchman had regained his ambush, the big door swung open and Laïla and the little Austrian girl emerged, descended the curving stairs and entered the waiting limousine. There was a buzzing, irritable hum of the self-starter, the spiteful swish of the powerful motor going into action; then, with a low, steady hum, the car glided from the curb and shot down the street with surprising speed.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin urged, seizing me by the hand and dragging me to the street, "to your car. Haste! We must follow them!"

I gazed after the fleeing motor and shook my head. "Not a chance," I declared. "They're doing better than thirty miles an hour now, and gathering speed all the time. We'd never be able to keep their trail with my little rattletrap."

"My friend," he replied, piloting me across the street and fairly shoving me into my car, "Jules de Grandin is no fool. Think you he slept away his time this afternoon? *Regardez-vous!*" With a dramatic gesture he pointed to the roadway before us.

I blinked my eyes in astonishment, then grinned in appreciation of his strategy. In the wake of the speeding limousine there shone a faint but unmistakable trail of luminous dots against the cement pavement. Now I understood what he had been doing at the other car's tail during the interval between Fräulein Mueller's entrance and Laïla's exit. Firmly attached to the limousine's gas tank was a small can of luminous paint, a small hole pierced in its bottom permitting its telltale contents to leak out, a drop at a time, at intervals which spattered the roadway with glowing trail-markers every thirty or forty feet.

Through the city, over country roads, up hill and down, over viaducts, across stretches of low-lying marshes, through wide, wooded areas and between long, undulating stretches of fields ripe for harvesting, the chase continued. The mileage dial on my dashboard registered forty-five, sixty, sixty-five miles before the car ahead swerved sharply from the highway, shot down a private lane, and entered the high, iron-grilled gateway of a walled estate.

"*Eh bien,*" remarked de Grandin, "here we are, of a surety, but where is it we are?" Parking our car behind a convenient copse of second-growth pines, we stole forward to reconnoiter the enemy's position. Our progress was barred by the tall iron gates which had been securely locked behind our quarry. Through the grille work of the barrier we could descry tall evergreens bowing and whispering with cemetery-like somberness on each side of a wide, curving driveway, and between their ranks we caught momentary glimpses of the ivy-covered walls and white porch pillars of a large Colonial-type residence.

De Grandin gave the gate-handle a tentative shake, confirming our suspicion that it was firmly secured. "It would be wiser not to attempt scaling these bars, Friend Trowbridge," he decided after an inspection of the iron uprights composing the grille; "the visibility would be too high, and I have no wish to stop, or even to impede, a bullet. Let us see what opportunities the walls afford." We drew back from the entrance and walked softly along the strip of grass bordering the wall's base, seeking a favorable location for swarming up.

"Why not here?" the Frenchman suggested, halting at a spot where the ivy grew thicker than elsewhere. "I will go first, do you keep a sharp lookout to the rear." Pulling his

jacket sleeves upward with a quick, nervous jerk, he laid hold of the clinging vines, braced his feet against the bricks and prepared to swing himself upward, then paused abruptly, casting a hasty glance over his shoulder.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge, to cover!" he urged, suiting action to his warning and dragging me to the shelter of a nearby bush. "We are observed!"

Hand on pistol, he crouched alertly while the light, barely audible step of someone advancing through the thicket sounded nearer and nearer on the carpet of early fall leaves lying on the ground about the tree-roots.

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" he exclaimed with a noiseless chuckle as the stranger emerged from the thicket. "A pussy!" A big, black-and-white tom-cat, returning from an evening's hunting or love-making, strode forth from the under-growth, tail waving proudly in air, inquisitive green eyes looking now here, now there. The creature paused a moment at the wall's base, gathered itself for a spring, then leaped upward with feline grace, catching the clustering ivy strands with gripping, claw-spiked feet, and lifted itself daintily to the wall-top, poising momentarily before making the downward jump to the yard beyond.

De Grandin stepped from his hiding-place and prepared to follow the cat's lead, but started back with an exclamation of dismay as the brute suddenly emitted an ear-piercing yowl of fear and agony, rose like a bouncing ball, every hair on its body stiffly erect, then catapulted like a hurled missile to the earth at our feet, where it lay twitching and quivering.

"*Sacré sang d'un païen!*" the Frenchman murmured, creeping forward and examining the rigid feline by the light of his electric torch. It was stone-dead, yet nowhere was there sign or trace of any wound or violence. "U'm," he commented, reaching out a tentative hand to stroke the dead animal's fur, then: "*Par la barbe d'un petit bonhomme!*" The hair was still bristling from the creature's hide, and as the Frenchman's fingers slipped over it a sharp, crackling sound, accompanied by tiny sparkling flashes, followed them.

"Ah? I wonder? Probably it is," he declared. Turning on his heel he hastened to the place where our car lay hidden, rummaged under the seat a moment, and dragged out the rubber storm-curtains. "*Mordieu,* my friend," he informed me with one of his elfish grins as he dragged the curtains through the underbrush, "never could I work one of those tops of the one man, but I think me these curtains come in handy for this, if for nothing else."

Once more bracing his feet against the wall, he drew himself up by the strong ivy, hung a moment by one hand while with the other he tossed the rubberized cloth across the top of the wall, then hoisted himself slowly, taking care to let his fingers come in contact with nothing not covered by the auto curtains.

“Up, Friend Trowbridge!” he extended his hand to me and drew me beside him, but: “Have a care, keep upon the curtains, for your life!” he commanded as I gained the wall’s top, then played the beam of his pocket flash along the bricks beside us. Running along the wall-top were four parallel wires, each supported at intervals of twenty feet or so by little porcelain insulators. But for the warning we received when the cat was killed, and de Grandin’s forethought in fetching the rubber curtains, we should surely have been electrocuted the moment we scaled the wall, for the wires were so spaced that contact with at least one of them could not possibly be avoided by anyone attempting to scramble across the top.

Taking advantage of the ample shelter afforded by the great trees, we stole across the wide lawn and brought up at the house without incident. Nowhere was there any trace of occupancy, for all the windows were darkened, and, save for the night wind souging through the towering evergreens, the place lay wrapped in graveyard silence. By a side door we found the big black car which had brought Laïla and Fräulein Mueller. Working rapidly, de Grandin unfastened the twisted wires with which the can of luminous paint was attached to the gas tank and tossed the nearly empty tin into an adjacent flower bed. This done, he considered the big machine speculatively a moment, then grinned like a mischievous boy about to perpetrate a prank. “Why not, *pour l’amour de Dieu?*” he demanded with a chuckle as he drew a wicked-looking case knife from his pocket and made four or five incisions in each of the vehicle’s balloon tires close to the rims. As the air fled hissing from the punctured tubes he turned away with a satisfied laugh. “*Nom d’un canard*, but they shall blaspheme most horribly when they discover what I have done,” he assured me as we continued our circuit of the house.

The tenants evidently placed implicit faith in their electrified wall, for there seemed no attempt to bar ingress, once the intruder had managed to pass the silent sentries on the wall-top. An unlatched window at the front of the building invited us to push our explorations farther, and a moment later we had let ourselves in, and, guided by cautious flashes from de Grandin’s pocket light, were creeping down a wide central hall.

“Now, my friend,” de Grandin whispered, “I wonder much which way leads to — *s-s-sh!*” he paused abruptly as a quick, nervous step sounded at the hall’s farther end.

There was no time to reconnoiter the position, for the beam of our flashlight would surely betray our presence. Some four paces back we had passed a doorway, and, shutting off his light, de Grandin wheeled in his tracks, grasped my arm and dragged me toward it with all speed.

Fortunately the lock was unfastened and the knob turned soundlessly in his hand. Grasping his revolver, he took a

deep breath, motioned me to silence, swung the door back and stepped softly into the room.

5

Darkness, black and impenetrable as a curtain of sable velvet, closed about us as we crossed the threshold. Dared we flash our light? Was there anyone hidden behind that veil of gloom, ready to pounce on us the moment we disclosed our position? We rested a moment, silently debating our next move, when:

“Doctor — Dr. Martulus” — a weak feminine voice quavered from the room’s farther end — “I’ll sign the paper. I’ll go through the ordeal, only, for pity’s sake, let me out. Don’t let *him* visit me again. Oh, o-o-o-oh, I’ll go insane if he comes again. Truly, I will!”

“Eh, what is this?” de Grandin demanded sharply, taking a hasty step forward in the dark, then pressing the switch of his flashlight. “*Cordieu — pardonnez-moi, Madame!*” He shut the light off abruptly, but in its momentary beam we had beheld a sight which brought a gasp of astonishment to our lips. Tethered to the wall by a heavy chain and metal collar locked round her scrawny neck, nude save for a pair of broken felt house-slippers and a tattered and much soiled chemise, thin to the point of emaciation, a woman crouched sobbing and whimpering on the floor. She was no longer young, and almost certainly she had never been lovely, but her voice, for all its burden of misery and terror, was low-pitched and cultured, and her pronunciation that of a person of refinement.

“Your pardon, *Madame!*” de Grandin repeated, taking another step toward the wretched captive. “We did not know you were here. We —”

“*Who are you?*”

“Eh?”

“Aren’t — aren’t you Dr. Martulus? Oh, if you aren’t, please, please take me away from this dreadful place! They’ve chained me to the wall here like a mad dog, and—”

“Pardon me, *Madame*,” de Grandin interrupted, “but who are *you?*”

“Amelia Mytinger.”

“Teeth of the Devil! Not the Mademoiselle Mytinger who disappeared from her home a month ago, and)”

“Yes; I am she. A woman called Laïla the Seeress brought me here one night — I don’t know how long ago it was. She told me I was possessed of a devil, and Dr. Martulus could cure me — I’d been suffering terribly from rheumatism and the doctors hadn’t been able to help me much — and she said it was an evil spirit which plagued me. When they got me here they told me it was Mephistopheles himself who possessed me, and that I’d have to undergo a

terrible ordeal by fire if I were ever to be rid of him. I could have hired a substitute, but she wanted ten thousand dollars, and I refused to pay it. I told them I'd undergo the ordeal myself, and they said I must sign a paper releasing them from all legal liability for possible injury I might suffer before they'd permit me to do it. When they brought the paper they wouldn't let me read it or even see any part of it except the space reserved for my signature, so—"

"Ah, ha," de Grandin muttered aside to me, "do you, too, not begin to sniff the odor of deceased fish in this business, Friend Trowbridge?"

"But they wouldn't let me go," the woman hurried on, ignoring his comment. "They said I was possessed of a devil and would bring terrible misfortune to everyone I met, so they took away my clothes and chained me here in this terrible place. I've never seen anyone from that night to this except Dr. Martulus, who comes once a day to feed me and ask if I've changed my mind about signing the paper, and—"

"And'," de Grandin quoted irritably, "and what, if you please, *Mademoiselle*?"

"And the Devil!"

"*Queue d'un sacré singe! The which?*" he demanded.

"The Devil, I tell you. I never believed in a personal Devil before, but I do, now. Every night he comes to torture me. I see his horrible face shining through the dark and feel his awful claw touch me, and it burns like a white-hot iron. Oh, I'll go mad, if I haven't done so already!" She gasped laboringly for breath, then, as if a thought had suddenly struck her: "You mentioned my having disappeared — I didn't tell anybody I was going to Laïla's that night, I was ashamed to have it known I'd consulted a fortune-teller — but you said I'd been missed. Do the police know about me? Are you from headquarters, by any chance. Will you save me? Oh, please, please take me away. I'm wealthy, I'll pay you anything you ask if only)"

"One moment, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin cut off her torrential speech. "I desire to think."

He remained immersed in thought a moment, then murmured softly, as though meditating aloud: "*Parbleu*, I see it all, now! As usual, Jules de Grandin was right. This is a gigantic conspiracy — a sort of Mephistopheles and Company, Limited. Yes, *pardieu*, limited only by these villains' capacity to invent devilish tricks to defraud defenseless women. *Mordieu*, this is infamous, this is monstrous, this must not be permitted! Me, I shall)"

His voice shut off abruptly, like a suddenly tuned-out radio, for a sharp *click* sounded from the doorway and something faintly luminous was shining face-high through the dark.

Nearer, nearer the fiery thing floated, and we were able to make out the lineaments of a long, thin, evil face; a face

with spiked beard and pointed mustaches, with up-rearing pointed eyebrows and crooked goat's horns growing from its forehead. That was all — no body, no neck — just the leering, demoniacal face floating forward through the blackness, its hideous, fire-outlined eyes gleaming with diabolical amusement as it neared the whimpering, cowering woman in the corner.

"O-o-o-h!" wailed the terrified spinster as she cringed against the wall and the grinning, satanic face bent above her.

"*Ugh!*" A short, surprised grunt answered her outcry, and the fiery face dropped downward through the dark like a burnt-out rocket falling to earth.

"Behold Satan's assistant, *mon ami*," de Grandin commanded, a note of fierce elation in his whisper as he switched the beam of his pocket flash on the prostrate form at our feet.

A tall, broad-shouldered man, his face made up in imitation of the popular conception of the Devil, lay sprawled on the floor within the circle of the flashlight's glow. A long gash, bleeding freely, told where the blue steel barrel of de Grandin's heavy service revolver had struck as the Frenchman lashed the weapon downward through the dark with unerring aim and devastating force.

"*Eh bien*, my friend, we have met again, it seems," de Grandin remarked as he snatched away the makeup from the fellow's face and surveyed his features in the electric light. I started with surprise as I gazed into the unconscious one's countenance. He was the man who had demanded he be allowed to take Fräulein Mueller from us when we rescued her in the park.

As the flashlight switched off momentarily, the mock devil's beard and mustache became alive with glowing, smoking fire. Instantly I realized de Grandin's surmise had been correct. Phosphorus, or some kind of luminous paint, had been employed to make the faces of the men accosting the little Austrian girl glow as though aflame when they met her in the dark, and the same device had been used here to torture Miss Mytinger.

A further explanation lay at our feet, too, for beside the unconscious man's hand we found a queer-looking instrument. A moment's examination proved it to be something like an oversized flashlight, only, instead of a lamp, its tip was fitted with a metal plate on which the design of a devil's face surmounted by a reversed crucifix was soldered. As de Grandin pressed the switch actuating the contrivance we saw the design suddenly glow red-hot. To all intents the thing was a branding-iron which would burn its device on the flesh of anyone with whom it came in contact. The mystery of Fräulein Mueller's disfigurement was solved. This, too, explained what Miss Mytinger meant when she spoke of Satan's "awful claw which burned like a white-hot

iron" touching her during the diabolical visitations.

"*Bête — cochon!*" de Grandin muttered, turning the man over with a none too gentle foot. "Let us see what we can find upon his so filthy carcass." A hasty examination of the fellow's pockets disclosed a short-bladed dirk knife, a neat, businesslike blackjack and a bunch of small keys. One of these fitted the lock of Miss Mytinger's iron collar, and de Grandin forthwith transferred the fetter from her neck to that of her late tormentor.

"Let us go," he admonished, as he stowed the loot from his fallen foeman's pockets in his own. "Thus far the luck has been with us, but he who tries heaven's patience too far oftentimes comes to grief." Stepping carefully, we crept from the darkened room into the dimly lighted hall.

6

"Have the care, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin warned as we started cautiously down the corridor, "a loose board may betray us, for — *ha?*"

Not fifteen feet ahead of us a door swung suddenly open and the menacing figure of a tall, black-bearded man stepped toward us. He was clad in a flame-colored robe on which was printed in black the figure of a prancing devil. A sort of diadem from which curving horns rose above his forehead gave his lean, cadaverous countenance a look of supernatural evil, and the wicked, sneering smile on his bony features completed the unpleasant picture.

Miss Mytinger gave a high-pitched squeal of terror. "Dr. Martulus!" she cried. "Oh, we're lost; he'll never let us go!"

De Grandin faced the other defiantly, his teeth bared in a grimace which was more a snarl than a grin. "We take this lady from out your damned, execrable house, *Monsieur le Diable*," he announced truculently. "Have the goodness to stand aside, or —"

"*Nelzyá!*" the other retorted, raising a small Mauser automatic from the folds of his red robe.

"*Ha!* 'It can not be done,' do you say?" the Frenchman inquired sarcastically, and let drive with his heavy revolver, firing from the hip.

Too late he discovered his error. A crash of tinkling, shivering glass sounded, and the vision of the man in red dissolved before our eyes like a scene on a motion-picture screen when the film is melted in an overheated projector. A full-length mirror had been moved into the hall since we came through, and the man we had supposed before us was really at our back. De Grandin had been parleying with the fellow's reflection and — irony of ironies! — fired point blank into the mirror, smashing it into a hundred fragments, but injuring his opponent not at all.

Like the echo of de Grandin's shot sounded the spiteful,

whiplike report of the other's weapon. Jules de Grandin clapped his left hand to his right shoulder and dropped like an overturned sack of meal to the polished floor.

Two more figures joined the red-robed man. One of them burst into a roar of laughter. "*Ach, dot vas a goot vun!*" he chuckled. "He vas daking der lady from der house oudt vas he? Now, perhabs, ve dake her back und giff her some more dime to dink ofer vedder she vill der baber sign or not. No?"

"No! — *Nom d'un porc — NO!*" de Grandin echoed, rolling over and rising on his elbow. The chuckling German swayed drunkenly in his tracks a moment, then crashed face downward to the floor, and his red-robed companion fell across him in a heap of crumpled crimson draperies a split-second later as de Grandin's revolver bellowed a second time. The third man turned with a squeal of dismay and leaped half-way through the open door, then stumbled over nothing and slid forward on his face as a soft-nosed bullet cut his spinal cord in two six inches below his collar.

"See to Mademoiselle Mytinger, Friend Trowbridge!" de Grandin flung over his shoulder as, pistol in hand, he charged toward the doorway where his late antagonists lay. "Take her outside, I will join you anon!"

"Where are you going!" I objected. The thought of being separated in this uncanny house terrified me.

"Outside — *cornes et peau du diable!* — outside with you!" he shouted in answer. "Me, I go to find Mademoiselle Mueller and a certain souvenir."

7

The big front door was barred and double-locked. I swung to the right, traversed the room through which we had entered and hoisted the unlatched window a few inches higher. "This way, please," I told Miss Mytinger, pointing to the opening, "it's only a few feet to the ground."

She clambered over the sill and dropped to the soft turf below, and, after a futile look around for my friend, I lowered myself beside her.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin's sharp whisper commanded even as my feet touched the grass. "This way — they come!"

His warning was none too early. Even as he grasped my arm and swung me into the shadow of a towering cedar, six men charged around the corner of the house, weapons in their hands and looks of fierce malignancy on their faces.

"*Sa-ha!*" de Grandin raised his revolver and fired, and the foremost of our assailants clapped his hand to his side, whirled half-way round, like a pirouetting ballet-dancer, reeled suddenly to the left and slumped to the ground in an awkward heap. The man immediately behind stumbled over the fallen one's legs and fell forward with a guttural curse.

De Grandin pressed the trigger again, but only a harmless click responded. The cylinder was empty, and five armed men faced us across a stretch of turf less than twenty feet wide.

Half turning, the Frenchman hurled his empty weapon with terrific force into the face of the nearest ruffian, who dropped with a scream, blood spurting from his nose and mouth, and grasped my elbow again. "This way, my friend!" he cried, seizing the Mytinger woman's arm with his free hand and rushing across the shaded lawn toward the narrow beach where the waters of Barnegat Bay lapped softly against the sand.

"Where's Fräulein Mueller?" I panted, striving to keep pace with him.

"Yonder!" he answered, and as he spoke a dark form detached itself from the shadow of a towering tree and joined us in flight.

Shouts and shots echoed among the evergreens behind us, but the short start we secured when the second man fell under the impact of de Grandin's hurled weapon enabled us to keep our lead, and, dodging among the shadows, we made steadily and swiftly toward the water.

"It's no use," Miss Mytinger informed us as the cool edges of the little wavelets moistened our feet and we swung toward the south, intent on rounding the edge of the walls surrounding the grounds on the landward side and doubling back to my car. "It's no use. The beach is full of quicksand. I heard them talking about it the night I came here. One of their cows wandered down to eat the sea-grass and was sucked under before they could save her."

"On, my friend!" de Grandin answered through clenched teeth, for the strain was beginning to tell on him. "Better to perish in the quicksands than fall prey to those assassins."

We dashed along the waterline, heading for the beach beyond the wall, and a chorus of triumphant shouts followed us. Our pursuers had noted our course and made certain we rushed to our doom.

"*Parbleu*, what a chase!" de Grandin laughed pantingly, suddenly dropping to the sands and unfastening the lacings of his shoes.

"Yes, and it's not over yet," I reminded him. "They'll be on us in a moment. What's the idea — going paddling?"

"Observe me, my friend," he replied as he drew off his pale mauve socks and took shoes and stockings in hand, running barefoot ahead of us across the sands. "Follow where I lead." He advanced along the beach with long, swinging strides like those of a Canadian voyageur sweeping over a winter drift on his snow-shoes. "Jules de Grandin has been in many places," he flung back over his shoulder, "and one of them was the coast of Japan, where quicksands are thick as pickpockets at a fair. There it was I learned the ways of quicksand from the peasant fishermen.

Like all other sand it looks, nor does it quake or tremble until it has its victim fast in its hold, but always it is colder than the sands about it, and the knowing one walking barefoot on the beach can feel its death-chilled borders before it is too late to draw back.

"Careful — to the right, my friends!" Gracefully, sliding one foot behind the other, like a dancer crossing a stage, he swerved inward from the water's edge, finally pausing a moment to feel the ground before him with a tentative toe. "*Très bon* — proceed. The quicksands reach no farther here," he announced, stepping forward with a confident stride.

Following his careful lead we proceeded the better part of a hundred yards when a sudden outcry behind us made me look round apprehensively. Infuriated by the sight of our escape, and assuming that because we had not perished the beach was safe for them, four of our enemies were rushing pell-mell after us, the starlight glinting evilly on the weapons brandished over their heads.

"Hurry, de Grandin!" I urged. "They'll be up with us in a moment!"

"Will they, indeed?" he replied with cool indifference, seating himself on the soft sand and beginning to don his socks and shoes in a leisurely manner. "When they reach us, my friend, I shall be ready for them, I assure you."

"But," I remonstrated, "but — good Lord, man! — here they come!"

"Yes!" he answered, lighting a cigarette. "If you will trouble to look round, I think you will say 'there they go'."

Looking down the beach I saw the four pursuers hurrying forward, running four abreast, like a squad of soldiers going into action.

Suddenly the man to the left stumbled awkwardly, like a person descending a flight of stairs and coming to the end before he was aware of it. He faltered, raised his forward foot, as though feeling for support where there was none, and grasped the man next him.

The second man staggered drunkenly in the frenzied hold of his companion, floundered bewilderedly a moment — all four of them were doing a clumsy, grotesque dance, reeling from side to side, swaying back and forth, raising their arms spasmodically as though grasping at non-existent ropes dangling before them. But oddly, they seemed shrinking in stature, growing shorter and shorter, like inflated manikins from which the air is slowly escaping. They were melting, melting like bits of grease thrown into a heated frying-pan.

I shuddered in spite of myself. Even though they were conscienceless minions of a conscienceless master, stealers and torturers of defenseless women, I could not repress a feeling of nausea as the last of the four heads sank like a corkless bottle flung into a stream. A jet of sandy spray shot up from the level beach, a hand, opening and closing in a

paroxysm of terror and despair, rose above the rippling sands, then all was still. The pale stars blinked unconcernedly down upon the bare stretch of smooth, unruffled beach and lapping, whispering water.

“*Tiens*, my friends,” de Grandin flung away his cigarette and rose; “that appears to be that. Come, let us go.”

“I can understand your wanting to rescue Fräulein Mueller, de Grandin,” I remarked as we started on our homeward journey with the two women snugly stowed in the rear seat of my car, “but what was that remark you made about getting a souvenir when you left me in the hall?”

The little Frenchman’s small white teeth gleamed under the line of his sharply waxed mustache as an elfish smile spread across his face. “Friend Trowbridge,” he confided, “I have visited many interesting places in your so interesting country, but never yet have I lodged in a jail, nor am I wishful to do so. Think you I risked good money when I entrusted Mademoiselle Mueller to those villains’ care? Not I. I did procure two thousand dollars in counterfeit bills with which she was to pay the wretches, and faithfully did I promise to return those notes to the police museum when I

should have finished with them. It was to make good that promise that I left you in the hall.”

“And Fräulein Mueller — had they released her when you found her?” I asked.

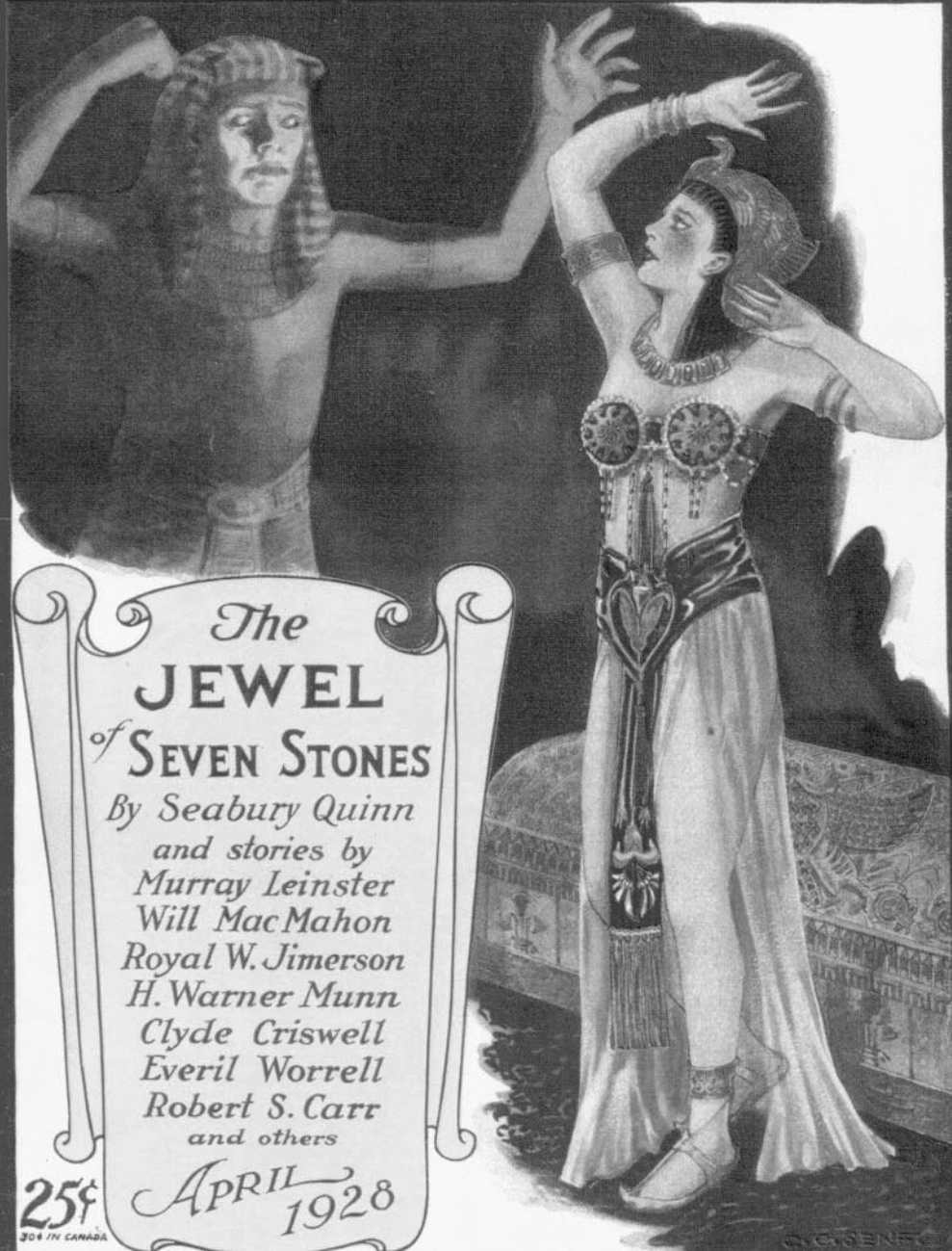
He suppressed a yawn. “Not quite,” he returned. “They had her bound in a chair, and the lady called Laïla was standing guard over her with a wicked-looking knife when I entered. My friend, I greatly dislike manhandling a woman, but ladies who wish not to be mauled should not attempt to stick knives in Jules de Grandin. I fear I was forced to be less than entirely gentlemanly before I succeeded in releasing Mademoiselle Mueller and binding Laïla in the chair in her place. *Eh bien*, I tied her no tighter than was necessary to keep her in place until the police call for her.”

“And—?”

“More speed and less conversation, if you please, my friend,” he interrupted. “Your house is yet a long distance away, and there is nothing to drink this side of your so adorable cellar. Come, as you Americans say, stand hard upon the gas.”

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



The
JEWEL
of **SEVEN STONES**

*By Seabury Quinn
and stories by
Murray Leinster
Will MacMahon
Royal W. Jimerson
H. Warner Munn
Clyde Criswell
Everil Worrell
Robert S. Carr
and others*

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The Jewel of Seven Stones

1. The Coffins from Alexandria

“HELLO, Dr. Trowbridge,” a cheerful hail accosted me as I turned the corner, hastening on my round of afternoon calls, “I’ve been meaning to look you up for the last two months, but never got ’round to it. Good thing I met you now; I’m figuring on pulling off a show this evening, and maybe you’d like a ringside seat.”

“Oh? How do you do?” I responded somewhat doubtfully, for the grinning young man in the shabby little red roadster at the curb was unknown to me. “I’m afraid you’ve the advantage of me; I —”

“Oh, yes, you do,” he replied with an infectious smile. “I’m Ellsworth Bennett you know. You used to come out to our house a lot when Father was living, and —”

“Why,” I broke in, “Ellsworth, boy, I never would have known you. You’ve grown so —”

“Quite right,” he agreed. “It’s a habit we all have during early life. Now, what do you say to coming out to my little diggings tonight? I’m parked in the old Van Drub cottage for the season, and I’ve really got something worth looking at.”

“Well,” I temporized, “I’d be delighted to have you in to my place to dinner, but I’m so tied up with night calls these times that I fear I’ll not be able to accept your invitation.”

“Oh rats!” he returned. “Try to come, won’t you? You know, I’ve been connected with the Museum of Ethnology ever since I got my degree, and this spring I ran across the trail of something really big while traveling in Egypt. I think I can show you something brand-new if you’ll drop out my way tonight or tomorrow. I seem to recall that you and Father used to spend no end of time talking about Rameses and Ptolemy and the rest of those antique gentlemen when I was too small to know what it was all about.”

I regarded the lad speculatively. He was his father’s own son, no mistake about it. Those honest, humorous blue eyes beneath the sandy brows, that wide, mobile mouth and square chin cleft with the slightest suggestion of a dimple, even the flecks of russet freckles across the bridge of his aquiline nose reminded me of my dear old classmate whose house had been a second home to me in the days before the influenza pandemic took him off. “I’ll come,” I decided, clasping the youngster’s hand in mine. “You may expect me sometime after eight this evening — office hours have to be observed, you know — and, if you don’t mind, I’ll bring a

friend with me, a Dr. de Grandin, from Paris, who’s stopping with me.”

“Not Jules de Grandin?” he demanded incredulously.

“Yes; do you know him?”

“No, but I’d like to. Jules de Grandin! Why, Dr. Trowbridge, I’d no idea you traveled in such highbrow company.”

“I’d hardly call him highbrow,” I replied, smiling at his enthusiasm.

“Oh, Lord!” he threw up his hands in mock despair. “You fellows who have all the luck never do appreciate it. Why, man, de Grandin’s one of the foremost ethnologists of the age; his studies in evolution and anthropometry are classics. I’ll say you can bring him. I’ll be hanging out the window waiting for you tonight. G’bye.” With a warning double toot of his horn he set his decrepit motor going and dashed down the street at a speed bound to bring him afoul of the first crossing policeman who spied him.

The Van Drub cottage where young Bennett had his “diggings” was a relic of the days when Swede and Dutchman contended for mastery of the country between the Delaware and the Hudson. Like all houses of its day, it was of the story-and-a-half type, built of stone to the edge of the overhanging roof and of hand-split chestnut shingles above. The ground floor was entirely occupied by a single large combination living-room and kitchen paved with brick and walled with roughly split planks, and small cubby-holes of storerooms flanked it at each end. Bennett’s living arrangements were as typical of himself as a photograph. Bookshelves lined the walls and displayed a most improbable array of volumes — de Morgan’s *Les Premières Civilisations* and Munzinger’s *Ostafrikanische Studien* huddled cheek by jowl with a much-worn copy of Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*. A once fine but now badly worn Sarouk rug covered the major portion of the brick floor, and the furniture was a hodgepodge of second-hand mahogany and new, cheap pine. In the middle of the room, as though on exhibition, were two long covered objects, roughly resembling a pair of mummy-cases, raised some three feet above the floor on rough saw-horses. Two kerosene-burning student lamps of the sort used in the late nineties, their green shades removed for greater radiation of light, illuminated the room’s center with an almost theatric glare, leaving the corners in shadow all the deeper from the contrast.

“Welcome to the humble student’s cave, gentlemen,”

Bennett greeted as we stepped through the wide, low doorway. "Tonight's the fateful hour; I either uncover something to set 'em all talking for the next ten years, or get myself a free ticket to the booby-hatch."

With sudden soberness he turned directly to de Grandin and added: "I'm on special leave from the Museum to work out a theory that's been haunting me for the last year or so. It'll be an important contribution to science, if I'm right. Here" — he waved his hand toward the sheeted objects on the trestles — "is the evidence. Shall we begin?"

"U'm." Jules de Grandin gave his little blond mustache a vicious tweak as he regarded our host with his direct, challenging stare. "What is it that you wish to prove by the evidence, *mon brave*?"

"Just this" — Bennett's frank, boyish eyes lost something of their humorous gleam and took on the earnest enthusiastic expression of the fanatic's — "that not all the traces of the Greek civilization were obliterated when the Moslems sacked and burned Alexandria."

"Ah? And you will prove it by—?" De Grandin's delicately arched brows lifted slightly as he glanced significantly at the sheeted things.

"By these," Bennett returned. "This spring, while I was over in Africa, I got in with a scoundrelly old Arab who rejoiced in the name of Abd-el-Berkr, and, in return for several liberal applications of *bakshish*, he agreed to turn over two ancient Greek coffins he had found in an old native cemetery in the desert. The old villain knew enough to distinguish between Christian coffins and Egyptian mummy-cases — there aren't any of the latter left in the neighborhood of Alexandria, anyhow — and he was too good a Moslem to disturb the tombs of his co-religionists, even if they had used substantial coffins for burial, which they hadn't.

"I took the old beggar on, for if he were telling the truth his find was worth a lot more than it cost me, and if he were lying — which he probably was — I'd not be so very much out of pocket. As you know, the Mohammedans took about everything that wasn't nailed down when they captured the city, and their descendants have been keeping the good work up. The few Christian cemeteries which survived the first onslaught of Islam were gradually uprooted and their inmates, ruthlessly ripped from their tombs and despoiled of such trifling ornaments as happened to be buried with them. So, even if we don't find anything of great importance in these two cases, the chances are we may recover a few old coins or some antique jewelry — enough to take back to the Museum and prove my time hasn't been entirely wasted."

He paused, eyes shining, lips parted as he surveyed us each in turn, almost pathetically anxious for a word of encouragement.

"I fear we have come on a chase of the wild goose, my

friend," de Grandin replied a trifle wearily. "Me, I have unearthed coffins of the olden days from the vicinity of Alexandria, of Tunis and of Sidon, but nothing save the most abominable evidence that all flesh is subject to decay have I ever found. For your sake I hope your hopes are justified. Speaking from experience, I should say the Arab gentleman has driven a most advantageous bargain, for himself. Undoubtedly he first despoiled the tombs of such trifles as they contained, then sold you the empty boxes for as much as he could. I fear you are — how do you say it? — holding the sack, *mon enfant*."

"Well, anyway, here goes," responded Bennett with a shamefaced grin as he whipped the threadbare table-cover from the nearest case and took up mallet and cold-chisel. "We may as well begin on this one, eh?"

The coffin was roughly like a bathtub in shape, perhaps six feet long by two and a half high, and composed of some sort of hard, brittle pottery, evidently baked in a brick-kiln, and apparently shaped by hand, for traces of the makers' thumb-marks still showed on its exterior. About its upper portion, an inch or so below the junction of lid and body, ran an ornamental molding of the familiar Greek egg-and-dart design, crudely impressed on the clay with a modeling mold before baking. There was no other attempt at decoration and no trace of inscription on the lid.

"Here we are!" Bennett exclaimed as he finished chipping away the scaling of the casket. "Give me a lift with this lid, Dr. Trowbridge?"

I leaned forward to assist him, tugged at the long, convex curved slab of terra-cotta, and craned my neck to glimpse the coffin's interior.

What I had expected to see I do not quite know. A skeleton, perhaps; possibly a handful of fetid mold; more likely nothing at all. The sight which met my eyes made them fairly start from their sockets, and but for Bennett's warning cry, I should have let my end of the casket cover clatter to the brick floor.

Cushioned on a mattress of royal purple cloth, a diminutive pillow beneath her head and another supporting her feet, lay a woman — a girl, rather — of such surpassing beauty as might have formed the theme of an Oriental romance. Slender she was, yet possessing the softly rounded curves of budding womanhood, not the angular, boyish thinness of our modern girls. Her skin, a deep, sun-kissed olive, showed every violet vein through its veil of lustrous, velvet tan. Across her breast, folded reposefully, lay hands as softly dimpled as a child's, their long, pointed nails overlaid with gold leaf or bright gilt paint, so that they shone like ten tiny almond-shaped mirrors in the rays of the hissing student lamps. Her little bare feet, as they dimpled the purple cushion on which they lay, were pinked about

sole and toe like those of a baby, and so soft, so free from callouses or roughening of any sort, that it seemed they must have trodden nothing harder than velvet carpets in life, even as they rested on pillows of velvet in death. About ankles, wrists and arms hung bangles of beaten rose-gold studded with topaz, garnet and lapis-lazuli, while a diadem of the same precious composition encircled her brow, binding back the curling black locks which lay about her small face in thick clusters. A robe or shroud of thinnest gauze enveloped her from throat to knees, and about her lower limbs from knee to ankle was wrapped a shawl of brilliant orange silk embroidered with wreaths of shells and roses. Black antimony had been rubbed on her lids to give added size and depth to her eyes, and her full, voluptuous lips, half parted, as though in the gentle respiration of peaceful sleep, were stained vivid vermilion with powdered cinnabar. There was nothing of death, nothing of the charnel-house, about the vision. Indeed, it required a conscious effort to convince me her bosom did not rise and fall with the softly-drawn breath of slumber, and the faint, subtle perfume of violets and orange blossoms which wafted to us from her raiment and hair was no delusion, but a veritable scent imprisoned in the baked-clay tomb for fifteen centuries.

“Ah!” I exclaimed in mingled surprise and admiration.

“Good Lord!” Ellsworth Bennett murmured, staring incredulously at the lovely corpse, his breath rasping sharply between his teeth.

“*Nom d’un chat de nom d’un chat!*” Jules de Grandin almost shouted, standing on tiptoe to gaze over my shoulder. “It is the Sleeping Beauty *en personne!*”

With a quick movement he turned to young Bennett, and before the other was aware of his intention had kissed him soundly on each cheek.

“*Embrasse moi, mon vieux!*” he cried. “Me, I am one great fool of a doubly-damned doubting Thomas! In all my head there is not the sense with which the good God had endowed a goose! *Parbleu*, we have here the find of the age; our reputation is assured; we shall have fame comparable to that of Boussard, *Mordieu*, but we are already famous!”

Characteristically, he had assumed charge of the entire proceeding. “We shall take her to the Museum!” he continued, elatedly; “she shall display her so marvelous beauty for all to see our handiwork. She shall — *misère de Dieu*, behold, my friends, she vanishes!”

It was true. Before our eyes, like a shadowgraph fading on the screen, the lovely being in the ancient coffin was dissolving. Where the full-rounded beauty of feminine perfection had lain a moment before, there stretched a withering, shriveling thing, puckering and wrinkling like a body long immersed in chilled water. The eyeballs had already fallen in, leaving cavernous, unfilled sockets in a face from which every semblance of the bloom of youth had

vanished and which showed pinched and desiccated like that of a mummy. The symmetrical, full-fleshed limbs were no more than skin-covered bones as we bent our gaze on the rapidly spreading desolation, and within a space of ten minutes even the skeleton lost its articulation, and nothing but a pile of dust, gray-white and fine as the ashes of cremation, lay upon the purple fabric. While we stared, horrified, even the pillows and mattress which had supported that once-beautiful body, the ethereal, transparent gauze and the heavy, brodered silk of the shawl crumbled like a gaslight filament crushed between thumb and forefinger. Sealed away from contact with the atmosphere for centuries, every vestige of perishable matter, both animal and vegetable, had shuddered into ashes in our oxygen-laden air almost as quickly as if brought in contact with living flame. Only the hard, glittering facets of the gems and the duller gleam of the gold composing her ornaments assured us that the body of a lovely girl had lain before us a short quarter-hour ago.

Ellsworth Bennett was the first to recover his self-possession. “*Sic transit gloria mundi!*” he remarked with a half-hysterical laugh. “Shall we open the other one?”

De Grandin was shaking like a leaf with emotion. Like all his countrymen, he was as susceptible to the appeal of beauty as a sensitive-plant’s fronds are to the touch, and the spectacle he had witnessed had shocked him almost past endurance. Taking his narrow chin between his forefinger and thumb, he gazed abstractedly at the floor a moment, then turned to our host with a shrug and one of his big quick, elfin smiles. “Regard not my foolishness, I beseech you,” he implored. “Me, I would not suffer such another sight for the wealth of the Indies, but — so great is my curiosity — I would not forego the experience of beholding the contents of that other casket for ten times the Indies’ wealth!”

Together he and Bennett broke the clay scaling of the coffin, and within five minutes, the lid was loosened and ready to be lifted from its place.

“Careful, careful, Trowbridge, my friend!” de Grandin besought as the three of us gently raised the slab of brittle clay. “Who knows what we may discover this time? Beneath this cover there may be — *quoi diable!*”

Instead of the open coffin we had expected to find beneath the earthen lid, a second covering, curved and molded to conform to the outer lid’s shape, met our gaze.

Bennett, intent on seeing what lay beneath, was about to strike the opaque white substance with his hammer, but a quick cry from de Grandin halted him. “*Non, non!*” the Frenchman warned. “Can not you see there is an inscription on it? Stand back, my friends” — his sharp, contradictory orders rang out in quick succession like military commands. “Lights, lights for the love of heaven! Bring forward the

lamps that I may decipher these words before I die from curiosity!"

Bennett and I each seized a lamp and we held them above the coffin's inner sealing while the little Frenchman leaned forward, eagerly scanning the inscription.

The curving cover seemed to be made of some softer, less brittle substance than the outer lid — wax, I decided after a hasty inspection — and on it, from top to bottom, in small Greek uncials some sort of message had been etched with a stylus.

De Grandin studied the legend through intently narrowed eyes a few moments, then turned to Bennett with a gesture of impatience. "It is no good," he announced petulantly. "My brain, he has too such burden on him this night; I cannot translate the Greek into English with the readiness I should. Paper, paper and pencil, if you please.

"I shall make a copy of this writing and translate him at my leisure this evening. Tomorrow we shall read him aloud and see what we shall see. Meantime, swear as you hope for heaven, that you will make no move to open this coffin until I shall return. You agree? *Bon!* To work, then; the writing is long and of an unfamiliar hand. It will take much time to transcribe it on my tablets."

2. A Portent from the Past

Golden waffles and rich, steaming coffee were waiting on the table when I descended the stairs next morning, for Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, maintained a soft spot in her Celtic heart for de Grandin and his gallant manners, and delays which would have made her nearly snap my head off brought only an indulgent smile when occasioned by the little Frenchman's tardiness. "Sure, Doctor darlin'," she greeted as I seated myself and looked about for my companion, "Dr. de Grandin wuz doin' th' divil's own bit o' studyin' last night, an' 'twould be unfair ter call 'um from his rist, so ut would."

"Fear not, my excellent one," a cheerful voice hailed from the stairs, "already I am here," and de Grandin stepped quickly into the sunlit dining-room, his face glowing from the recent application of razor-blade and cold water, his little blond mustache waxed to twin needle-points at the corners of his small, sensitive mouth, and every blond hair on his head lying as perfectly in place as though numbered and arranged according to plan.

"*Mordieu*, what a night!" he exclaimed with a sigh as he drained a preliminary draft of well-creamed coffee and passed the cup back for replenishment. "*Cordieu*, even yet I doubt me that I saw what I beheld at Monsieur Bennett's cottage last night, and I am yet in doubt that I translated what I did from the notes I made from the second coffin!"

"Was it so remarkable?" I began, but he cut me short with an upraised hand.

"Remarkable?" he echoed. "*Parbleu*, my friend, it is amazing, nothing less. Come, let us first discuss this so excellent food, then discuss the message from the past.

"Attend me, if you please," he ordered, picking up a sheaf of manuscript from the study table when we had finished breakfast. "Give careful ear to what I read, my friend, for I shall show you that which makes even our vision of yesternight fade to insignificance by comparison. Listen:

Kaku, servant and priest of Sebek, dread God of Nilus, son of Amathel the son of Kepher, servants and priests of Sebek, to who so looks hereon, greeting and admonition:

Not of the creed and belief of Christians am I, neither of the bastard cult of the Greek usurpers. Flesh of the flesh and blood of the mighty blood of the race which ruled Upper and Lower Egypt in the days when Ra held away is Kaku, servant and priest of Sebek. Learned in the laws and magic of the olden priesthood am I, and by the lore and cunning of my forebears have I sealed the virgin Peligia in unwaking sleep beneath this shield of time-defying cerus, even the wax which sets at naught the father of acids.

Greek and Christian though she be, and daughter of the race which trod upon my ancestors, my heart inclined to her and I would have taken her to wife, but she would not. Wherefore, I, being minded that she should take no other man to husband, devised a plan to slay her and bury her with the ancient rites and ceremonies of my people, that her body should not know corruption, but lie in the tomb until the Seven Ages were passed, and I might take her to myself and dwell with her in Aalu. Nathless, when I had taken her beyond the city gates, and all was ready for her death, my heart turned water within me, and I could not strike the blow. Therefore, by my magic, and by the magic of my priesthood, have I caused a deep sleep to fall on her, even a sleep which knows no waking until the Seven Ages be past and she and I shall dwell together in Amenaand.

For the Seven Ages shall she sleep within this coffin, obedient to the mystic spell I have put on her, and if no man openeth the tomb and waken her before the Seven Ages be past, then she shall become as the dust of Egypt, and be mine forever and forever in the land beyond the setting sun. But if a man of later days shall lift the covering from off this coffin and take her hand in his and call on her by name, and in the name of love, then shall my magic be valueless, and she shall waken and cleave unto her deliverer, and be his own in that land and generation yet unborn. This is the sum of all my spells and learning unable to withstand.

Yet, ye who look hereon, be warned in time or ever ye seek to open this tomb of the living-in-death. I, Kaku, priest and servant of Mighty Sebek, have sealed this virgin within this tomb that she may be mine and not another's. My shadow, and the shadow of Sebek which is my god, is upon her. Yea, were it seventy times seventy ages instead of seven, and were the earth to perish under our feet, yet would I pursue her until her heart inclines to me.

I, Kaku, servant and priest of Sebek, have sealed this tomb

with clay and wax and with my curse, and with the curse of Sebek, my god and master, and the curse of Kaku, and of Kaku's god, shall smite with terror him who openeth this tomb. And on him in ages yet to come who looks upon this coffin with presumptuous eyes and makes bold to open it, I do pronounce my curse and the curse of Sebek, and I do set myself against him in wager of battle, that his days be not long in the land; neither his nor hers to whom life returns and youth and love for the duration of the seven stones upon the jewel, according to the obedience of the eternal gods of Egypt whose kingdom shall have no end.

I have said.

De Grandin laid the manuscript on the desk and looked at me, his little blue eyes round and shining with excitement.

"Well?" I asked.

"Well?" he mimicked. "*Parbleu*, I shall say it is well! Many remarkable things have I beheld, my friend, but never such as this. Come, let us hasten, let us fly to the cottage of Monsieur Bennett and see what lies beneath that shield of wax. *Mort d'un Chinois*, though she subsist but for five little minutes, I must gaze, I must feast my eyes upon that paragon of womanhood whose beauty was so great that even the hand of jealousy forbore to strike!"

3. The Jewel of Seven Stones

Differing from her companion in death as dawn light differs from midnight, the virgin Peligia lay in her terracotta coffin when Bennett, de Grandin, and I had lifted off the curving shield of wax. She was some five and twenty years of age, apparently; slightly above middle height, golden-haired and fair-skinned as any Nordic blonde, and as exquisitely proportioned as a Grecian statue of Aphrodite. From tapering white throat to blue-veined, high-arched insteps she was draped in a simple Ionic robe of snowy linen cut in that austere modest and graceful fashion of ancient Attica in which the upper part of the dress falls downward again from neck to waist in a sort of cape, hiding the outline of the breast while leaving the entire arms and the point of the shoulders bare. Except for two tiny studs of hand-beaten gold which held the robe together over the shoulders and the narrow double border of horizontal purple lines at the bottom of the cape, marking her status as a Roman citizen, her gown was without ornament of any sort, and no jewelry adorned her chaste loveliness save the golden threads with which her white-kid sandals were embroidered and a single strand of small gold disks, joined by minute links and having seven tiny pendants of polished carnelians, which encircled her throat and lay lightly against the gentle swell of her white bosom.

To me there seemed something of the cold finality of death about her pose and figure. After the glowing beauty

and barbaric splendor of her unnamed companion, she seemed almost meanly dressed, but de Grandin and Bennett were mute with admiration as they gazed on her.

"*Mordieu*, she is the spirit of Greece, undebased by evil times, brought down to us within a shell of clay," the little Frenchman murmured, bending over her and studying her calm, finely molded features like a connoisseur inspecting a bit of priceless statuary.

Young Bennett was almost speechless with mingled excitement and homage. "What — what did you say her name was!" he asked thickly, swallowing between words, as though the pressure of his breath forced them back into his throat.

"Peligia," de Grandin returned, bending closer to study the texture of her robe.

"Peligia," Bennett, repeated softly. "Peligia —" Scarce aware of what he did, he reached downward and took one of the shapely hands crossed above her quiet breast in his.

Jules de Grandin and I stood fascinated, scarce daring to breathe, for at the whispered name and the pressure of the boy's fingers on hers, the woman in the coffin stirred, the slender, girlish bosom heaved as if with respiration, and the smooth, wax-white lids fluttered upward from a pair of long gray eyes as gentle as the summer and as glowing as the stars. A wave of upward-rising color flooded her throat, her cheeks; the hue of healthy, buoyant youth showed in her face, and her calmly set lips parted in the faintest suggestion of a smile.

"My lord," she murmured softly, meeting young Bennett's gaze with a look of gentle trust. "My lord and my love, at last you have come for me."

And she spoke in English.

"*Morbleu*, Friend Trowbridge, look to me, assist me hence to some asylum for lunatics," de Grandin implored. "I am *caduc* — mad like a hare of March. I see that which is not and hear words unspoken!"

"Then I'm crazy too," I rejoined, leaning forward to assist Bennett in his task of lifting the girl from her coffin-bed. "We're all mad — mad as hatters, but —"

"Yes, *parbleu*," he agreed, fairly dancing before us to toss back the covers of the camp bed and ease the girl upon it, "mad we are, of a surety, but who would own sanity if madness brings visions such as this?"

In another moment the blankets had been drawn about the girl's shoulders, and with Bennett seated at her left, de Grandin at her right, and me standing, at the bedstead's foot, she held her little levee like some spoiled beauty of the Louis' court at her salon.

"How comes it you speak English, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin demanded, putting in blunt words the question which burned in all our brains.

The girl turned her agate eyes on him with a puzzled little

frown. “English?” she repeated. “What is English?”

“*Nom d’un nom!* What is” — de Grandin gasped, looking as if he were in momentary danger of exploding — “‘What is it?’ You do ask. It is the language we use. The barbarous tongue of the Saxon savages!”

“Why” — still her smooth brow wrinkled with non-comprehension — is not the tongue we use that of the Empire? Are we not in Alexandria?”

“In Alexandria!” Again the little Frenchman seemed on the point of bursting; then, with a mighty effort, he restrained himself and demanded, “*Parlez vous Français?*”

She shook her head in silent negation.

“But — but,” he began; then he stopped short with a look of bewilderment, almost of dismay.

“I understand,” she broke in while he waited her explanation. “A moment ago I ceased to hold my lord’s hand, and the words you used seemed suddenly meaningless, though before I understood perfectly. See, while his hand is clasped in mine I talk as you do and understand your speech, but the moment I release his fingers my mind becomes a blank, and all about me seems strange. I know the answer to your question. He” — she cast another melting glance on the boy sitting beside her — “he is my love through all the ages, the man who waked me into life from death. While he touches me or I touch him I speak with his tongue and hear with his ears; the moment our contact is broken I am an alien and a stranger in a strange land and time.”

“*Cordieu*, yes, it is possible,” de Grandin agreed with a short nod. “I have known such cases where patients suffered with amentia, but —

“Scat!” The interruption came with dramatic suddenness as he chanced to glance toward the open door. Upon the threshold, one forefoot raised tentatively, its big, green eyes fixed on the reclining girl with a baleful gleam, stood a huge black cat.

“Out, beast of evil omen!” the little Frenchman cried, striding toward the brute with upraised hand.

“Ss-s-sh!” Venomous as the hiss of a poisonous reptile, the thing’s furious spit greeted his advance, and every sable hair along its spine reared upward belligerently.

“Out, I say!” de Grandin repeated, aiming a devastating kick at the brute.

It did not dodge. Rather, it seemed to writhe from under his foot, evading the blow with perfect ease. With a lithe, bounding spring it launched itself into the air, landed fairly on the covers protecting the girl’s bosom and bent forward savagely, worrying at her throat.

Bennett leaped to his feet, flailing at the thing with ineffectual blows, fearing to strike directly downward lest he hit the girl, and missing the writhing brute each time he swung his impotent fists at it.

Then, suddenly as it had appeared, the creature vanished. Snarling once, defiantly, it turned and leaped to the window-sill. As it paused for a final baleful glare at us, we, saw a tiny red fleck against its lips. Was it blood? I wondered. Had the beast fleshed its fangs in the girl’s throat? De Grandin had seized a piece of crockery from the dresser and raised his hand to hurl it at the beast, but the missile was never thrown. Abruptly, like a light snuffed out in a gust of wind, the thing was gone. None of us saw it leap from the sill; there was no sound of its feet against the heaped-up dry leaves outside. It was gone, nor could we say how or where.

On the bed, Peligia wept despairingly, drawing her breath with deep, laboring sobs and expelling it with low, quavering moans. “My lord,” she cried, seizing Bennett’s hand in hers that she might express herself, “I understand it all. That was no cat, but the *ka* of Kaku, the priest of Sebek. Long years ago he put me in a magic sleep with his unclean sorceries, but before he did so he told me that if ever I awakened and loved another man his double would pursue me from the dungeons of Amenti and ravish me from out my lover’s arms. And in token of his threat, he hung this about my neck” — she pointed hysterically to the chaplet of golden disks and ruddy beads — “and warned me that my life in the days to be would last only so long as the seven pendants of this jewel. One at a time, he vowed, his *ka* would take the stones from me, and as each one fell, so would my stay in the land of my new-found lover be shortened. Behold, my darling, already he has wrested one of the stones from me!”

Baring her breast of the shrouding blankets, she indicated the necklace.

One of the tiny carnelian pendants was gone. The jewel of seven stones retained but six.

4. The Accident

Two months had passed. Peligia’s naive assumption that the man whose voice and touch wakened her from her sesqui-millennial trance was her foreordained mate found ready echo in Ellsworth Bennett’s heart. Three days after her release from the Alexandrian coffin he and she were wed at the sole Greek Catholic church our little city boasted, Bennett’s innate thoughtfulness dictating the choice, since the service and language of the liturgy employed by the modern *papa* were essentially the same as those to which his bride was accustomed in the days of the Patriarch Cyril.

De Grandin and I attended them at the ceremony and helped them procure their license, and the little Frenchman was near to bursting with laughter when the solemn-visaged clerk of court demanded of Bennett whether his bride was of full age. “*Par la barbe de Saint Gris*,” he chuckled

delightedly in my ear, "Friend Trowbridge, I am half minded to tell him her true age!" and he stepped forward as though to carry out his threat.

"Come back, you little fool," I admonished, seizing his elbow and dragging him away; "he'll have us all committed to an asylum!" At which he laughed all the harder, to the very evident scandal of the serious-minded attachés of the clerk's office.

The earthenware coffin in which the dead girl had lain, together with her splendidly barbaric ornaments, had been taken to the Museum as trophies of Bennett's researches, and, backed by de Grandin's statement, his story of the find was duly accredited. Of the manner of Peligia's coming nothing had been said, and since Ellsworth was an orphan without near relatives, there was little curiosity shown in his charming wife's antecedents. Their brief honeymoon had been a dream of happiness, and their life together in the cheerful little suburban villa bade fair to continue their joy uninterrupted. Since the first sinister manifestation on the afternoon of her awakening, Peligia and her husband had received no further visitations, and I, for one, had become convinced that the black cat was really a feline rogue which happened into the cottage by uncanny coincidence, rather than a visitant from beyond the grave.

De Grandin and I faced each other across my study table. In the dining-room the candlelight gleamed on china and silver and cut glass, and from the kitchen emanated odors of gumbo soup, roast chicken and fresh-baked apple pies. Also imprecations as Nora McGinnis strode to and fro across her domain, breathing uncomplimentary remarks about "folks who kape a body's dinner waitin' an' sp'ilin' on th' sthove half an hour afther ut's due ter be served."

The Frenchman consulted the silver dial of the tiny watch strapped to the under side of his wrist for the tenth time in as many minutes. "They are late, Trowbridge, my friend," he announced unnecessarily. "I do not like it. It is not well."

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "Ellsworth's probably had a blowout or something of the sort, and is holding us up while he puts on a new tire."

"Perhaps possibly," de Grandin admitted, "but I have the *malaise*, notwithstanding. Go to the telephone, I beseech, and assure yourself they are on the way."

"Stuff!" I retorted, but reached for the receiver as I spoke, for it was plain my friend's apprehension was mounting like a thermometer's mercury on an August afternoon.

"Give me —" I began, preparing to name Bennett's number, but the voice of central cut me off.

"Here's your party," she announced, speaking to someone on the other end of the line.

"Is this Dr. Trowbridge?" the cool, impersonal voice of one used to discussing tragedies over the telephone demanded.

"Yes," I admitted, "but I was just attempting to get another party on the wire —"

"I think this is important," the other interrupted. "Do you know a Mr. Ellsworth Bennett?"

"Yes! What about him?"

"This is the Casualty Hospital. Mr. and Mrs. Bennett and their taxi-driver were brought here twenty minutes ago. He regained consciousness for only a moment, and begged us to call you, then fainted again, and —"

"I'll be right over!" I shouted, clashing the receiver back into its hook and springing from my chair.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux* — it is the bad news?" de Grandin asked, leaping to his feet and regarding me with a wide-eyed stare.

"They've just had an accident — motor collision — at the Casualty Hospital now — unconscious," I jerked out as I ran through the dining-room, notified Nora of the cause of delay, and rushed into the hall for my hat and topcoat.

De Grandin was ahead of me, already seated in the car when I ran down the front steps. "Stand on it; hasten; fly!" he urged as I shot the self-starter and turned toward the hospital at furious speed. "*Sang du diable*, I knew it; in each bone of my body I felt it coming! Oh, hurry, hurry, my friend, or we may be too late!"

"Too late? For what?" I asked crossly. "The nurse didn't say they were seriously hurt."

"Haste, more haste!" was his only reply as he leaned forward like a jockey bending across the neck of his mount to urge it to greater speed.

Rounding corners on two wheels, even cutting across sidewalks in our effort to clip a few feet from our course, our siren shrilling continuously, we dashed through the winter night, finally drew up beneath the hospital's portecochère, our motor panting like a winded polo pony after a furious chukker.

"Where are they — *plumes d'un canard!* — where are Monsieur and Madame Bennett, if you please?" cried de Grandin, fairly bouncing through the hospital door.

"Mrs. Bennett's in the operating-room, now," the night supervisor replied, not at all impressed with his urgency. "She was rather badly —"

"And that operating-room, it is where?" he demanded impatiently. "Be quick, if you please. It is of the importance, and I am Dr. de Grandin. "

"The operating-room's on the fourth floor, but no one is permitted there while the surgeons are —"

"*Ah bah!*" he interrupted, for once forgetting his customary courtesy, and starting down the corridor at a run. "Come with me, Friend Trowbridge!" He flung back over his shoulder, pressing his finger to the elevator bell button and continuing the pressure uninterrupted. "We may not be too late, though I greatly fear —"

“Say, whatsa big idea!” demanded the elevator conductor, slamming-open his door and glowering at the little Frenchman.

“The idea, my friend, is that I shall give you one five-dollar bill in case you take us to the fourth floor immediately,” returned de Grandin, extracting a crisp green Treasury note from his wallet.

The car shot upward like a captive balloon suddenly released from its cable and came to a stop at the top floor with a suddenness which set the circuit breakers in the basement to clattering like a battery of field guns. “First door to your right at the end o’ the corridor,” directed the conductor with a wave of his left hand while with his right he stowed de Grandin’s gratuity in his trousers pocket.

We ran at breakneck speed down the wide, solemn hall, paused not a moment at the ominous green-painted door with its gold-lettered sign of “Silence” and “No Admission,” but rushed into the brilliantly lighted room where two nurses and a young and plainly worried surgeon stood above the sheeted form of Peligia Bennett.

“Ah — *hèlas* — it is as I thought!” de Grandin almost shrieked as he bounded forward. Even as we entered the room one of the nurses leaned over and grasped some shining object from the unconscious patient’s throat, detaching it with a quick jerk. It was the necklace from which a pendant had been lost the day we raised Peligia from the coffin.

“Quick, replace it — put it back! *Barbe de Saint Pierre* — PUT IT BACK!” the Frenchman cried, leaping across the white-tiled floor and snatching at the jewel dangling from the nurse’s fingers.

The girl turned on him with an exclamation of surprise, clutched frantically at the golden strand he reached for, and let it fall to the terrazzo floor.

There was a miniature explosion, like that of an electric light bulb bursting, only softer, and two of the carnelian pendants winked out like suddenly extinguished lights. Contact with the floor’s hard tiles had cracked them, and each seemed in need of only so slight a concussion to dissolve into a little pile of garnet dust which quickly turned to vapor and disappeared, leaving no trace.

Fairly shoving the nurse from his path, de Grandin seized the mutilated necklace and laid it against the unconscious girl’s throat.

“Sir, this is an outrage! What do you mean by forcing yourself in here?” demanded the astonished young surgeon. “This patient is in a desperate condition, and—”

“Desperate? *You tell me that?*” de Grandin rasped. “*Parbleu*, you know not how desperate her plight is, *Monsieur!*” As he spoke he flung aside his dinner coat and rolled back his cuffs.

“I am Dr. Jules de Grandin, of Paris,” he continued, reaching methodically for an operating-smock. “I hold degrees from Vienna and the Sorbonne, as my friend, Dr. Trowbridge, whom you doubtless know, can certify. With your permission — or without it — I shall assume charge here.” He turned imperiously to the nurses, motioning them to bring a pair of sterile rubber gloves.

“I’m afraid you’re too late,” the other responded coldly. “If you’ll trouble to look, you’ll see —”

“*Grand ciel*, I do!” the Frenchman gasped, staring with horrified eyes at the pallid form on the table.

Peligia Bennett’s face had gone a sickly, deathlike gray, her eyeballs seemed fallen in their sockets and her nostrils had the chilled, pinched look of one in extremity. From between her parted lips sounded the harsh irregularity of Cheyne-Stokes breathing.

“*Mordieu*, she is passing!” he exclaimed; then: “Ah? So?” Bending quickly, he retrieved the necklace from the floor, where it had fallen during his altercation with the surgeon, and placed it about Peligia’s throat. This done, he bent two of the tiny gold links together and fastened the strand where it had broken when the nurse snatched it from her bosom. As the jewel shone once more against the fainting girl’s white skin I noticed, with a start, that another of the garnet pendants was missing.

The replacement of the necklace acted like a powerful stimulant on the patient. Scarcely had gold and stone touched her flesh again than her respiration became more normal and the bluish, deathlike pallor gave way to the slight flush of strengthening circulation.

“Now, *Mesdemoiselles*, if you please, we shall begin,” de Grandin announced, signing to the nurses, and seizing scalpel and forceps he set to work with a speed and deftness which brought a gasp of admiring amazement from the offended young doctor and the attendants alike.

“Not again; not again for fifty thousand francs would I perform such an operation,” he murmured as he turned his gloves inside out and shrugged out of his gown. To the nurse he ordered: “Attend her constantly, *Mademoiselle*; on your life, see that the necklace is kept constantly in place. Already you have observed the effect of its loss on her; it is not necessary to say more, *hein?*”

“Yes, Sir,” responded the nurse, gazing at him with mingled wonder and respect. Surgical nurses soon recognize a master craftsman, and the exhibition he had given that night would remain history forever in the operating-room of Casualty Hospital.

“I feared something like this,” he confided as we walked slowly down the corridor. “All evening I have been ill at ease; the moment I heard of the accident I made sure the hospital authorities in their ignorance would remove the jewel from *Madame’s* throat — *grâce à Dieu* we were in

time to replace it before the worst occurred. As it is —” He broke off with a shrug of his narrow shoulders. “Come,” he added, “let us interview Monsieur Bennett. I doubt not he has something of interest to tell.”

5. THE SHADOW OF SEBEK

“Mr. Bennett is still under the anesthetic,” the nurse informed us when we inquired at my friend’s room. “He had a Colles’ fracture of the lower right epiphysis, and Dr. Grosnal gave him a whiff of ether while he was repositioning the fragments.”

“U’m,” commented de Grandin. “The treatment was correct, *Mademoiselle*. The chauffeur who drove them, where is he? I am told he, also, was hurt.”

“Yes, you’ll find him in Ward D,” the girl replied. “He wasn’t hurt much, but he was taking on quite a bit when I came through.”

“U’m” de Grandin remarked again, and turned toward the room where the Bennetts’ taxi-driver lay.

“*Mon vieux*,” the Frenchman bent above the patient’s cot and laid a friendly hand on his shoulder, “we are come to interview you. You will please tell us what occurred?”

“If you’re from th’ insurance comp’ny,” the chauffeur answered, “I want you to git me, and git me right; I wasn’t drunk, no matter what these here folks tell you. I’m off’n that stuff, an’ have been ever since th’ kid wuz born.”

“But of course,” de Grandin agreed with a nod. “That much is understood, and you will please describe the accident.”

“Well you can take it or leave it,” the other replied truculently. “I wuz drivin’ south through Minot Avenoo, makin’ pretty good time, ’cause th’ young gentleman told me he had a dinner date, an’ just as I was turnin’ into Tecumseh Street I seen what I thought wuz a piece o’ timber or sumpin layin’ across th’ road, an’ turned out to avoid it. Blow me if th’ thing didn’t move right across th’ pa’ment ahead o’ me, keepin’ in me path all th’ time. You can believe me or not — I’m tellin’ you the gospel truth, though — it wuz a alligator. I know a alligator when I see one, too, for I drove a taxi down to Miami durin’ th’ boom, an’ I seen plenty o’ them animated satchels down there in th’ ’gator farms. Yes, sir, it was a ’gator an’ nothin’ else, an’ th’ biggest ’gator I ever seen, too. Must a’ been sixteen or eighteen foot long, if it wuz a inch, an’ a lot sprier on its feet than any ’gator I ever seen before, for I wuz goin’ at a right fair clip, as I told you, an’ Minot Avenoo ain’ more’n fifty foot wide from curb to curb, but fast as I wuz goin’, I couldn’t turn out fast enough to keep that cussed thing fr’m crawlin’ right smack in front o’ me. I ain’t partic’lar ’bout runnin’ over a lizard, d’ye see, an’ if this here thing hadn’t

been th’ granddaddy of all th’ ’gators that ever got turned into suitcases an’ pocketbooks, I’d a’ run ’im down an’ gone on me way; but runnin’ over a thing like that wuz as much as me axles wuz worth — he wuzn’t a inch less’n three foot high fr’m belly to back, not countin’ th’ extra height o’ his legs — an’ me cab ain’t paid for yet, so I turns out like there wuz a ten-foot hole in th’ pa’ment ahead o’ me, an’ dam’ if that thing didn’t keep right ahead o’ me till I lost control o’ me wheel, an’ th’ nex’ thing I knowed — zowie! I wuz parked up agin a tree wid me radiator leakin’ like a cake o’ ice lef’ out in th’ sun on Fourt’ o’ July, an’ me wid me head half-way t’rough th’ windshield, an’ me two fares knocked right outa th’ cab where th’ door’d give way in th’ smash-up. That’s th’ Gawd’s truth, an’ you can take it or leave it.”

“*Cordieu*, my excellent one,” de Grandin assured him, “we do take it, nor do we require salt upon it, either. This alligator, now, this so abominable saurian who did cause you to collide with the roadside tree, was he in the locality when the ambulance arrived.”

“Sa-ay, you tryin’ to kid me?” demanded the injured man.

“By no means. We believe all you have told us. Can you not be equally frank with us and reply to our queries?”

“Well,” returned the patient, mollified by de Grandin’s evident credence, “that’s th’ funny part o’ th’ joke, sir. When th’ ding-dong came for me an’ me fares, I told th’ sawbones about th’ ’gator, an’ he ups an’ says to th’ murderer ’at runs, th’ business end o’ th’ rattler, ‘This here guy’s been drinkin’ more hootch ’an Ol’ Man Volstead ever prohibited.’ That’s what he says, sir, an’ me as sober as a court-house full o’ judges, too!”

“Infamous!” de Grandin pronounced, “But the *sine qua non* of your accident, this monster alligator, where was he?”

“Say,” the driver confided, “you know what? He wuzn’t no place. If I hadn’t seen ’im wid me own eyes I’d a’ believed th’ sawbones when he said I had th’ heebie-jeebies; but I tell you I hadn’t had nuttin’ to drink, an’ I ain’t so nutty as to mistake a shadder for a real, live ’gator, ’specially a baby th’ size o’ that one. It’d be different if I wuz a bozo ’at hadn’t been around much; but I been to Florida, an’ I knows a ’gator when I sees one — git me?”

“*Mais oui*, my friend,” the Frenchman nodded, “your story has the veritable ring of verisimilitude.”

“It *has*, has it? It’s th’ truth, an’ nuttin’ else but!” the offended chauffeur exclaimed as de Grandin rose and with another friendly nod tip-toed from the room.

“That explains it,” I jubilated as we walked slowly down the corridor. The uncanniness of the night’s happenings had gotten on my nerves, and I had been on the point of believing my friend’s mishap might be traceable to the ancient curse, but here was a perfectly natural explanation of the whole affair. “If that man wasn’t drunk or half insane with cocaine I’m much mistaken. Of course, he imagined he

saw an alligator crossing his path! I'm only surprised that he didn't insist it was pink or baby blue instead of the conventional shade. These taxi-drivers—"

"This particular one told the truth," de Grandin cut in, speaking softly, as though more to himself than to me. "When he assured me he was no longer drinking there was the indubitable ring of truth in his words. Moreover —"

"Yes? Moreover?" I prompted, as he strode a dozen or so paces in thoughtful silence.

"*Tiens*, it is most strange, but not impossible," he replied. "This Sebek, I know him."

"You know him? Sebek? What in the world—" I stammered incredulously.

"Perfectly, my friend. Sebek, the god whom the priest Kaku worshiped, was the typification of the sun's harmful powers. To him the waters of the Nile, when at their lowest ebb, were parceled off as his particular domain. He was represented as a crocodile-headed deity, even as Anubis possessed the head of a jackal, and in all his phases he was evil — very evil, indeed. Granted that the priest's powers were effective — and did he not so hypnotize Madame Bennett that she slept like one dead for more than a thousand years? — what would be more natural than that this god should appear in his traditional form to aid his votary? Bethink you of the wording of the curse, my friend: *'My shadow, and the shadow of Sebek which is my god, is upon her.'*"

"Nonsense!" I scoffed.

"Perhaps," he conceded, as though the point were scarcely worth debating. "You may be right, but then, again—"

"Right? Of course I'm right! The old priest might have been able to suspend Peligia's vital processes by some sort of super-hypnosis unknown to us, but how could he call down on her the curse of a god that never existed? You'll scarcely assert that the heathen gods of ancient Egypt had actual existence, I suppose?"

"There is a difference between an individual entity and an abstract force, whether it be for good or evil," he began, but ceased abruptly at the sudden sound which tore the hospital's sepulchral quiet into shreds.

It was not the wail of tortured flesh giving tongue to insupportable pain as the blessed unconsciousness of the anesthetic waned. No surgeon whose apprenticeship was served at the rear end of an ambulance can fail to recognize the cry of returning consciousness from an etherized patient. This was the horrified, piercing scream of a woman in deadly terror long-drawn, breathless, the reflex outcry of normal nerves suddenly strained past their limit of endurance. And it came from the room where Peligia Bennett lay, still immersed in anesthesia.

"*Mon Dieu*," de Grandin gasped, "the *garde-malade*!"

Grasping my arm, he rushed pell-mell down the hall.

The buxom young woman to whose care Peligia had been entrusted when de Grandin finished mending her broken body crouched at the far corner of the room, and her normally florid face was chalky-white under the shaded bedside lamp. "It came out of the wall!" she gasped as we swung the door back. "Out of the wall, I tell you; and there was no body to it!"

"Eh, what do you say?" de Grandin snapped. "What came out of the wall, *Mademoiselle*? What had no body, if you please?"

"The hand — the hand that snatched at her throat!" The nurse groveled closer in the angle of the wall, as though to shield herself from attack from side and rear.

"The hand? Her throat? *Grand Dieu*!" de Grandin leaped across the little room like a cat pouncing on a luckless sparrow and turned back the chaste white sheet enshrouding Peligia's supine body.

"Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend," he commanded, and his voice was hoarse as a croaking frog's, "behold!"

I joined him at the bedside and cast my glance where his shaking forefinger pointed.

A fifth pendant had disappeared from the necklace round Peligia's throat. Of the seven stones there remained but two.

6. CATASTROPHE

A flurry of snowflakes, wind-driven by the January tempest, assaulted de Grandin and me as we alighted from the late New York train. "*Cordieu*," the Frenchman laughed as he snuggled into the farther corner of the station taxicab, "to attend the play in the metropolis is good, Friend Trowbridge, but we pay a heavy price in chilled feet and frosted noses when we return in such a storm as this!"

"Yes, getting chilblains is one of the favorite winter sports among us suburbanites," I replied, lighting a cigar and puffing mingled smoke and vaporized breath from my nostrils.

"U'm," he remarked thoughtfully, "your mention of winter sports reminds me that our friends the Bennetts are at Lake Placid. I wonder much how it is with them?"

"They're not there now," I answered. "Ellsworth wrote me that both he and Peligia are completely recovered and he expects to reopen his home this week. We'll have to look in on them later. I wonder if they've had any more visitations from — what was his name? — the old Egyptian priest, you know." I could not forbear the sly dig at my friend, for his stubborn insistence that the series of mishaps befalling Ellsworth Bennett and his wife were due to the malign influence of a man dead and buried more than a thousand years struck me as droll.

“*Prie Dieu* they have not,” he responded seriously. “As you have been at great pains to assure me many times, my friend, all has seemed well with them since the night of their motor accident, but” — he paused a moment — “as yet I am unconvinced we have heard the last of that so wicked Kaku and his abominable god.”

“We certainly have not, if you insist on raving about them,” I returned rather testily as the taxi swung into our block. “If I were you, I’d —”

Clang! Clang! clang-clang-a-lang! Rushing like the wind, its siren shrieking like the tempest, and its bells sounding clamorous warning, a fire-engine swept past us, its uproar cutting short my utterance.

“*Mordieu*, what a night for a fire!” the Frenchman murmured as we ascended my front steps.

The office telephone was shrilling wildly as I fitted my latchkey to the door.

“Hello — hello, Dr. Trowbridge?” an agonized voice hailed as I lifted the receiver.

“Yes.”

“Bennett, Ellsworth Bennett, talking. Our house is on fire, and Peligia is — I’m bringing her right over to your place” The sharp click of his receiver smashed into its hook and closed his announcement like an exclamation point.

“The Bennetts are still pursued by Kaku, it seems,” I remarked sarcastically, turning to de Grandin. “That was Ellsworth on the ’phone. It was his house the engines were going to. He wasn’t very coherent, but I gathered that Peligia is injured, and he’s bringing her here.”

“Eh, do you say so?” the little Frenchman replied, his small eyes widening with sudden concern. “Perhaps, my friend, you will now believe —” He lapsed into silence, striding nervously up and down the office, lighting one cigarette from the glowing stump of another, answering my attempts at conversation with short, monosyllabic grunts.

Ten minutes later when I answered the insistent clatter of the front doorbell, Ellsworth Bennett stood in the vestibule, a long bundle, swathed in rugs and blankets, in his arms. A wave of sudden pity swept over me as I noted his appearance.

The light-hearted, easy-going boy who had taken his strange bride’s hand in his before the altar of the Greek Orthodox church a short four months ago was gone, and in his place stood a man prematurely aged. Lines, deep-etched by care and trouble, showed about his mouth and at the corners of his eyes, and his long, loosely articulated frame bent beneath something more than the weight of the object he clasped to his breast.

“Ellsworth, boy, whatever is the matter?” I exclaimed sympathetically as I seized his shoulder and fairly dragged him across the threshold.

“God knows,” he answered wearily, laying his inert

burden on the surgery table and turning a miserable countenance to us. “I brought her here because” — he seemed to struggle with himself a moment, then continued — “I brought her here because I didn’t know where else to take her. I thought she’d be safer here — with you, sir,” he turned directly to de Grandin with an imploring look.

“*Ohé la pauvre* —” the Frenchman leaned forward and put back the coverings from Peligia’s pale face tenderly. “Tell me, *mon enfant*,” he glanced up at the distracted husband, “what was it this time?”

“God knows,” the wretched youngster repeated. “We got back from the lake on Tuesday, and Peligia seemed so well and so” — a sob choked him, but he went bravely on — “and so happy, and we thought we’d managed to escape from the nemesis which pursues us.

“We went to bed early this evening, and I don’t know how long we’d slept when we awakened together, smelling smoke in the room.

“Flames were darting and creeping under the door like so many serpents when we realized what was happening, and I grabbed the bedside ’phone to call the fire department, but the wires must have burned already, for I couldn’t get any response from central.

“When I opened the door the whole hallway was a mass of flames, and there was no possibility of anything human going through; so I made a rope by tearing the bed sheets in strips and prepared to escape by the window. After I’d knotted the sheets together I tossed the other bedclothes out to act as a cushion when we landed, and slid down, then stood waiting to catch Peligia in my arms. I’d managed to slip on some clothes, but her things had been lying on a chair near the door, and had caught fire before she could put ’em on, so there was nothing for her to do but brave the storm in her nightclothes.

“I was standing, waiting to catch her in my arms, and she had already begun to slide down the knotted sheets when —” He paused, and a shudder ran through him, as though the chill of his midnight escape still clung to him, despite my surgery’s warmth.

“Yes, what then?” de Grandin prompted.

“I saw him! I tell you, *I saw him!*” the boy blazed out, as though we had already denied his word.

“*Dieu de tous les poissons!*” de Grandin almost screamed. “Proceed. What, or whom, did you see?”

“I don’t know who it was, but I suspect,” the other responded. “Just as Peligia was slipping down the sheets, *a man looked out of the window, above her and tried to choke her!*

“Mind you, not forty seconds before, we’d been driven from that bedroom by the fire which was raging in the hall, and there was no chance for anything living to pass through that flaming hell, and no one in the room when we quit it,

but there was a man at our window as my wife began her descent. He leaned over the sill and snatched at her throat, as if trying to strangle her. I heard her scream above the hiss of the fire as he missed his clutch at her throat and drew back a moment; then he whipped out a knife and slashed the sheet in two, six inches below the level of the sill.

"I couldn't have been mistaken, gentlemen," he turned a challenging glance from one of us to the other. "I tell you, *I saw him*; saw him as plainly as I see you now. The fire was at his back and he stood out like a silhouette against its light.

"God!" he shuddered. "I'll never forget the look of hellish hate and triumph on his face as he hacked that sheet in two and my poor darling came crashing down — he was a tall, cadaverous fellow, dressed in a sort of smock of gray-green linen, and his head was shaven — not bald, but shaven — and so was his entire face, except for a narrow, six-inch beard on his chin. That was waxed to a point and turned up like a fish-hook."

"A-a-ah?" de Grandin remarked on a rising note. His level, unwinking gaze caught and held Bennett's, and horrified understanding and agreement showed in the eyes of each.

De Grandin shook his narrow shoulders in a quick, impatient shrug. "We must not let him terrify us, or all is lost," he declared. "Meantime, let us look to *Madame*, your wife." He cast back the covers from Peligia and ran deft, skillful fingers over her form from neck to feet.

"Here it is," he announced, pausing in his examination to finger her rounded left ankle. "A dislocation; no more, let us give thanks. It will be painful, but not serious, I think.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge, the bandages, if you please," he turned peremptorily to me, raising the girl's small, uncovered foot in his hand and gently kneading the displaced bones back into position. "Ah, that is better," he announced, as he completed fastening the gauze about the injured member.

"Now, Bennett, my friend. if you will bear *Madame* your lady upstairs and put her in my bed, I think we can promise — *nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu* — look!" he broke off, pointing a trembling finger at the open throat of Peligia's flimsy muslin night-dress.

Against the white bosom where the ancient necklace reposed, a single ruddy pendant glowed. Six of the seven stones were missing.

7. WAGER OF BATTLE

Jules de Grandin stared at Ellsworth Bennett, and Ellsworth Bennett stared at Jules de Grandin, and in the eyes of each was gathering terror, hopelessness, defeat.

"What to do — *Mon Dieu!* — what to do?" muttered the

little Frenchman, and his voice was almost a wail.

"My friend," he stared fixedly at Ellsworth, "did you do as I suggested?"

"Go to the priest?" the other replied. "Yes. He gave us some sort of little charm — I suppose you'd call it an *ikon*. See, here it is." Reaching inside his wife's gown he drew out a fine silken cord to the end of which was attached a tiny scapular of painted silk showing the device of a mailed champion encountering a dragon. "It's supposed to be a relic of St. George," he explained, "and Father Demitri assured us no harm could come to her while she wore it. God in heaven — if there is one!" he burst into a peal of chattering laughter. "He told us it would protect her! See how it worked!" With another laugh he pointed to the necklace and at its single remaining stone which seemed to wink sardonically at us as it rose and fell with the regular movement of Peligia's breast.

"*Non, non,*" the Frenchman muttered, "new charms are valueless against ancient evils. We must combat that which is old and bad by that which is equally old, but good. But how — *nom d'un canard!* — how?"

"Take her upstairs, my friend," he motioned almost frantically to Bennett. "Take her upstairs and lay her in my bed. Watch beside her, and, if you have not forgotten how, pray; pray as you did when a lad beside your mother's knee. Meanwhile I — *Grand Dieu*, I shall do what I can!"

As Bennett bore his swooning bride up the stairs the little Frenchman seated himself beside the surgery desk, put both elbows down upon its polished surface and cupped his pointed chin in his palms, staring straight before him with a fixed, unseeing stare of utter abstraction.

At last: "*Parbleu*, it is desperate but so are we. We shall try it!" he announced. For a moment his gaze wandered wildly about the room, passing rapidly over the floor, walls and ceiling. At last it came to rest on a sepia print of Rembrandt's *Study in Anatomy*.

"I know not whether it will serve," he muttered, rising quickly and detaching the picture from its hook, "but, *parbleu*, it must!"

"Go, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered over his shoulder while he worked feverishly at the screw-eyes to which the picture's wire was attached. "Do you go upstairs and see how it is with our friends. Me, I shall follow anon."

"Everything all right?" I asked as cheerfully as I could as I entered the room where Peligia lay as silent as though in a trance.

"I — don't know," Bennett faltered. "I put her to bed, as you ordered, and before I could even begin to pray I fell asleep. I just woke up a moment ago. I don't think she's — oh; *o-o-oh!*" The exclamation was wrung from him as a scream might come from a culprit undergoing the torture. His wife's head, pillowed against the bed linen, was white

as the snowy cloth itself, and already there was a look of impending death upon her features. Too often I had seen that look on a patient's face as the clock hands neared the hour of two. Unless I was much mistaken, Peligia Bennett would never see the morning's sun.

"Ha, it seems I come none too soon," de Grandin's voice came in a strident whisper from the door behind us.

"My friends," he announced, facing each of us in turn, his little eyes dilated with excitement, "this night I enter the lists against a foe whose strength I know not, and I do greatly fear my own weapons are but feeble things. Trowbridge, dear old friend" — his slender, strong hand clasped mine in a quick pressure — "should it so happen that I return no more, see that they write upon my tomb: 'He died serving his friends.'"

"But, my dear chap, surely you're not going to leave us now," I began, only to have my protest drowned by his shout:

"Priest Kaku, server of false gods, persecutor of women, I charge thee, come forth; manifest thyself, if thou darest. I, Jules de Grandin, challenge thee!"

I shook my head, and rubbed my eyes in amazement. Was it the swirl of snowflakes, driven through the partly opened window by the howling January blast, or the fluttering of the scrim curtain, that patch of white at the farther end of the room? Again I looked, and amazement gave way to something akin to incredulity, and that, in turn, to horror. In the empty air beside the window-place there was taking form, like a motion-picture projected on a darkened screen, *the shadowy form of a man*. Tall, cadaverous, as though long dead and buried, he was clothed in a straight-hanging one-piece garment of grayish-green linen, with shaven head and face, protruding, curling beard, and eyes the like of which I had never seen in human face, eyes which glowed and smoldered with a fiery glint like the red reflection of the glory-hole of lowest hell.

For an instant he seemed to waver, half-way between floor and ceiling, regarding the little Frenchman with a look of incomparable fury, then his burning, glowing orbs fixed themselves intently on the sleeping woman on the bed.

Peligia gave a short, stifled gasp, her lids fluttered open, but her eyes stared straight before her sightlessly. Her slender, blue-veined hands rose slowly from the counterpane, stretched out, toward the hovering phantom in the corner of the room, and slowly, laboriously, like a woman in a hypnotic trance, she rose, put forth one foot from the bed, and made as if to walk to the beckoning, compelling eyes burning in the livid face of the — there was no doubt about it — *priest of Sebek* who stood, now fully materialized, beside the window of my bedroom.

"Back!" de Grandin screamed, thrusting out one hand and forcing her once more into the bed.

He wheeled about, facing the green-robed priest of Egypt with a smile more fierce than any frown. "*Monsieur* from hell," he challenged, "long years ago you did make wager of battle against him who should lift thy spell, and the spell of Sebek, thy unclean god, from off this woman. He who submits to ordeal by battle may fight for himself or engage a champion. Behold in me the champion of this man and this woman. Say, wilt thou battle against me for their lives and happiness, or art thou the filthy coward which I do believe thee?"

It was monstrous, it was impossible; it could not be; my reason told me that flesh and blood could not enter the lists against intangible phantoms and hope to win; yet there, in the quiet of my bedroom, Jules de Grandin flung aside jacket and waistcoat, bent his supple body nearly double, and charged headlong into the twining embrace of a thing which had materialized out of the air.

As he leaped across the room the Frenchman snatched something from his pocket and whirled it about his head like a whiplash. With a gasp of amazement I recognized it for a four foot strand of soft-iron picture wire — the wire he had taken from the print in my surgery.

The phantom arms swept forward to engulf my little friend, the phantom face lit up with a smile as diabolical as that of Satan at the arrival of a newly damned soul, yet it was but a moment ere I realized the battle was not hopelessly to the ghost-thing and against his mortal opponent.

De Grandin seemed to make no attempt to grapple with the priest of Sebek or to snare him in the loop of wire. Rather his sole attention seemed directed to avoiding the long-bladed copper knife with which the priest was armed.

Again and again the wraith stabbed savagely at de Grandin's face, throat or chest. Each time the Frenchman avoided the lunging knife and brought his loop of woven iron down upon the ghost-thing's arms, shoulders or shaven pate, and I noticed with elation that the specter writhed at each contact with the iron as though it had been white-hot.

How long the struggle lasted I do not know. De Grandin was panting like a spent runner, and great streams of perspiration ran down his pale face. The other made no sound of breathing, nor did his sandaled feet scuff against the carpet as he struggled with the Frenchman. Bennett and I stood as silent as two graven images, and only the short, labored breathing of the little Frenchman broke the stillness of the room as the combat waxed and waned.

At last it seemed the phantom foeman was growing lighter, thinner, less solid. Where formerly he had seemed as much a thing of flesh and bone as his antagonist, I could now distinctly descry the outlines of pieces of furniture when he stood between them and me. He was once more assuming his ghostly transparency.

Time and again he sought to strike through de Grandin's guard. Time and again the Frenchman flailed him with the iron scourge, avoiding his knife by the barest, fraction of an inch.

At length: "*In nomine Domini!*" de Grandin shrieked, leaping forward and showering a perfect hailstorm of whiplashes on his opponent.

The green-clad priest of Sebek seemed to wilt like a wisp of grass thrown into the fire, to trail upward like a puff of smoke, to vanish and dissolve in the encircling air.

"*Triomphe*, it is finished!" sobbed de Grandin, stumbling across the room and half falling across the bed where Peligia Bennett lay. "It is finished, and — *mon Dieu* — I am broken!" Burying his face in the coverlet, he fell to sobbing like a child tired past the point of endurance.

"It was magnificent," I told him as we sat in my study, a box of cigars and one of my few remaining bottles of cognac between us. "You fought that ghost bare-handed, and conquered him, but I don't understand any of it. Do you feel up to explaining?"

He stretched luxuriously, lighted a fresh cigar and flashed one of his quick, impish smiles at me through the smoke wreaths. "Have you studied much of ancient Egypt?" he asked, irrelevantly.

"Mighty little," I confessed.

"Then you are, perhaps, not aware of the absence of iron in their ruins? You do not know their mummy-cases are put together with glue and wooden dowels, and such instruments of metal as are found in their temples are of copper or bronze, never of iron or steel?"

"I've heard something like that," I replied, "but I don't quite get the significance of it. It's a fact that they didn't understand the art of making steel, isn't it, and used tempered copper, instead?"

"I doubt it," he answered. "The arts of old Egypt were highly developed, and they most assuredly had means of acquiring iron, or even steel, had they so desired. No, my friend, the absence of iron is due to a cause other than ignorance. Iron, you must know, is the most earthly of all metals. Spirits, even of the good, find it repugnant, and as for the evil ones, they abhor it. Do you begin to see?"

"No, I can't say I do. You mean —"

"I mean that, more than any other country, Egypt was absorbed with the spiritual side of life. Men's days there were passed in communing with the souls of the departed or spirits of another sort, elemental spirits, which had never worn the clothing of the flesh.

"The mummification of their dead was not due to any horror of putrefaction, but to their belief that a physical resurrection would take place at the end of seven ages — roughly, seven thousand years. During that time, according

to their religion, the body would lie in its tomb, and at the end of the period the soul, or *ka*, would return and reanimate it. Meantime, the *ka* kept watch beside the mummy. Do you now see why no iron entered into their coffins?"

"Because the spirit, watching beside the body, would find the iron's proximity uncomfortable?"

"Precisely, my friend, you have said it. There have been authenticated instances of ghosts being barred from haunted houses by no greater barrier than an iron wire stretched across the door. In Ireland the little people are oftentimes kept from a cottage by nothing more than a pair of steel shears opened with their points toward the entrance. So it was that I determined to put it to a test and attack that shade of Kaku with naught but a scourge of iron. *Eh bien*, it was a desperate chance, but it was successful."

The flame of his match flared flickeringly as he set fire to a fresh cigar and continued: "Now, as to that jewel of seven stones with which Madame Bennett's fate is interwoven. That, my friend, is a talisman — an outward and visible sign of an invisible and spiritual force. In his hypnotic command to her to sleep until awakened by someone in a later age, or else to die completely at the end of seven thousand years, Kaku the priest had firmly planted in her mind the thought that if the seven stones of that jewel were destroyed, her second life should also wane. The seven stones were to her a constant reminder of the fate which overshadowed her like — like, by example, the string you tie about your finger to remind you to buy fresh razor-blades or tooth-powder next time you go past the drug store." He grinned delightedly at his homely example.

"But how could Kaku know when Peligia had been awakened, and how could he come back to fight for her?" I demanded.

"Kaku, my friend, is dead," he replied seriously, "but like your own Monsieur John Brown, his soul goes — or, at least, went — marching on. And because it was not a good soul, but one which dwelt within its body in constant companionship with the ugly thought of jealousy, it was not permitted to continue its journey toward perfection, but was chained to the earth it had aforesaid walked. Always in Kaku's consciousness, even after he had ceased to possess a body, was the thought of his unrequited love for Peligia and the fear that she should be awakened from her trance by a man whom she would love. Not more swiftly does the fireman respond to the alarm than did the restless, earth-bound spirit of Kaku answer the knowledge that Peligia had returned to consciousness. In the guise of a cat he came at first, for cats were familiar things in old Egypt. Again, in the form of a crocodile he did all but kill the young Bennett and his bride as they motored to dine with us. Once more — and how he did it we do not know — he appeared and set fire to their house, and all but encompassed her death when he

caused the rope to part as Peligia escaped the flames.

“This night he came to call her by strength of will from out her fleshly body to join his wandering spirit, but — thanks be to God! — we thwarted him by the use of so simple a thing as a length of iron wire, from which his spirit, earthbound as it was, did shrink.”

“But see here,” I persisted, “do you mean to tell me Kaku will never return to plague Peligia, and Ellsworth again?”

“Yes,” he said, with an elfish grin, “I think I may

truthfully say that Kaku will never again return. *Parbleu*, this night the iron literally entered into his soul!

“You saw me contend with him; you saw him vanish like the shadows of night before the rising sun. Draw your own happy conclusions. Meantime” — he reached for the shining green bottle in which the cognac glowed with a ruby iridescence — “to your very good health, my friend, and the equally good health of Monsieur and Madame Bennett.”

The Serpent Woman

“GRAND DIEU, Friend Trowbridge, have a care!” Jules de Grandin clutched excitedly at my elbow with his left hand, while with the other he pointed dramatically toward the figure which suddenly emerged from the shadowy evergreens bordering the road and flitted like a windblown leaf through the zone of luminance cast by my headlights. “*Pardieu*, but she will succeed in destroying herself if she does that once too —” he continued; then interrupted himself with a shout as he flung both feet over the side of the car and dashed down the highway to grapple with the woman whose sudden appearance had almost sent us skidding into the wayside ditch.

Nor was his intervention a second too soon, for even as he reached her side the mysterious woman had run to the center of the highway bridge, and was drawing herself up, preparatory to leaping over the parapet into the rushing stream fifty feet below.

“Stop it, *Mademoiselle!* Desist!” he commanded sharply, seizing her shoulders in his small, strong hands and dragging her backward to the dusty planks of the bridge by main force.

She fought like a cornered wildcat. “Let me go!” she raged, struggling in the little Frenchman’s embrace; then, finding her efforts unavailing, twisting suddenly round to face him and clawing at his cheeks with desperate, fear-stiffened fingers. “Let me go; I want to die; I must die; I will die, I tell you!” she screamed. “Let me go!”

De Grandin shifted his grasp from her shoulders to her wrists and shook her roughly, as a terrier might shake a rat. “Be still, *Mademoiselle!*” he ordered curtly. “Cease this business of the fool, or, *parbleu!*” — he administered another shake — “I shall be forced to tie you!”

I added my efforts to his, grasping the raging woman by the elbows and forcing her into the twin shafts of light thrown by the car’s driving-lamps.

Leaning forward, de Grandin retrieved her hat and placed it on her dark head at a decidedly rakish angle; then regarded her meditatively in the headlights’ glare. “Will you restrain yourself, if we loose you, *Mademoiselle?*” he asked after a few seconds’ silent inspection.

The young woman regarded him sullenly a moment, then broke into a sharp, cachinnating laugh. “You’ve only postponed the inevitable,” she announced with a fatalistic shrug of her shoulders. “I’ll kill myself as soon as you leave me, anyway. You might as well have saved yourself the trouble.”

“U’m?” the Frenchman murmured. “Precisely, exactly, quite so, *Mademoiselle*; and for that reason we shall take pains not to abandon you. *Nom d’un parapluie*, are we murderers? We shall not leave you to your fate. Tell us where you live, and we shall take you there.”

She faced us with quivering nostrils and heaving, tumultuous breast, anger flashing from her eyes, a diatribe of invective seemingly ready to spill from her lips. She had a rather pretty, high-bred face; unnaturally large, dark eyes, seeming larger still because of the deep violet circles under them; death-pale skin contrasting strongly with the little tendrils of dark, curling hair which hung about her cheeks beneath the rim of her wide leghorn hat.

“*Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin announced with a bow, “you are beautiful. There is no reason for you to wish to die. Come with us; Dr. Trowbridge and I shall do ourselves the honor of escorting you to your home.”

“I’m Mrs. Candace,” she replied simply, as though the name would explain everything.

“*Madame*,” de Grandin assured her, bowing formally from the hips, as though acknowledging an introduction, “the very great honor is ours. I am Jules de Grandin, and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge. May we have the honor of your company —”

“But — but,” the girl broke in, half-believingly, “you mean you don’t know who I am?”

“Until a moment ago we have been denied the happiness of your acquaintance, *Madame*,” rejoined the Frenchman with another bow. “You are now ready to accompany us!” he added, glancing toward the car.

Something like gratitude shone in the young woman’s eyes as she answered: “I live in College Grove Park; you may take me there, if you wish, but —”

“*Tiens, Madame*,” he interrupted, “let us but no buts, if you please.”

Taking her hand in his he led her to the waiting car and assisted her to a seat.

“It’s kind of you to do this for me,” our passenger murmured as I turned the motor eastward. “I didn’t think there was anyone who’d trouble to keep me from dying.”

De Grandin shot her a glance of swift inquiry. “Why?” he demanded with Gallic directness.

“Because everyone — everyone but Iring — wants to see me hanged, and sometimes he looks at me so strangely. I think perhaps he’s turning against me, too!”

“Ah?” de Grandin responded. “And why should that be?”

“Because of Baby!” she sobbed. “Everyone thinks I killed him — I, his mother! The neighbors all look at me as though I were a monster — call their children away when they see me coming — and never speak to me when I pass them. Even Iring, my husband, is beginning to suspect, I’m afraid, and so I wanted to die — would have done it, too, if you hadn’t stopped me.”

Utter, hopeless misery was in her tones as she spoke, and de Grandin bent forward with quick impulsiveness, taking her hand in his. “Tell us the story, *Madame*,” he begged. “It will relieve your nerves to talk, and it may easily be that Friend Trowbridge and I can be of help —”

“No, you can’t,” she negated sharply. “Nobody can help me. There isn’t any help for me this side of the grave, but—”

It was a long, heart-rending story the young mother retailed as we sped over the dusty summer road to the pretty little suburb where she lived. Ten days before, she and her husband had been to a party in New York and it was nearly two o’clock in the morning when they returned to College Grove. Iring Junior, their ten-months-old baby, had been left in charge of the Negro maid of all work, and both he and his nurse were fast asleep when his parents gently unlatched the front door and tiptoed down the bungalow hall. Dismissing the maid, Mrs. Candace had crept into the little blue-and-white room where the baby slept, raised the window a few inches — for the maid steadfastly refused to accept the virtues of fresh air — bent down and kissed the sleeping child, then stepped softly to her own room across the hall.

Tired to the point of exhaustion, both parents were soon in bed, but some evil premonition seemed to keep the mother’s eyelids open. Sitting up in bed suddenly, she heard a tiny whimper in the nursery, the half-articulate sound of a little boy-baby turning restlessly in his sleep, and without waiting to don either house-robe or slippers, she ran barefooted across the hall, pushed open the nursery door and switched on the bedside lamp.

The boy was gone. In the little white pillow of his crib was the dent where his curly head had rested; the shape of his straight little body could be traced by the rise of the light blanket-sheet, but, save for the brown, woolly Teddy bear and the black patent-leather cat mounting guard at the foot of the crib, the nursery was untenanted.

“I called my husband,” she went on between deep, heart-racking sobs, “and we searched the house, then looked everywhere outside, but our little son was nowhere to be found. The nursery door was latched, though not locked, but his baby fingers could not have unfastened it, even if he had managed to crawl that far. The nursery window was open about ten inches, and there was no screen in it, but Baby could not have crept through it, for I had the blanket

fastened down at the head and foot with clamps to keep him from kicking it off during the night, and he couldn’t have gotten out of bed by himself. Yet our baby was nowhere.

“We looked for him all night, and kept our search up most of next day; but there isn’t any clue to his whereabouts, no sign to show how he left us, unless —”

She shuddered convulsively.

“Yes?” de Grandin prompted.

“And the rumor got about that I killed him! They say I did away with my own little baby, and they won’t come near me, nor let me come near them, and when I walk down the street the mothers run and snatch their children into the house as though I carried plague germs!”

“*Mordieu*, but this is infamous, this is intolerable, this is not to be borne!” de Grandin exploded. “You have undoubtedly advised the police of the case, *Madame*?”

“The police?” her voice was thin, high-pitched, like the muted scream of one in pain past bodily endurance. “*It was the police who started the rumor!*”

“*Nom d’un coq!*” de Grandin demanded in incredulous amazement. “You would have us to understand that —”

“I would have you to understand just that!” she mocked. “There is no clue to the manner in which my baby disappeared. No footprints, no fingerprints” — for a moment she hesitated, breathing deeply, then continued — “nothing. When the police could find nothing to go on, no person who would wish us misfortune or have a reason for stealing our baby, they said I must have done it. The only reason I’m not locked up this moment, waiting trial for murder, is that they have not been able to find Baby’s body — though they’ve had our cellar floor up and knocked down half the partitions in the house — and our maid’s testimony shows that Baby was alive and well, fifteen minutes before my screams woke her. They can’t figure how I’d had time to kill him and hide his little body in that time — that’s the only reason they haven’t arrested me! Now you know why I wanted to die, and why I fought you when you saved me,” she concluded. “And” — defiantly — “why I’m going to kill myself the first chance I have. There won’t *always* be someone to stop me!”

De Grandin’s little round eyes were shining like those of a cat in the dark, and on his small, pointed-chinned face was a half-thoughtful, half-dreamy expression, like that worn by a person trying to recall the notes of a long-forgotten tune. Suddenly he leaned forward, staring straight into the tear-stained face of the young mother.

“*Madame*,” he spoke with slow insistence, “there is something you have not told us. Twice did I notice your speech halt and falter like a poorly trained horse before the hurdle. At the back of your brain lies another thought, a thought you have not clothed in words. What is it you have not yet told anyone, *Madame*?”

The girl's large, dark eyes widened suddenly, as though a light had been flashed before them. "No, no!" she almost screamed.

"*Madame*," de Grandin's tone was low, but his voice was inexorable, "you will please tell me the thing you have not yet spoken of."

"You'd think me crazy!"

"*Madame Candace*, you will tell me!" Again the low, even tone of command.

"I — I was brought up in the country," the girl stammered, fighting for breath between syllables like a runner nearly spent, or an exhausted swimmer battling with the surf. "I was brought up in the country, and the day after Baby disappeared I noticed something down at the lower end of our garden — something I hadn't seen since we lived on the farm and I used to walk barefoot on the dirt roads."

De Grandin's features contracted sharply, as though a presentiment of what she would say had come to him, but he persisted. "Yes? You saw —"

"A snake track — the track of a snake, fresh and unmistakable in the soft earth of the rose beds — but not the track of any snake I've ever seen, for it was wide as the mark of an automobile tire!"

"Ah?" the little Frenchman's voice was lower than a whisper, but swift understanding shone in his small blue eyes. "You think, perhaps —"

"God in heaven, don't say it!" she screamed. "It's bad enough to live with the thought; but if you put it into words—"

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin whispered sharply, "yonder is her home. Help me carry her there. She has swooned."

A young man whose face showed the deep etchings of sleepless nights and tormented days answered our ring at the cottage door. "Stella!" he exclaimed as he caught sight of his wife's white, drawn face; then, to us: "I've been looking all over for her. This terrible trouble has" — he paused as a sob choked back the words — "her mind, you know, gentlemen."

"U'm?" responded de Grandin noncommittally as we bore her to the couch.

"I've been terribly worried about you, dear," her husband told Mrs. Candace as a slow wave of returning color suffused her face. "When I couldn't find you in the house I went outside, and called and called, but —"

"I know, dear," the young wife interrupted wearily. "It was so hot and stuffy here, I thought I'd take a little walk, but it was too much for me, and these kind gentlemen brought me home."

Young Candace looked doubtfully at us a moment, as though debating whether it was safe to speak before us;

then, abruptly deciding we were to be trusted, he blurted: "We've news at last, dear. Part of the mystery is cleared up. Baby's alive — if this is to be believed — and we've a chance of finding him."

"Oh!" Mrs. Candace sprang from the couch as though suddenly shocked by an electric current. "What is it, Iring? What is it?"

For answer he extended a sheet of yellow paper, the sort schoolchildren use to figure their sums upon. "I found this tucked under the screen door when I came back from looking for you," he replied.

Without pausing for permission, de Grandin gazed over the mother's shoulder as she perused the missive her husband had handed her. As she finished reading, he took the paper gently from her and passed it to me.

The words were formed of letters cut from a newspaper and pasted irregularly together, making a sort of crazy-quilt of small characters and large. Many words were grotesquely misspelled, but the message as a whole was easily decipherable:

"Mr. & Mrs. Candace, Esq., yUr kid is al right anD well enough and i aM takin gooD care of it but i aint go ing to wait foreVr I'm a poor man an I got to live and you better get me some money mighty dam quik or Ill quit makiNG a bOarding House of myseLf and forgET to feed him but i will hold him in good shape for one week more If you wAnt to see him agan have two thousand \$ in cash mOney redy next Tuesday nite at midnite tweLve oclock and throw it from Yur automobil as YOu ride down the piKE between harrisonville an Rupleyville Throw the moneys out where You see a light in the Woods an dont try no triks on me or have the poLice with you or yull never see yur kid no more on account of i bein a desprit man an dont intend no foolin an if they do catch me I wont never tell where he is no matter how much they beat me so yur Kid wlll starv to deth. Have the mony redy when I say an no foolin or you wont never see him agan "Yurs trulie"

By way of signature the note was subscribed with a long, serpentine flourish, like an inverted capital S.

"*Eh bien*, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin remarked judicially as he took the note back into his hand, "I should say —"

A thunderous knock at the door interrupted his opinion, and a moment later a heavy-set, sandy-haired man in high, mud-spattered boots, corduroy pantaloons and a far from clean blue sweater stalked into the room. "Evenin', Mr. Candace," he greeted, removing his battered felt hat. "Evenin'," he nodded curtly to Mrs. Candace. Of de Grandin and me he took no more notice than if we had not existed. "Did you say you'd had a note from th' kidnaper? Lemme see it.

“Hum,” he commented, inspecting the patchwork piece of blackmail under the glare of the living-room electrolier. “Hum-m. When did you git this?”

“I found it tucked under the screen door a few minutes before I ’phoned you,” Candace replied. “Mrs. Candace had gone out without letting me know, and I was looking for her. When I couldn’t find her in the house I started out into the garden, and found this note folded under the door when I came back. I —”

“Hum.” The big man cleared his throat portentously. “Mis’ Candace wuz out, wuz she? An’ you found this here note in th’ door when you come back from lookin’ for her, did you? Hum; hum-m. Yeah. I *see*.”

“This is Mr. Perkinson, the assistant county detective,” Candace offered a belated introduction, as he indicated de Grandin and me with a wave of his hand. “He’s been working on the case, and when I found this ransom letter, I thought it best to get in immediate touch with him.”

“Ah,” de Grandin murmured softly; then, turning to the detective: “It seems, *Monsieur*, that whoever sent this letter was a cunning miscreant. He has taken most excellent precautions to disguise his handwriting, and the fact that he chose such people as Monsieur and Madame Candace for his victims argues more cleverness. They are neither rich nor poor, but comfortable *bourgeois*. A rich man would have scoured the country with his hired detectives. A poor man could not have paid a ransom. This villain has stolen a child of the middle class and demanded a ransom which the parents can afford to pay. What does it mean? *Parbleu*, I think it indicates he has intimate knowledge of the family’s affairs, and —”

“You’re damn tootin’, Doc,” Assistant County Detective Perkinson’s agreement interrupted. “I’ll say she knows th’ family’s affairs. Stella Candace,” he put a large, freckle-flecked hand on the mother’s bowed shoulder, “I arrest ye for the abduction of Iring Candace, Junior, an’ it’s me duty to warn ye that anything said now may be used agin ye.”

“See here —” Iring Candace stepped forward angrily, his face flushed, his eyes flashing dangerously.

“You ignorant, blundering fool!” I exclaimed, thrusting myself between the officer and his prey.

To my amazement, Jules de Grandin remained perfectly calm. “Your perspicacity does you utmost credit, *Monsieur*,” he assured the officer with an ironical bow. “By all means, take Madame Candace before the judge. I make me no doubt—”

“I’ll be damned if he will!” protested the husband, but Mrs. Candace interposed.

“Don’t resist him, Iring” she begged. “He’s been aching to arrest me ever since Baby disappeared, and you’ll only make matters worse if you try to interfere. Let him take me peaceably, and —”

“And tomorrow, *parbleu*, we shall seek your release on writ of *habeas corpus*!” de Grandin interjected. “After that we shall be free from interference, and may give attention to important matters.”

“Good night, dear,” Stella Candace turned her lips up to her husband’s. “I’ll be brave, and you can see a lawyer in the morning, as Dr. de Grandin says. Don’t worry.”

“Very well, Mr. Perkinson,” she said. “I’m ready.”

“Oh, my God!” Iring Candace dropped into a chair, propped his elbows on his knees, cupped his face in his hands and shook with retching sobs. “What shall I do; what *shall* I do? I can’t think Stella would do such a thing; but Perkinson — there *might* be something in his suspicions, after all. It’s strange I should have found that note after she’d gone out, and yet —”

“*Mordieu*, my friend, there is no yet,” de Grandin cut in. “That Perkinson, he is one great zany. *Nom d’un nom*, were all his brains secreted in the hollow of a gnat’s tooth they would rattle about like a dried pea in a bass drum!”

“But if Stella’s not guilty, how are we going to recover our boy? The police are convinced she did it; we can get no help from them, and the kidnaper will —”

“*Monsieur!*” de Grandin interrupted, offended dignity in his voice. “Have I not said I would undertake the case? *Parbleu*, this kidnaper shall meet his just deserts, be he human or be he — never mind; if I do not apprehend this stealer of little children I am more mistaken than I think I am.”

“How will you manage it?” the bereaved father asked with hopeless matter-of-factness. “What can you do that the police haven’t already done? The kidnaper will surely suspect if you try to trap him; then our little boy is lost. Oh!” — a fresh burst of sobs broke his words to fragments — “oh, my little son; my little baby boy!”

“*Monsieur*,” the Frenchman assured him, “I am Jules de Grandin. What I undertake, that I accomplish.

“*Allons*, Friend Trowbridge,” he turned to me; “there remains much to be done and little time in which to do it before we have this child-stealer by the heels.”

“*Nom d’un moucheron*, but it is strange!” Jules de Grandin muttered to himself the following morning as he finished his after-breakfast perusal of the *Journal*. “It is unusual, it is extraordinary, it is ghastly, yet I make no doubt it has some connection with the vanished little one.”

“Eh, what’s that?” I demanded.

“Read, my friend,” he thrust the newspaper into my hand. “Read, and tell me what it is you see.”

“JERSEY DEVIL IN NEW GUISE?”

queried the headline to which his neatly manicured

forefinger directed my attention. Below, couched in facetious journalese, was a short article:

“Has the well-known and justly celebrated Jersey Devil assumed a new form this summer? William Johannes, a farmer living near Rupleyville, thinks so. Little has been heard of this elusive specter this season, and tired newspapermen had about decided he had retired on a much-needed vacation when Johannes sent in a hurry call to inform the world at large and the *Journal’s* city room in particular that he had seen the Devil, and he didn’t mean perhaps, either.

“Shortly after eight o’clock last night William, who vows he hadn’t had a thing stronger than his customary cup of Java with his dinner, was startled to hear an unearthly concert of squeals emanating from the direction of his pig-pen. Armed with his trusty bird gun, William set out hot-foot to see who was disturbing the repose of his prize porkers. As he neared the odoriferous confines of the porcine domicile, he was astonished to hear a final despairing squeal invoke high heaven for assistance, and to see a great, brownish-green snake, at least forty feet in length, go sliding through the bars of the pig-coop. He fired at the monster, but apparently his shot had no effect, for it wriggled away among the bushes and was quickly lost to sight.

“Arriving at the pig-sty, William was desolated to discover that three of a litter of six prize Cochin China sucking pigs had completely disappeared, leaving their mother, Madam Hog, in a state bordering on nervous collapse.

“In proof of his story William showed your correspondent the tracks of the marauding monster in the soft loam of the woodland adjoining his pig-pen. There were two well-defined trails, one coming, the other going, serpentine in course, and about the width of an automobile — not a Ford — tire. Both were plainly visible for a distance of some twenty feet, after which they were lost in the leaf-strewn ground of the woods.

“William says he doesn’t mind good clean fun, but when it comes to stealing three valuable piglets the matter ceases to be a joke, and he’s going to have the legislature pass a law or something about it.”

“Humph!” I grunted, passing the paper back to him. “Some smart-Alec reporter’s practicing his imagination again. That ‘Jersey Devil’ is a standing joke in this state, de Grandin, like the annual sea-serpent fable at Cannes, you know. There’s always a stack of fool stories like this in the newspapers about this time of year.”

“Indeed?” he raised narrow, black eyebrows. “Do you say so? Nevertheless, my friend, I shall interview the so excellent Monsieur Johannes. It is probable that the journalist is a facile liar, but we did not beat back the *boche* by leaving anything to chance. Me, I shall prove each step of this business.”

“What business?” I asked as he pushed back his chair and

sought his hat and walking-stick.

“*Ah bah*, my friend,” he replied, “you do ask too many questions for the sake of listening to your own voice. Expect me when I return.”

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, behold what it is I have discovered,” he ordered, bursting into my study some four hours later. “*Parbleu*, but the young man of the press did us an inestimable favor, though he knows it not, when he wrote his tale of the Devil of New Jersey. Observe, if you please!” With a hand that trembled with excitement he extended a bit of folded paper to me.

Opening the slip I beheld what might have been the paring from a horse’s hoof made by a blacksmith when preparing to fit a new shoe to the beast.

“Well?” I asked, turning the thing over curiously. “What is it, and what of it?”

“As to what it is, I did not expect recognition from you,” he admitted with one of his quick, elfin smiles. “As to its significance — who shall say? That, my friend, is a chip from the belly-armor of a great snake. I did find it after two hours’ search upon my hands and knees beside the tracks left by the serpent which raided the sty of Monsieur Johannes’ pigs last night. At present I am not prepared to say definitely what sort of reptile shed it, but my guess is in favor of a Burmese python or an African boa. Also, from this scale’s size, I should say that terror and astonishment lent magnifying lenses to Monsieur Johannes’ eyes when he beheld the snake, for the thing is more likely twenty than forty feet in length, but the good God knows he would be sufficiently formidable to meet, even so.”

“Well?” I queried again.

“Well?” he mocked. “Well, what? What does it mean?”

“As far as I can see, it doesn’t mean anything, except—”

“*Dieu de Dieu*,” he interrupted impatiently “except that Madame Candace was stating only the literal truth when she said she recognized snake tracks in her garden, and that there is actually such a monster abroad in the countryside.”

“Why,” I stammered as the enormity of his statement struck me, “why, you mean the little Candace boy might have been devoured by this monster? That would account for his disappearance without clues; but what about the ransom letter we saw last night? A snake might eat a child, though I’ve always understood the process of ingestion is rather slow, and I can’t quite see how he could have swallowed the little boy before Mrs. Candace reached the nursery; but even you will admit a snake would hardly have been likely to prepare and send that letter demanding two thousand dollars for the child’s return.”

“Sometimes, Friend Trowbridge,” he assured me. solemnly, “I think you a fool. At others I believe you only dull-witted. Can you not reconcile the possibility of a great

serpent's having made off with the little one and a ransom letter being sent?"

"No, I'm hanged if I can," I admitted.

"*Morbleu* —" he began furiously, then paused, one of his quick smiles driving the annoyed frown from his face. "Forgive me, good, kind friend," he implored. "I do forget you have not had the benefit of my experience at the *Sûreté*. Attend me: Ten days ago the little lad did vanish. The police have been notified, the news of his disappearance has become public. There is no clue to the manner of his going; as yet the pig-ignorant police have no theory worthy of the name. The snake might well be responsible for all this, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"I suppose so," I admitted.

"*Très bien*. Now suppose some miscreant desired to trade upon the misery of those bereaved parents; what then? Granting that he knew their circumstances, which I strongly suspect he does, what would be easier than for him to concoct such a letter as the dastardly thing we read last night and transmit it stealthily to Monsieur and Madame Candace, knowing full well they would jump at any chance, and pay any sum within their means, to see their baby boy once more?"

"You mean some fiend would trade on their heartbreak to swindle them out of two thousand dollars — knowing all the time he was unable to keep his wretched bargain and return their child?" I asked, horrified.

His small, sensitive mouth set in a grim, straight line beneath the trimly waxed ends of his little blond mustache. "*Précisément*," he nodded. "Such things have been done many times. We of the Paris *Sûreté* are familiar with many such cases."

"But, for the Lord's sake —" I began.

"Exactly," he responded. "For the Lord's sake, and for the sake of those two poor ones whose little man has been stolen away, and for the sake of all other parents who may suffer a similar fate, I shall make it my sworn duty to apprehend this villain, and, by the horns of the Devil, if it turns out he knows not the whereabouts of the little boy, he will pray lustily for death before I have done with him."

"But —"

"*Ah bah*, let us bother with no buts at this time, my friend. Tomorrow night is the appointed time. Me, I hasten, I rush, I fly to New York, where I would consult with certain expert artificers. By the belly of Jonah's whale, but I shall give this kidnaper such a surprise as he does not suspect! *Adieu*, Friend Trowbridge. I return when my business in New York is completed."

"Have a care, my friend," de Grandin ordered the following night as I relieved him of a small black satchel while he climbed into the tonneau of the Candace motor car.

"Treat the bag with respect; coddle it like an infant, and, whatever you do, touch not its handles, but hold it by the sides."

Consulting the diminutive watch strapped to the under side of his wrist, he nodded shortly to Candace, who sat at the wheel in a perfect fever of excitement and impatience. "Let us go, *Monsieur*," he ordered, and the powerful motor-car turned southward toward the little Italian settlement of Rupleyville, its engine gaining speed with each revolution of the wheels.

"Do you keep sharp watch on your side of the road, Friend Trowbridge," he directed, driving a sharp elbow into my ribs. "Me, I shall glue my eyes to mine."

"More speed, Monsieur Candace," he urged as the car entered a long, narrow stretch of roadway between two segments of dense pine woods. "Never will our fish rise to the bait if we loiter along the highway. Tread on the gas, I beseech you!"

His face set in grim lines, eyes narrowed as he peered intently before him, Iring Candace advanced his spark and pressed his foot on the accelerator. The car shot ahead like a projectile and darted down the tunnel between the ranks of black-boughed pines with a roar like that of an infuriated beast.

"Good, most excellently good," the Frenchman commended. "At this rate we should — *grand Dieu*, there is the light!"

As the car roared round the bend of the road the sudden yellow gleam of a stable lantern suspended from a tree-bough shone out against the black background of the woods. "Continue — carry on — keep going, *pour l'amour de Dieu!*" de Grandin gritted in the driver's ear as Candace involuntarily slackened speed. Next instant he leaned far out of the rushing car, seized the small black satchel from my lap and hurled it toward the flickering lantern like a football player making a lateral pass.

"Gently — gently, my friend," he counseled, nudging Candace between the shoulder blades as the car rounded the bend, "do but slow down sufficiently to permit us to alight, but keep your *moteur* running and your muffler out. We must persuade the despicable one we are still on our way." Next instant he flung open the tonneau door, dropped silently to the hard-surfaced roadway, and motioning me to follow, crept toward the underbrush bordering the highway.

"Have you your gun ready?" I whispered as I crouched beside him in the long weeds fringing the road.

"S-s-sh!" he cautioned sibilantly, reaching under his jacket and bringing out a small, cloth-covered package resembling a folded sheet-music stand. Feverishly he tore the flannel wrappings from the slender steel bars and began jointing the rods together. In a moment's time he held an odd-looking contrivance, something like an eel-spear,

except that it possessed only two tines, in his left hand, while from an inside pocket he produced a skein of strong, braided horsehair rope terminating in a slip-noose, and swung it loosely, lasso-wise, from his right fist.

“*Allez vous en!*” he rasped, crawling farther into the undergrowth.

Cautiously, moving so slowly it seemed to us we scarcely moved at all, we approached the swinging lantern. Nothing indicative of human presence showed in the tiny circle of light cast by the swinging lamp; neither form nor shadow stirred among the tall black pines.

“The Devil!” I exclaimed in furious disappointment. “He’s got away.”

“Quiet!” warned the Frenchman angrily. “Be still; he does but wait to make sure we were not followed by the police. Lie low, my friend, and be ready — *nom d’un bête*, behold him!”

Like the shadow of a shadow, moving furtively as a weasel between the tree trunks, a man, slender as a youth, stoop-shouldered and narrow-chested, but incredibly quick-footed, had slipped forward, seized the black bag de Grandin flung from the car, and darted back among the sheltering pines, even as the Frenchman gave his warning cry.

Next moment the midnight quiet of the woods was broken by a sudden retching sneeze, another and yet another, and a rushing, stumbling figure emerged from the darkness, blundering blindly into bush and shrub and heavy tree bole, clawing frantically at his face and stopping every now and again in his crazy course to emit a tortured, hacking cough or sternutative sneeze.

“Ha, Monsieur Child-stealer, you expected coin of another sort, *n’est-ce-pas?*” de Grandin fairly shrieked leaping forward to trip the blinded, sneezing fellow with a deft movement of his foot. “On him, Friend Trowbridge!” he shouted. “Sit upon him, grind his face into the earth, seize him, bind him — off to the bastille!”

I rushed forward to comply, then started back, cold horror grasping at my throat. “Look out, de Grandin!” I screamed. “Look out, for God’s sake —”

“*Ha?*” The Frenchman’s sharp interrogative exclamation was more an expression of satisfied expectancy than of surprise. Almost, it seemed, the monstrous snake which had risen up from the pine needles at our feet was something he had awaited.

“Is it indeed thou, *Monsieur le Serpent?*” he demanded, skipping backward between the trees, advancing his two-pronged fork before him as a practiced swordsman might swing his foil. “It would seem we are met, after all,” he added, dancing back another step, then, with the speed of forked lightning, stabbing downward with his prong.

“*Sa-ha, Monsieur*, how do you care for that?” he

demanded, his voice high and thin with hysterical triumph as the sharp steel tines sank into the soft earth each side of the great snake’s neck, pinning his wicked, wedge-shaped head fast to the ground.

“*Eh bien*, it seems I am one too many for you, *mon ami*,” de Grandin remarked calmly as he slipped the noose of his hair rope beneath the squirming head, drew it taut and nonchalantly flung the rope’s free end over a low-hanging tree bough. “Up we go,” he announced cheerfully, drawing sharply on the rope and hoisting the monster reptile from the earth until it hung suspended from the branch, the tip of its pointed tail and some four feet of brown-mottled body lashing furiously at the scrub pines which grew rank underfoot.

The noisome thing beat the earth futilely with its tail a moment, then drew its glistening body, thick as a man’s thigh, upward, wrapping it about the bough to which its neck was pinioned, knotted there a moment in agony, then slid in long, horrifying waves again toward the earth.

“Squirm, my friend,” de Grandin ordered, surveying the struggling serpent with a smile of grim amusement. “*Parbleu*, wriggle, writhe and twist, it will do you small good. ’Twas Jules de Grandin tied those knots, and he knows how to deal with your sort, whether they travel on their bellies or their feet. Which reminds me” — he turned toward the struggling man on the ground — “it seems we have you, also, Monsieur. Will you be pleased to rise when I can induce my good Friend Trowbridge to cease kneeling on your biceps?”

“Did you get him?” Candace crashed through the undergrowth, brushed me aside and seized the prisoner’s shoulder in an iron grip. “Where’s my son. you devil? Tell me, or, by God, I’ll —”

“Meestair, let me go!” the captive screamed, writhing in Candace’s clutch. “I ver’ good man, me. I was passing through the woods, and saw where someone had left a lantern — a good, new lantern — out here, and come over to get him. As I try and take him from the tree, somebody come by and throw a satchel at me, and I think maybe it have money in him, so I pick him up, and then my eyes go all —”

“You lie!” Candace was almost frothing at the mouth as he shook the fellow again. But de Grandin drew him away with a word of caution.

“Softly, my friend,” he whispered. “Remember, it is your son we wish to recover. Perhaps we may succeed only in frightening him into silence if we attempt intimidating here. At Harrisonville is a barracks of the state *gendarmierie*. Let us take him there. Undoubtedly the officers will force a confession from him, and Madame Candace will be cleared before all the world thereby. Let us go.”

“All right,” Candace agreed grudgingly. “Let’s get going.”

We can get there in half an hour, if we hurry.”

The lights of the troopers’ barracks streamed out into the moonless summer night as Candace brought his car to a halt before the building and fairly dragged the prisoner from the vehicle.

“*Bon soir, Messieurs les Gendarmes,*” de Grandin greeted, removing his soft felt hat with a ceremonious flourish as he led the way into the guard-room. “We are this minute arrived from Rupleyville and” — he paused a moment, then motioned toward the undersized prisoner writhing in Candace’s grip — “we have brought with us the kidnaper of the little Candace boy. No less.”

“Oh, have you?” the duty sergeant responded unenthusiastically. “Another one? We’ve been getting all sorts of tips on that case — got a stack o’ letters a foot high — and we have about a dozen ’phone calls a day, offering us the lowdown on the —”

“*Monsieur le Sergent*” — de Grandin’s amiability vanished like the night’s frost before the morning sun — “if you are of opinion that we rush about the countryside at midnight for our own amusement, you are greatly mistaken. Look upon this!” He thrust the ransom letter under the astonished policeman’s nose, and as the other concluded his perusal of the missive, launched on a succinct account of the evening’s adventures.

“Huh, looks as if you’ve got something we can sink our teeth in, for a fact,” the sergeant complimented.

“Where’s the kid?” he turned brusquely to the prisoner. “Speak up, you; it’ll be worse for you if you don’t.”

“Meestair,” the captive returned with an expressive elevation of his narrow shoulders, “I not know what you talk of. Me, I am hones’ man; ver’ poor, but hones’. I not know nothing about this keed you ask for. Tonight I walk through the woods on my way home, and I see where someone have left a good, new lantern hanging up. I go to get him, for I need him at my house, and these gentlemens you see here come by in a fast automobile, and — *whizz!* — they throw something into the woods. I think maybe they are bootleggers running from police, so I go to see what’s in the bag, and right away something go off right in my face — *pouf!* — like that. It make me all blind, and while I run around like a fish out of water, these gentlemens here, they come up and say, ‘You — you steala da keed; we kill you pretty dam’ quick if you no tell us where he is!’ I not know why they say so, Meestair. Me poor, hones’ man. Not steal no keed, not steal nothing. No, not me!”

“Humph!” the sergeant turned to de Grandin with a shrug. “He’s probably a damn liar, most of ’em are; but his story’s straight enough. We’ll just lock him up for a couple of days and give him time to think the matter over. He’ll be ready to admit something by the time we have him arraigned, I

hope.”

“But, *Monsieur?*” de Grandin protested, “can not you see how absurd that is? While you have this so villainous miscreant in a cell, the little boy whom we seek may starve to death. Your delay may mean his death!”

“Can’t help it,” the young officer replied resignedly. “I’ve had more experience with these fellows than you have, and if we try mauling him he’ll call on all the saints in the calendar to witness his innocence and yell bloody murder, but we’ll never get an admission from him. Give him time to think it over in a nice, solitary cell — that’s the way to crack these wops’ shells.”

“*Morbleu*” — I thought the little Frenchman would explode with amazed anger — “*you* have more experience than I — I, Jules de Grandin of *le Sûreté*? Blood of the Devil; blood of a most ignoble cat! We shall see what we shall see. You admit your inability to force a confession from this one. May I try? *Parbleu*, if I fail to make him talk within ten little minutes I shall turn monk and live upon prayers and detestable turnips for the rest of my life!”

“U’ m?” the sergeant regarded the angry little Frenchman speculatively. “Promise not to hurt him?”

De Grandin tiptoed across the room and whispered something in the policeman’s ear, waving his slender hands like a windmill in a hurricane the while.

“Okeh,” the officer agreed, a broad grin spreading over his features. “I’ve heard a lot about the way you fellows work. Let’s see you strut your stuff.”

“*Merci,*” de Grandin acknowledged, crossing the guard-room and pausing before the tall cast-iron stove which heated the place in winter.

Accumulated paper and a few sticks of light wood lay in the heater’s cylinder, and de Grandin set them alight with a match, thrusting the long, steel poker into the midst of the leaping flames. “Will you help, Friend Trowbridge?” he asked as he took a skein of stout cord from his pocket and began making the captive fast to his chair with skillful knots.

“What do you want me to do?” I asked wonderingly.

“Stand ready to hand me a bit of ice from the cooler,” he whispered softly in my ear; then, as the poker slowly glowed from gray to red, and from red to pale orange in the fire, he seized its handle and advanced with a slow, menacing stride toward the bound and helpless prisoner, his little, round blue eyes hardening to a merciless glare as the eyes of a kindly house-cat flash with fury at sight of a mongrel street dog.

“Kidnaper of little children,” he announced in a voice so low as to be hardly audible, but hard and merciless as a scalpel’s edge, “I am about to give you one last chance to speak the truth. Say, where is the little one you stole away?”

“*Signor,*” replied the prisoner, twisting and straining at

the cords, “me, I have told you only the truth. *Per l’amore della Madonna* —”

“*Ah bah!*” the Frenchman advanced the glowing steel to within an inch of the fellow’s face. “You have told only the truth! What does a child-stealer know of true words? *Nom d’un chat*, what does a duck know of the taste of cognac?”

Advancing another step, he suddenly snatched a towel from above the washstand, looped it into a loose knot and flung it over the prisoner’s face, drawing it tightly about his eyes. “Observe him well, my friends,” he commanded, reaching out to snatch the bit of ice I had abstracted from the water-cooler at his nod of silent command, then ripping the bound man’s collar open.

Fascinated, we watched the tableau before us. De Grandin seemed as savage and implacable as the allegorical figure of Nemesis in a classic Greek play. Facing him, trembling and shaking as though with a chill, despite the warmth of the night, his swarthy visage gone corpse-pale, sat the fettered prisoner. He was an undersized man, scarcely more than a boy, apparently, and his small, regular features and finely modeled, tiny hands and feet gave him an almost feminine appearance. His terror was so obvious that I was almost moved to protest, but the Frenchman waited no further word.

“Speak, child-stealer, or take the consequences!” he exclaimed sharply, bringing the scorching poker to within a half-inch of the prisoner’s quivering throat, then snatching it back and thrusting the bit of ice against the shrinking white skin.

A shriek of hopeless anguish and pain burst from the captive’s lips. He writhed and twisted against his bonds like a scotched snake in the flame, biting his lips till bloody froth circled his mouth, digging his long, pointed nails into the palms of his hands. “*Santissima Madonna — caro Dio!*” he screamed as the ice met his flesh.

“Make answer, villain!” de Grandin commanded, boring the ice farther into the prisoner’s neck. “Answer me, or, *pardieu*, I shall burn your lying tongue from your throat!”

The bound man twisted again, but only hoarse, inarticulate sounds of fright and pain escaped his bloody lips.

“*Nom d’un sacré singe* — but he is stubborn, this one,” de Grandin muttered. “It seems I must yet burn his heart from his breast.”

Dropping the poker into the fire again, he snatched at the prisoner’s soiled white shirt with his free hand, ripping the fabric apart and exposing the bosom.

“*Mon dieu!*” he ejaculated as the garment parted in his grasp.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed in amazement.

“For Gawd’s sake — a woman!” the constabulary sergeant gasped.

“*Santa Madonna, Santissima Madre!*” the prisoner gave

a choking, gurgling cry and slumped against her restraining cords, head hanging, bleeding lips parted, her bared white bosom heaving convulsively.

“Quick, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin commanded sharply. “Some water, if you please. She is unconscious.”

The woman’s eyelids fluttered upward, even as I hastened to obey de Grandin’s command. “*Si, si, signori,*” she answered. “I am a woman, and — I took the little one from the Candace house.”

For a moment she paused, swallowing convulsively, raising one of her slender hands, from which de Grandin had cut the bonds, to her throat, feeling tentatively at the spot where the Frenchman had pressed the ice, then shuddering with mystified relief as she discovered no brand from what she had thought the red-hot poker.

“I” — she gulped back a sob — “I am Gioconda Vitale. I live in Rupleyville, down by the railroad tracks. The people of College Grove know me as one who works by the day, who scrubs, who tends fires, washes. You, Signor Candace, have seen me in your house more than once, but never have you noticed me more than if I had been a chair or table.

“Last year my man, my Antonio, he die. It was the influenza, the doctor say, and he went ver’ quick, like falling asleep after a hard day’s work. In life he had been — how you call it? snake-charmer? — with circuses in Italy, then at Coney Island. We make plenty money while he was living, for he ver’ good man with the snakes — they call him ‘King of the Serpents’ on the billboards. But I not like them. All but Beppo, he was ver’ good, kind snake. Him I like. That Beppo, the python, my man like best of all, and I like him, too. He has a good, kind heart, like a dog. I not have the heart to sell him like I sell all the others when my ’Tonio die. I keep him, but he ver’ hard for to feed, for he eat much every month — chicken, rabbit, anything he can get his hand on. When I not have money for get him what he want, he go out and get it himself.

“‘Beppo,’ I tell him, ‘you get us in plenty trouble if you keep on,’ but he not pay me no ’tention. No.

“*Signori*” — she swept us with her large, dark eyes — “when my man die I was left all alone, yet not alone, for there was another with me, the answer to my man’s love and my prayers to *la Madonna*. Yes.

“Without my man, all heavy as I was, I go out and work, work, work till I think the bone come through my finger-ends, and at night I sit up and sew, that the *bambino* who is to come should have everything all nice. Yes.

“Presently he come, that beautiful little boy. His eyes are blue like my man’s who are in heaven with the blessed saints, for Antonio was of Florence, and not dark like us Sicilians. *Santo Dio*, how I love him, how I worship him, for

he was not only the child of my body; he was my man come back to me again! I christen him Antonio, for his father who is gone to God, and every night when I come home from work he smile on me and seem to say, '*Madre mia*, my father up in heaven with the blessed ones, he see all you do, and love you still as when he held you in his arms on earth. Yes, *signori*, it is so.

"The good God knows His ways, but they are ver' hard for women to understand. My little one, my token of love, he were taken from me. The doctor say it is something he have eat, but me, I know it were because he were too beautiful to stay on earth away from the holy angels and the blessed innocents who died that our Lord might live in the days of King Herod.

"Then I have only Beppo. He were a good snake; but no snake, not even the favorite of my dear man, can take the place of the little one who has gone to God. Beppo, he follow me out the door sometimes when I go out to walk at night — mostly when he are hungry, for it cost so much to feed him — but I say, 'Beppo, go back. What the people say if they see me walking with a snake? They tell me I have the Evil Eye!'

"*Signor*" — she turned directly to Candace — "you know what it mean to have empty arms. Me, I was that way. I was one crazed woman. Each time I see a happy mother with her child something inside me seem to say, '*Gioconda*, but for the curse of God, there goes you!'

"Pretty soon I can not stand it no more. In *Signor* Candace's house is a little boy about the size of my lost one if he had lived till now. I watch him all day when I go there to work. All the time my empty heart cry out for the feel of a baby's head against it. Finally, a week — maybe two — ago, I go clear mad. All night I stand outside the window where the little one sleeps and watch the light. Late, ver' late, his mother come in and lean over and kiss him good-night. My heart burst with the nothing which is inside. I can not stand it. *Santa Madre*, I can not stand it! When she put out the light and raise the window, I take a stepladder from the kitchen porch and climb up the house, take the little one from his bed all quiet, replace the ladder, and run to my house.

"Ah, how sweet it are to have a child once more in my arm, to feel the little head against my breast, to kiss back the cries he makes when he wakes up at night! I am wild for joy.

"But how am I, a poor woman, whose husband is with the blessed saints, to bring up this child? I can sell Beppo, but how much money will they give me for him? Not much. A hundred dollar, perhaps. That will not do. No, I can not get enough that way. Then I remember *Signor* Candace is rich. His wife not have to scrub floors or wash clothes. She is young, too; more children will come to gladden their home,

but for me there is only the little *bambino* which I have stole. I shall make the rich father support his child, though he knows it not.

"So I make the letter which ask for money, and threaten to kill the little one if he does not pay. I kill him? *Dio mio*, sooner would I starve myself than have him go without the good red wine, the goat's milk and the fine white bread every day!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the horrified father. "Is she feeding *my* child that?"

The woman paid no heed, but hurried on: "*Signori*, I am a wicked woman. I see it now. If I suffer because the good God, who own him, take my little boy to heaven, how much more shall this other poor mother suffer because a mortal, sinful woman, who have no right, steal away her little son from her? Yes.

"You come with me" — she cast big, tear-dimmed eyes pleadingly on each of us in turn — "I take you to my house and show you how nice I keep the little man and how he hold out his baby hands and smile when he see me come in."

Jules de Grandin twisted his mustache furiously and strove manfully to look fierce, but the voice which he tried to make stern had a surprisingly tender tone as he replied: "Take us to your house; we shall get the little one, and if all is as you say, it may be you shall not suffer too greatly for your crime."

"And now, my friends," de Grandin began when the little boy had been restored to his hysterically happy mother's arms, "you are due an explanation of my cleverness.

"When first I heard of the marks Madame Candace saw in the earth of her garden I knew not what to think. Snakes of the size the marks seemed to indicate are not native to this soil; I thought perchance she might be mistaken, even" — he made a quick, apologetic bow to Mrs. Candace — "that she might be stating something with no greater foundation than her imagination.

"When I did behold the letter asking for ransom I thought, 'Surely, this is the explanation of it all. We shall take this miscreant red-handed, perhaps recover the stolen child, as well; but at any rate, we shall take the kidnaper.

"Next morning I read where the excellent Monsieur Johannes lost a pig to a great snake. '*Parbleu*,' I say to me, 'this must be investigated. It may be the snake whose track Madame Candace saw did thrust his so hideous head into the room where her little one slept as lesser snakes thrust their heads into birds' nests, and made off with the baby.' It was not a pleasant thought, my friends; but we must see what we should see.

"So I interviewed Monsieur Johannes, and sure enough, I found the evidence of a real snake, a large one. 'Now,

what to do?' I ask me.

"It may easily be someone who knows nothing of the little man's whereabouts was trying to cheat Monsieur and Madame Candace of two thousand dollars, I know. I have seen such cases. He has asked in his letter that we throw the money from an automobile. 'Ah-ha, Monsieur the kidnaper,' I say 'Jules de Grandin shall throw you something you do not expect.'

I go to New York and have an artizan make me a satchel which is only one great tear-gas bomb disguised. In its top are many tiny holes, and inside its metal interior is much tear-gas, pumped in at great pressure. The handle is like a trigger, and the minute anyone grasps it the holes in the bag's top are opened and the gas rushes out, blinding the person who holds the handles. Remember, Friend Trowbridge, how I warned you not to touch those handles?

"Very good. 'But what connection have the snake with the stealing of the child?' I want to know. Not much, I believe, yet one thing make me stop and think. Was it only coincidence that those tracks appear in Madame Candace's garden the night her little boy was stolen? Perhaps so; perhaps not. At any rate, Jules de Grandin does not sleep when wakefulness is necessary. I have made also a fork something like the notched sticks the Burmese use to catch the great snakes of their country — the snakes which later make shoes for the pretty ladies. Now, I am ready for human kidnapers or reptile devourers of children.

"We go to the woods as the note directs, we fling out the bag, and the little woman who stole to refill her aching, empty heart, is caught by the success of my so clever bomb-satchel.

"So far all is well, but it was as well I had my snake-stick with me, for the excellent Beppo, who doubtless was a most affectionate snake, was also there, and I, not being aware of his good qualities, was obliged to exterminate him in self-defense. *Eh bien*, Beppo is not the first to die because of evil appearances.

"Friend Trowbridge, I think our work is done. We have restored the little boy to his parents; we have made one great fool of that so odious Perkinson person who suspected Madame Candace of killing her son; we have apprehended the kidnapper. Let us go."

He bowed to the company, strode to the door, then paused abruptly, a half-diffident, ingratiating smile on his face. "Monsieur Candace," he asked, "as a favor to me, if you feel at all obligated for the little I have done, I would ask that you be merciful to the poor, bereaved mother when her trial comes up. Remember, though she sinned against you greatly by stealing your child, her temptation was also great."

"Trial, hell!" Candace retorted. "There isn't going to be any trial. D'ye think I'd have the heart to prosecute her after what she told us at the barracks? Not much! As far as I'm concerned, she can go free now."

"*Eh bien*, Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin confided as we walked down the garden path, "I do admire that Monsieur Candace immensely. Truly, the great heart of America is reflected in the great hearts of her citizens."

As we reached the waiting car he paused with a chuckle. "And the great thirst of the great desert is reflected in Jules de Grandin," he confided. "Come, make haste, my friend, I pray. I would imbibe one of your so glorious gin rickies before I bid myself good night."

Body and Soul

I HAD HAD a strenuous day, for the mild epidemic of summer gripe had lasted over into September, and my round of calls had been double the usual number. “Thank heaven, I can relax for seven or eight hours,” I murmured piously as I pulled the single blanket up around my chin and settled myself for the night. The hall clock had just struck twelve, and I had no appointments earlier than nine the following morning. “If only nobody is so inconsiderate as to break a leg or get the bellyache,” I mumbled drowsily, “I’ll not stir from this bed until —”

As if to demonstrate the futility of self-congratulation, there came a sudden thunderous clamor at the front door. Someone was beating the panels with both his fists, raining frenzied blows on the wood with his feet and shrieking at the top of his voice, “Let me in! Doctor — Dr. Trowbridge, let me in! For God’s sake, let me in!”

“The devil!” I ejaculated, rising resentfully and feeling for my slippers and dressing-gown. “Couldn’t he have had the decency to ring the bell?”

“Let me in, let me in, Dr. Trowbridge!” the frantic hail came again as I rounded the bend of the stairs. “Let me in — quick!”

“All right, all right!” I counseled testily, undoing the lock and chain-fastener. “Just a min —”

The caller ceased his battering-ram assault on the door as I swung it back and catapulted past me into the hall, almost carrying me off my feet as he did so. “Quick, shut it — shut the door!” he gasped, wheeling in his tracks to snatch the knob from my hand and force the door to. “It’s out there — it’s outside there, I tell you!”

“What the mischief —” I began, half puzzled, half angry, as I took quick stock of the intruder.

He was a young man, twenty-five or -six, I judged, dressed somewhat foppishly in a suit of mohair dinner clothes, his jacket and waistcoat badly rumpled, his once stiff evening shirt and collar reduced to a pulpy mass of sweat-soaked linen, and the foamy froth of drool disfiguring the corners of his flaccid mouth. As he turned on me to repeat his hysterical warning, I noticed that he caught his breath with considerable difficulty and that there was a strong hint of liquor in his speech.

“See here, young man, what do you mean?” I demanded sternly. “Haven’t you any better sense than to knock a man out of bed at this ungodly hour to tell him that —”

“Ssssh!” he interrupted with the exaggerated caution of the half-tipsy. “Ssssh, Dr. Trowbridge, I think I hear it

coming up the steps. Is the door locked? Quick, in here!” Snatching me by the arm he dragged me unceremoniously into the surgery.

“Now see here, confound you!” I remonstrated. “This is going a bit too far. If you expect to get away with this sort of thing, I’ll mighty soon show you —”

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, what is it? What does the alarm portend?” Jules de Grandin, a delicate mauve-silk dressing-gown drawn over his lilac pajamas, slippers of violet snake-skin on his womanishly small feet, tiptoed into the room, his little blue eyes round with wonder and curiosity. “I thought I heard someone in extremity calling,” he continued, looking from the visitor to me, then back again with his quick, stock-taking glance. “Is it that someone dies and requires our assistance through the door to the better world, or —”

“It looks as if some drunken young fool is trying to play a practical joke on us,” I returned grimly, bending a stern look on the boy who cowered in the chair beside my desk. “I’ve half a mind to prescribe four ounces of castor oil and stand by while he takes it!”

De Grandin regarded the young man with his steady, unwinking stare a moment, then: “What frightens you, *mon brave*?” he demanded, far too gently, I thought. “*Parbleu*, but, you look as though you had been playing tag with Satan himself!”

“I have — I have!” the youth replied quaveringly. “I tell you, it jumped at me just as I came past the park entrance, and I wasn’t a hundred yards ahead when Dr. Trowbridge let me in!”

“U’m?” the Frenchman twisted the ends of his little blond mustache meditatively. “And this ‘It’ which pursued you, it is what?”

“I don’t know,” the other responded. “I was walking home from a dance at the Sigma Delta Tau house — been staggling it, you know — and stopped by the Victory Monument to light a cigarette when something — dam’ if I know what — jumped out o’ the bushes at me and made a grab at my throat. It missed my neck by a couple o’ inches, but snatched my hat, and I didn’t take any time to see what it would do next. I’d ‘a’ been going yet if my wind hadn’t given out, and I happened to think that Dr. Trowbridge lives in this block and that he’d most likely be up, or within call, anyhow, so I rushed up the steps and hammered on the door till he let me in.

“Will you let me stay here overnight?” he concluded, turning to me appealingly. “I’m Dick Ratliff — Henry

Ratliff's nephew, you know — and honest, Doctor, I'm scared stiff to go out in that street again till daylight."

"H'm," I murmured judiciously, surveying the young fool reflectively. He was not a bad-looking boy — quite otherwise — and I could well imagine he presented a personable enough appearance when his clothing was in better array and his head less fuddled with bad liquor. "How much have you had to drink tonight, young man?"

"Two drinks, sir," he returned promptly, looking me squarely in the eye, and, though my better judgment told me he was lying like a witness at a Senate investigation, I believed him.

"I think you're a damn fool," I told him with more candor than courtesy. "You were probably so full of rotgut that your own shadow gave you a start back there by the park gate, and you've been trying to outrace it for the last four blocks. You'll be heartily ashamed of yourself in the morning, but I've a spare bed, and you may as well sleep off your debauch here as in some police station, I suppose."

"Thank you, sir," he answered humbly. "I don't blame you for thinking I've got the jim-jams — I know my story sounds crazy — but I'm telling you the truth. Something did jump out at me, and almost succeeded in grabbing me by the throat. It wasn't just imagination, and it wasn't booze, either, but — my God, *look!*"

The exclamation ended in a shrill crescendo, and the lad half leaped from his chair, pointing with a shaking forefinger at the little window over the examination table, then slumped back as though black-jacked, his hands falling limply to the floor, his head lolling drunkenly forward on his breast.

Both de Grandin and I wheeled about, facing the window. "Good lord!" I exclaimed as my gaze penetrated the shining, night-backed panes.

"*Grand Dieu — ç'est le diable en personne!*" the little Frenchman cried.

Staring into the dimly lighted room was such a visage as might bring shudders of horripilation to a bronze statue. It was a long, cadaverous face, black with the dusky hue of old and poorly cured rawhide, bony as a death's-head, yet covered with a multitude of tiny horizontal wrinkles. The fleshless, leathery lips were drawn back from a set of broken and discolored teeth which reminded me somehow of the cruel dentition of a shark, and the corded, rugous neck supporting the withered face was scarcely thicker than a man's wrist. From the bare, black scalp there hung a single lock of coarse, straggling hair. But terrible as the features were, terrifying as were the unflashed lips and cheeks and brow, the tiny, deep-set eyes almost fallen backward from their sockets were even more horrible. Small as the eyes of a rodent, set, unwavering in their stare, they reminded me, as

they gleamed with hellish malevolence in their settings of shrunken, wrinkled skin, of twin poisonous spiders awaiting the chance to pounce upon their prey. It might have been a trick of the lamplight, but to me it seemed that the organs shone with a diabolical luminance of their own as they regarded us with a sort of mirthless smile.

"Good heavens, what is it?" I choked, half turning to my companion, yet keeping most of my glance fixed on the baneful, hypnotic orbs glaring at me through the windowpane.

"God knows," returned de Grandin, "but by the belly of Jonah's whale, we shall see if he be proof against shot and powder!" Whipping a tiny Ortgies automatic from his dressing-gown pocket he brought its blunt muzzle in line with the window and pressed the trigger. Seven, eight shots rang out so quickly that the last seemed no more than the echo of the first; the plate glass pane was perforated like a sieve within an area of three square inches; and the sharp, acrid smell of smokeless powder bit the mucous membrane of my nostrils.

"After him, Friend Trowbridge!" de Grandin cried, flinging aside the empty pistol and bolting through the door, down the hallway and across the porch. "*Barbe d'une oie*, but we shall see how he liked the pills I dealt him!"

The September moon rode serenely in the dark-blue sky; a little vagrant breeze, coming from the bay, rustled the boughs of the curbside maple trees; and from the downtown section there came to us, faintly, the muted clangor of the all-night trolley cars and the occasional hoot of a cruising taxicab's horn. After the bedlam of the Frenchman's shots the early autumn night seemed possessed of a stillness which bore in on our eardrums like a tangible sound, and, like visitors in an empty church, we pursued our quest in silence, communicating only in low, breathless whispers. From house to hedge, over lawn and rosebed and tennis court we pushed our search, scanning every square inch of land, peering under rosebushes and rhododendron plants, even turning over the galvanized iron trash-can which stood by my kitchen stoop. No covert large enough to have shielded a rat did we leave unexplored, yet of the awful thing which had gazed through the surgery window we found no sign or trace, though we hunted till the eastern sky began to pale with streaks of rose and pearl and amethyst and the rattling milk carts broke the nighttime quiet with their early-morning clatter.

"Good mornin', Dr. de Grandin." Detective Sergeant Costello rose from his seat in the consulting-room as de Grandin and I entered. "'Tis sorry I am to be disturbin' ye so early in th' mornin', more especially as I know what store ye set by yer breakfast" — he grinned broadly at his sally — "but th' fact is, sor, there's been a tidy little murder

committed up th' street, an' I'm wondering if ye'd be discommodin' yerself to th' extent o' comin' up to Professor Kolisko's house and takin' a look around before th' coroner's physician messes everything up an' carts th' remains off to the morgue for an autopsy."

"A murder?" de Grandin's little eyes snapped with sudden excitement. "Do you say a murder? My friend, you delight me!"

"Yes, sor, I knew y'd be pleased to hear about it," the Irishman answered soberly. "Will we be goin' up to th' house at once, sor?"

"But of course, by all means," de Grandin assented. "Trowbridge, my friend, you will have the charity to convey us thither, will you not? Come, let us hasten to this Monsieur Kolisko's house and observe what we can see. And" — his little eyes twinkled as he spoke — "I beseech you, implore the so excellent Nora to reserve sufficient breakfast against the time of our return. *Mordieu*, already I feel my appetite assuming giant proportions!"

Two minutes later the detective, de Grandin and I were speeding uptown toward the isolated cottage where Urban Kolisko, one-time professor of psychology at the University at Warsaw, had passed the declining years of his life as a political refugee.

"Tell me, Friend Costello," the Frenchman demanded; "this Monsieur Kolisko, how did he die?"

"H'm, that's just what's puzzlin' all of us," the detective admitted. "All we know about th' case is that Murphy, who has th' beat where th' old felly lived wuz passin' by there a little after midnight an' heard th' devil's own row goin' on inside. The lights, wuz all goin' in th' lower part o' th' house, which warn't natural, an' when Murphy stopped to hear what it wuz all about, he thought he heard someone shoutin' an' swearin', an' once or twice th' crack o' a whip, then nothin' at all.

"Murphy's a good lad, sor; I've knowed him, man an' boy, these last eighteen years, an' he did just what I'd expected o' him. Went up an' knocked on th' door, an' when he couldn't get no response, broke it in. There was hell broke loose for certain, sor."

"Ah?" returned de Grandin. "What did the excellent Murphy observe?"

"Plenty," Costello replied laconically. "Ye'll be seein' it for yerself in a minute."

Inside the Kolisko house was that peculiar hush which does reverence to the Grim Reaper's visits. Acting on telephoned instructions, Officer Murphy mounted guard before the door, permitting no one to enter the place, and the scene in the small, poorly lighted living-room was exactly as he had come upon it several hours earlier. Like most dyed-in-the-wool students, Kolisko had regarded his home merely as a place to sleep, eat and store books. The room

was lined from floor to ceiling on all sides with rough deal shelving which groaned and sagged under the weight of ponderous volumes in every language known to print. Piles of other books, unable to find accommodation on the shelves, were littered about the floor. The rough, bench-like table and the littered, untidy desk which stood between the two small windows were also piled high with books.

Between the desk and table, flat on its back, staring endlessly at the rough whitewashed ceiling with bulging, sightless eyes, lay the relic of Professor Kolisko. Clothed in a tattered bathrobe and soiled pajamas the body lay, and it was not a pretty sight even to a medical man to whom death in its unloveliest phases is no stranger. Kolisko had been thin to the point of emaciation, and his scrawniness was accentuated in death. His white-thatched head was thrown back and bent grotesquely to one side, his straggling white beard thrust upward truculently, and his lower jaw had fallen downward with the flaccidity of death, half an inch or so of tongue protruding beyond the line of his lower teeth. Any doctor, soldier or undertaker — any man whose business has to do habitually with death — could not fail to recognize the signs. The man was dead, and had been so for upward of seven hours.

"Howly Mither!" Costello's brogue came strongly to the surface as he blessed himself involuntarily. "Will ye be lookin' at th' awfulness o' him, sors?"

"U'm," murmured Jules de Grandin, sinking to one knee beside the corpse, raising the lolling head and fingering the back of the neck with quick, practiced hands, then brushing back the bristling beard to examine the scrawny throat attentively, "he had cause to be dead, this one. See, Friend Trowbridge" — taking my hand he guided my fingers slowly down the dead man's neck, then pointed to the throat — "there is a clean fracture of the spine between the third and fourth dorsal vertebræ, probably involving a rupture of the cord, as well. The autopsy will disclose that. And here" — he tapped the throat with a well-manicured forefinger — "are the marks of strangulation. *Mordieu*, whatever gripped this poor one's neck possessed a hold like Death himself, for he not only choked him, but broke his spine as well! If it were not for one thing, I should say such strength — such ferocity of grip — could only have been exerted by one of the great apes, but —"

He broke off, staring with preoccupied, unseeing eyes at the farther wall.

"But what, sor?" Costello prompted as the little man's silence continued.

"*Parbleu*, it could not be an ape and leave such a thumb-mark, my friends," de Grandin returned. "The gorilla, the orangutan, the chimpanzee, all have such strength of hand as to accomplish what we see here, but they are not human, no matter how much they parody mankind. Their thumbs are

undeveloped; the thumb which closed on this one's neck was long and thin, more like a finger than a thumb. See for yourselves, it closed about the throat, meeting the fingers which clasped it on the other side. *Mordieu*, if we are to find this murderer we must look for one with twice the length and five times the strength of hand of the average man. Bethink you — this one's grip was great enough to snap Kolisko's spine like a clay-pipe stem by merely squeezing his neck! *Dieu de Dieu*, but he will be an uncomfortable one to meet in the dark!"

"Sergeant Costello," Murphy's hail came sharply from the cottage door, "they're comin'; Coroner Martin an' Dr. Schuester just drove up!"

"All right, Murphy, good lad!" Costello returned, then glanced sharply at de Grandin. "Leave him be, Doc," he ordered. "If the coroner an' Dr. Schuester catch us monkeyin' with their property there'll be hell poppin' at headquarters."

"Very good, my friend," de Grandin rejoined, rising and brushing the dust from his trousers knees, "we have seen as much of the body as we desire. Let them have it and perform their gruesome rites; we shall look elsewhere for what we seek."

Coroner Martin and his physician came bustling in almost as the little Frenchman ceased speaking, glanced casually at Costello and suspiciously at de Grandin and me, then went at their official duties with only a mumbled word of greeting.

"What do you make of it?" I inquired as we drove toward my house.

"*Eh bien*, as yet I make nothing," de Grandin returned. "The man was killed by paralysis resulting from a broken neck, although the pressure on his windpipe would have been sufficient to have slain him, had it but continued long enough. We know his murderer possessed hands of extraordinary strength and size, and is, therefore, in all probability, a man of more than usual height. Thus far we step with assurance. When the coroner has finished with the deceased gentleman's premises, we shall afford ourselves the pleasure of a protracted search; before that we shall request our good friend Costello to inquire into Monsieur Kolisko's antecedents and discover if he possessed any enemies, especially any enemies capable of doing him to death in this manner. Meantime I famish for my breakfast. I am hungry as a cormorant."

The boasted appetite was no mere figure of speech. Three bowls of steaming cereal, two generous helpings of bacon and eggs, half a dozen cups of well-creamed coffee disappeared into his interior before he pushed back his chair and lighted a rank-smelling French cigarette with a sigh of utter content. "*Eh bien*, but it is difficult to think on an empty stomach," he assured me as he blew a column of

smoke toward the ceiling. "Me, I am far from my best when there is nothing but flatulence beneath my belt. I require stimu — *Mon Dieu*, what a fool I am!"

Striking his forehead with the heel of his hand, he rose so abruptly that his chair almost capsized behind him.

"What's the matter?" I asked, but he waved my question and me aside with an impatient hand.

"*Non, non*, do not stop me, do not hinder me, my friend!" he ordered. "Me, I have important duties to perform, if it be not too late to do them. Go upon your errands of mercy, Friend Trowbridge, and should you chance to return before I quit the surgery, I pray you leave me undisturbed. I have to do that which is needful, and I must do it uninterrupted, if you please."

Having thus served notice on me that I would be unwelcome in my own workshop, he turned and fled toward the front door like a luckless debtor pursued by collectors.

It was nearly four o'clock that afternoon when I returned from my round of calls and tiptoed past the surgery door, only to find my caution unnecessary, for de Grandin sat in the cool, darkened library, smoking a cigar and chuckling over some inane story in *L'Illustration*.

"Finish the important duties?" I asked, regarding him ironically.

"But certainly," he returned. "First, dear friend, I must apologize most humbly for my so abominable rudeness of this morning. It is ever my misfortune, I fear, to show only incivility to those who most deserve my courtesy, but I was all afire with the necessity of haste when I spoke. Great empty-head that I was, I had completely forgotten for the moment that one of the best places to seek clues of a murder is the person of the victim himself, and when I did remember I was almost beside myself until I ascertained to which *entrepreneur des pompes funèbres* — How do you say it? Undertaker? — my God, what a language! — Monsieur Kolisko's body had been entrusted by the coroner. Friend Costello informed me that Monsieur Mitchell was in charge, and to the excellent Mitchell I hurried post-haste, begging that he would permit me one little minute alone with the deceased before he commenced his ministrations."

"H'm, and did you find anything?" I asked.

"*Parbleu*, yes; I found almost too much. From the nails of Monsieur Kolisko's hands I rescued some fragments, and in your surgery I subjected them to microscopic examination. They proved to be — what do you say?"

"Tobacco?" I hazarded.

"Tobacco!" he scoffed. "Friend Trowbridge, sometimes I think you foolish; at others I fear you are merely stupid. Beneath the dead man's finger-nails I found some bits of human skin — and a fragment of human hair."

"Well," I returned unenthusiastically, "what of it?"

Kolisko was an exceedingly untidy sort of person — the kind who cared so little for social amenities that he was apt to scratch himself vigorously when he chose, and probably he was also addicted to the habit of scrabbling through his beard with his fingers. Most of those European scientists with birds' nests sprouting from their chins are that sort, you know. He was shockingly uncouth, and —”

“And you annoy me most thoroughly, Friend Trowbridge,” the little Frenchman broke in. “Listen, attend me, regard that which I am about to tell you: The skin and hair which I did find were black, my friend, black as bitumen, and subjected to chemical reagents, showed themselves to be strongly impregnated with natron, oil of cedar and myrrh. What have you to say now?”

“Why—”

“And if these things suggest an Egyptian mummy to you, as they may if you think steadily for the next ten or more years, I make so bold as to ask what would a professor of psychology be doing in contact with a mummy. *Hein?* Answer me that, if you please. Had he been an Egyptologist, or even a student of comparative anatomy, there would be reason for it, but a psychologist — it does not make sense!”

“Well, then, why bother about it?” I retorted.

“Ah, but I think maybe, perhaps, there is an answer to the riddle, after all,” he insisted. “Recall the events of last night, if you please. Remember how that young Monsieur Ratliff came bawling like a frightened calf to our door, begging to be taken in and protected from something which assaulted him in the public thoroughfares. Recollect how we suspected him of an overindulgence in alcohol, and how, as we were about to turn him out, there appeared at our window a most unpleasant-looking thing which made mock of Jules de Grandin's marksmanship. *Parbleu*, yes, you will recall all that, as well as that the ungrateful Ratliff child did sneak away from the house without so much as saying ‘thank you’ for our hospitality while we were out with Sergeant Costello viewing Monsieur Kolisko's remains.”

“Then you'd suggest —” I began incredulously, but he rose with an impatient shrug.

“Ah bah, I think nothing, my friend,” he assured me. “He who thinks without knowing is a fool. A connection there may be between that which we saw last night and that which we viewed this morning. We shall see, perhaps. I have an engagement to search Kolisko's house with Sergeant Costello this evening, and I suggest you accompany us. There may be that there which shall cause your eyes to pop from out your face with wonder. Meantime, I hear visitors in the reception-room. Go to your duties, my friend. Some neurotic old lady undoubtedly desires you to sympathize with her latest symptoms.”

“Well, sor,” confided Sergeant Costello as he, de Grandin

and I set out for the Kolisko cottage that evening, “this case beats th' Jews, an' th' Jews beat the devil.”

“Indeed?” responded de Grandin politely.

“It sure does. We've been over Kolisko's antecedents, as ye might call 'em, an' th' devil a thing can we find that might lead us to a clue as to who killed him. 'Twas little enough they knew about him, at best, for he was a stand-offish old felly wid never a word for anybody, except when he wanted sumpin, which warn't often. He had a few Polack cronies, but they wuz few an' far between. Five months ago a felly broke into his house an' stole some stuff o' triflin' value, an' shot up a State trooper while tryin' to escape to th' next town. Kolisko appeared agin 'im at th' trial, as wuz his dooty, for he wuz subpoenaed, an' later visited 'im in jail, I understand, but this, felly — name o' Heschler, he wuz — didn't take anny too kindly to th' professor's visits, an' he cut 'em out.”

“Ah,” de Grandin nursed his narrow chin in the cradle of his hand, “perhaps it is that this Heschler harbored malice and wreaked vengeance on Monsieur Kolisko for the part he had in his conviction?”

“P'raps,” agreed Costello shortly, “but 'tain't likely.”

“And why not?” the Frenchman demanded shortly. Like most men who keep their own counsel, he was easily annoyed by others' reticence.

“Because they burned him at Camden last night, sor.”

“Burned? How do you mean —”

“Sure, burned him. Bumped 'im off, rubbed 'im out, gave 'im th' chair — electrocuted 'im. He was a murderer, warn't he?” Costello elucidated.

“U'm,” the Frenchman gulped over the information like one trying to clear his mouth of an unpalatable morsel, “you are doubtless right, Sergeant; we may regard this Heschler as eliminated — perhaps.”

“P'raps?” echoed the amazed Irishman as I brought the car to a halt before the cottage door. “P'raps me neck! If you'll listen to me, I'll say he's been eliminated altogether entirely be th' State executioner!”

Our search was startlingly unproductive. A few letters in envelopes with foreign postmarks, receipts for small bills for groceries and kindred household items, one or two invitations to meetings of learned societies — this was the sum total produced by an hour's rummaging among the dead man's papers.

“*Tiens*, it would seem we have come on the chase of the wild goose,” de Grandin admitted disconsolately, wiping the sweat from his forehead with a pale blue silk handkerchief. “*Zut*, it seems impossible that any man should have so much paper of so little importance. Me, I think that —”

“Here's sumpin that might help us, if it's papers ye're after,” Costello interrupted, appearing at the kitchen door

with a rough wooden box in his hand. "I found it behind th' stove, sor. Most of it seems of little enough account, but you might find sumpin that'd —"

"Aside, stand aside, my friend!" the Frenchman ordered, leaping on the box like a famished cat on a mouse and scattering its contents over the living-room table. "What have we here? *Mordieu*, another receipt from that twenty-times-damned Public Service Company! Name of a rooster, did the man do nothing but contract and pay bills for electric light? Another one — and another! *Grand Dieu*, if I find but one more of these receipts I shall require a strait-waistcoat to restrain myself. What, another — ah, *trionphe!* At last we find something else!" From the pile of scrambled papers he unearthed a small, black-leather book and began riffling through its pages.

Pausing to read an inscription at random, he regarded the page with upraised brows and pursed lips, seated himself beside the table and brought his eyes to within a few inches of the small, crabbed writing with which the book seemed filled.

Five minutes he sat thus studying the memoranda, his brows gradually rising till I feared they would impinge upon the line of his smoothly combed blond hair. Finally: "My friends, this is of the importance," he assured us, looking quickly from one to the other with his queer, direct glance. "Monsieur Kolisko made these entries in his diary in mingled Polish and French. I shall endeavor to render them into English tonight, and tomorrow morning we shall go over them together. Thus far I have read little, but that little may explain much, or I am much mistaken."

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin requested the following morning when my round of calls was finished, "will you please read what I have written? All night I labored over this translation, and this morning my eyes are not sufficient to the task of reading my own script."

He thrust a sheaf of neatly written foolscap into my hands, then lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, his small hands locked behind his head, his eyes half closed, as he surveyed Costello and me lazily.

Glancing from de Grandin to the waiting detective, I set my pince-nez firmly on my nose and began:

April 5 — Michel was here again last night, nagging me with his silly talk of the soul and its immortality. To think that one so well educated should entertain such childish ideas! I would have ordered him from the house in anger, as I did once before, had he not been more than usually insulting. After taunting me with the old story about a body's being weighed a few minutes after death and found lighter than before, thereby proving that something of material weight had passed from it, he challenged me to prove the non-existence of any entity separate from the physical being. Fool! It is he who asserts the proposition, not

I. Yet I must think of some way to confound him, or he will be everlastingly reminding me that I failed to meet his test.

April 10 — Michel is a greater fool than I thought. I hold him and his faith in the hollow of my hand, and by his own act. Last night he proposed the wildest scheme ever broached by man. The burglar who broke into my house last month has been sentenced to death for killing a policeman. Michel would have me see the fellow in prison, arrange for a transmigration of his soul to a body which he will secure, and await results of the experiment. It is childish folly; I insult my own intelligence by agreeing to it, but I must silence Michel and his everlasting patter of the soul's immortality. I shall undertake the task, if only to prove my cousin a fool.

May 16 — Yesterday I saw Heschler in prison. The poor fellow was almost beside himself with joy when I told him of Michel's wild plan. Not dying, but fear of punishment in the world to come seems to terrify the man. If I can provide a tenement for his soul which will enable it to remain away from the seat of judgment a little longer, he will be content, even though he has to live in the body of a child, a cripple or one already bowed with age. Living out the span of life in the second body we provide, he will so conduct himself as to win pardon for misdeeds committed in the frame he now wears, he vows. Poor, hoodwinked fool! Like all Christians, he is bound hand and foot by the old superstitions which have come down to us through the ages. That Heschler, the burglar, should adhere to the *Christus* myth, the God fairy-tale, is not surprising, for he is but an ignorant clod; but that my cousin Michel Kolisko, a learned man, should give credit to beliefs which were outworn and disproved in the Nineteenth Century is beyond my understanding.

May 30 — Today I had another talk with Heschler. He is pitifully anxious to begin the experiment. It was childishly simple. Ordering him to gaze steadfastly into my eyes through the bars of his cell, I soon had him completely hypnotized. "You will hereafter cease to dread your coming execution," I told him. "From this time forth you will think of nothing but the opportunity of living on in another body which is to be afforded you. At the moment of execution you will concentrate all your will upon entering the body which will be waiting at my home to receive your soul." He nodded as I gave each command, and I left him. It will not be necessary to repeat my orders. He was already half insane with the obsession of prolonging his life. My work was more than half done before I gave him the directions. I shall not see him again.

The next page bore a clipping from the *Newark Call*:

Adolph Heschler, confined in the penitentiary at Camden awaiting execution for the murder of State Trooper James Donovan on the night of March 20th last, seems resigned to his fate. When first taken to the state prison he seemed in deadly fear of death and spent most of his time in prayer. Prison officials say that he began to show signs of resignation following the memorial services on May 30th, and it is said he declares his conscience is cleared by the thought that he shall be allowed the opportunity of atoning for his misdeeds. Curiously enough, Heschler, who has heretofore shown the most devout appreciation of the ministrations of the prison's

Catholic chaplain, will have nothing further to do with the spiritual advisor, declaring “atonement for his sins has been arranged.” There is talk of having him examined by a lunacy commission before the date set for his execution.

Another translation of the diary followed:

August 30 — Michel has come with the body. It is a mummy! When I expressed my astonishment, he told me it was the best possible corpse for the purpose. After hearing him, I realized he has the pseudo-logic of the mildly insane. The body of one who has died from natural causes or by violence would be unfitted for our purposes, he says, since some of its organs must inevitably be unable to function properly. This mummy is not a true mummy, but the body of an Egyptian guilty of sacrilege, who was sealed up alive in a tomb during the Hyksos dynasty. He died of asphyxia, in all probability, and his body is in perfect condition, except for the dehydration due to lying so many thousands of years in a perfectly dry atmosphere. Michel rescued the mummy during his last expedition to Egypt, and tells me there was evidence of the man’s having made a terrific struggle before death put an end to his sufferings. Other bodies, properly mummified, were found in the same tomb, and the dying man had overturned many of the cases and spilled their contents about the place. His body was so thoroughly impregnated with the odor of the spices and preservatives, absorbed from the mummies lying in the tomb, that it was not for some time his discoverers realized he had not been eviscerated and embalmed. Michel assures me the dead man will be perfectly able to act as an envelope for Heschler’s soul when the electrocution has been performed. Cousin Michel, if this body does but so much as wiggle its fingers or toes after the authorities have killed Heschler, I will believe — I will believe.

I laid down the final page of de Grandin’s translation and looked wonderingly at him. “Where’s the rest of it?” I demanded. “Couldn’t you do any more last night?”

“The rest,” he answered ironically, “is for us to find out, my friends. The journal stops with the entry you have just read. There was no more.”

“Humph,” Sergeant Costello commented, “crazy as a pair o’ fish out o’ water, weren’t they? Be gorry, gentlemen, I’m thinkin’ it’s a crazy man we’d best be lookin’ for. I can see it all plain, now. This here Cousin Michael o’ Professor Kolisko’s was a religious fy-nat-ic, as th’ felly says, an’ th’ pair o’ ’em got to fightin’ among themselves an’ th’ professor came out second best. That’s th’ answer, or my name ain’t—”

The sudden shrilling of the office telephone interrupted him. “Sergeant Costello, please,” a sharp voice demanded as I picked up the receiver.

“Yeah, this is Costello speakin’,” the detective announced, taking the instrument from me. “Yep. All right, go ahead. *What?* Just like th’ other one? My Gawd!”

“What is it?” de Grandin and I asked in chorus as he put

down the receiver and turned a serious face to us.

“Miss Adkinson, an old lady livin’ by herself out by th’ cemetery, has been found murdered,” he replied slowly, “an’ th’ marks on her throat tally exactly wid those on Professor Kolisko’s!”

“*Cordieu!*” de Grandin shouted, leaping from his chair as if it had suddenly become white-hot. “We must hasten, we must rush, we must fly to that house, my friends! We must examine the body, we must assure ourselves before some bungling coroner’s physician spoils everything!”

Two minutes later we were smashing the speed ordinances in an effort to reach the Adkinson house before Coroner Martin arrived.

Stark tragedy repeated itself in the Adkinson cottage. The old lady, gaunt with the leanness of age to which time has not been over-kind, lay in a crumpled heap on her kitchen floor, and a moment’s examination disclosed the same livid marks on her throat and the same horrifying limberness of neck which we had observed when viewing Professor Kolisko’s body.

“By Gawd, gentlemen, this is terrible!” Costello swore as he turned from the grisly relic. “Here’s an old man kilt at night an’ a harmless old woman murdered in broad daylight, an’ no one to tell us anything certain about th’ murderer!”

“*Ha*, do you say so?” de Grandin responded sharply, his little eyes flashing with excitement. “*Parbleu*, my friend, but you are greatly wrong, as wrong as can be. There *is* one who can tell us, and tell us he shall, if I must wring the truth from him with my bare hands!”

“What d’ye mean — ?” Sergeant Costello began, but the little Frenchman had already turned toward the door, dragging frantically at my elbow.

“Clutch everything, *mes amis*,” he commanded. “Retain all; me, I go to find him who can tell us what we need to know. *Mordieu*, I shall find him though he takes refuge in the nethermost subcellar of hell! Come, Trowbridge, my friend; I would that you drive me to the station where I can entrain for New York.”

Shortly after seven o’clock that evening I answered the furious ringing of my telephone to hear de Grandin’s excited voice come tumbling out of the receiver. “Come at once, my friend,” he ordered, fairly stuttering in his elation. “Rush with all speed to the Carmelite Fathers’ retreat in East Thirty-Second Street. Bring the excellent Costello with you, too, for there is one here who can shed the light of intelligence on our ignorance.”

“Who is it — ?” I began, but the sharp click of a receiver smashed into its hook cut short my query, and I turned in disgust from the unresponsive instrument to transmit the Frenchman’s message to Sergeant Costello.

Within sight of Bellevue's grim mortuary, enshrouded by the folds of drab East River fog as a body is wrapped in its winding-sheet, the little religious community seemed as incongruously out of place in the heart of New York's poverty-ridden East Side as a nun in a sweatshop. Striding up and down the polished floor of the bare, immaculately clean reception-room was Jules de Grandin, a glowing cigarette between his fingers, his tiny, waxed mustache standing straight out from the corners of his mouth like the whiskers of an excited tom-cat. "At last!" he breathed as Costello and I followed the porter from the front door to the public room. "*Morbleu*, I thought you had perished on the way.

"Monsieur," he paused in his restless pacing and stopped before the figure sitting motionless in the hard, straight-backed chair at the farther side of the room, "you will please tell these gentlemen what you have told me and be of haste in doing so. We have small time to waste."

I glanced curiously at the seated man. His strong resemblance to the dead Kolisko was remarkable. He possessed a mop of untidy, iron-gray hair and a rather straggling gray beard; his forehead was high, narrow and startlingly white, almost transparent, and the skin of his face was puckered into hundreds of little, wrinkles as though his skull had shrunk, leaving the epidermis without support. His eyes, however, differed radically from Kolisko's, for even in death the professor's orbs had shown a hard, implacable nature, whereas this man's eyes, though shaded by beetling, overhanging brows, were soft and brown. Somehow, they reminded me of the eyes of an old and very gentle dog begging not to be beaten.

"I am Michel Kolisko," he began, clearing his throat with a soft, deprecating cough. "Urban Kolisko was my cousin, son of my father's brother. We grew up together in Poland, attended the same schools and colleges, and dreamed the same dreams of Polish independence. I was twenty, Urban was twenty-three when the Tsar's officers swooped down on our fathers, carried them off to rot in Siberia, and confiscated most of our family's fortune. Both of us were suspected of complicity in the revolutionary movement, and fled for our lives, Urban to Paris, I to Vienna. He matriculated at the Sorbonne and devoted himself to the study of psychology; I studied medicine in Vienna, then went to Rome, and finally took up Egyptology as my life's work.

"Twenty years passed before I saw my cousin again. The Russian proscription had been raised, and he had gone to Warsaw, where he taught in the university. When I went there to visit him, I was shocked to learn he had abandoned God and taken to the worship of the material world. Kant, Spencer, Richet, Wundt — these were his prophets and his priests; the God of our fathers he disowned and denied. I argued with him, pleaded with him to return to his

childhood's belief, and he turned me out of his house.

"Once again he earned the displeasure of the Tsar and escaped arrest only by a matter of moments. Fleeing to this country, he took up residence in your city, and devoted himself to penning revolutionary propaganda and atheistic theses. Broken in health, but with sufficient money to insure me of a quiet old age, I followed him to America and made it the work of my declining years to convert him from his apostasy.

"This spring it seemed I was beginning to succeed, for he showed more patience with me than ever before; but he was a hardened sinner, his heart was steeled against the call of consciousness, even as was Pharaoh's of old. He challenged me to offer evidence of God's truth, and promised he would turn again to religion if I could."

For a moment the speaker paused in his monotonous, almost mumbled recitation, wrung his bloodless hands together in a gesture of despair, pressed his fingers to his forehead, as though to crowd back departing reason, then took up his story, never raising his voice, never stressing one word more than another, keeping his eyes fixed on vacancy. He reminded me of a child reciting a distasteful lesson by rote.

"I see we were both mad, now," he confided drearily. "Mad, mad with the sense of our own importance, for Urban defied divine providence, and I forgot that it is not man's right to attempt to prove God's truth as revealed to us by his ordained ministers. It is ours to believe, and to question not. But I was carried away by the fervor of my mission. 'If I can shake Urban's doubts, I shall surely win a crown of glory,' I told myself, 'for surely there is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.' And so I went about the sacrilegious business of the test.

"Among the curios I had brought from Egypt was the body of a man sealed alive in a tomb during the Hyksos rule. It was not really a mummy, for no embalming had been performed, but the superheated atmosphere of the tomb in which he had been incarcerated had shriveled his tissues until it was difficult to tell him from a body mummified by artificial methods. Only three or four such bodies are known; one is the celebrated Flinders mummy, and the others are in French and British museums. I had intended leaving mine to the Metropolitan when I died.

"I brought this body to Urban's house the night before Heschler, the condemned murderer, was to be executed, and we laid it on the library table. Urban viewed it with disgust and skepticism, but I prayed over it, begging God to work a miracle, to permit the body to move, if only very slightly, and so convince my poor, misguided cousin. You know, gentlemen" — he turned his sorrowful, lackluster eyes on us with a melancholy smile — "such things are not entirely unknown. Sudden changes in temperature or in the moisture content of the atmosphere often lead to a movement as the

dehydrated tissues take up water from the air. The mummy of Rameses the Great, for instance, moved its arm when first exposed to the outdoor air.

"A few minutes after midnight was the time set for Heschler's electrocution, and as the town clocks began rounding the hour I felt as though the heavens must fall if no sign were manifested to us.

"Urban sat beside the mummy, smoking his pipe and sneering — part of the time reading an impious book by Freud. I bowed my head in silent prayer, asking for a miracle to save him despite his hardness of heart. The city hall clock struck the quarter hour, then the half, and still there was no sound. Urban laid his pipe and book aside and looked at me with his familiar sneer, then turned as though to thrust the body of the Egyptian from the table — *then it sat up!*

"Like a sleeper waking from a dream, like a patient coming forth from the ether it was — the corpse that had been dead four thousand years rose from the table and looked at us. For a moment it seemed to smile with its fleshless lips, then it looked down at itself, and gave a scream of surprise and fury.

"'So!' it shrieked; 'so *this* is the body you've given me to work out my salvation! This is the form in which I must walk the earth until my sins be wiped away, is it? You've tricked me, cheated me; but I'll have vengeance. No one living can harm me, and I'll take my toll of human kind before I finally go forth to stew and burn in Satan's fires!'

"It was stiff and brittle, but somehow it managed to crawl from the table and make at Urban. He seized a heavy whip which hung on the wall and struck the thing on the head with its loaded butt. The blow would have killed an ordinary man — indeed, I saw the mummy's dried-up skull cave in beneath the force of Urban's flailings, but it never faltered in its attack, never missed a step in its pursuit of vengeance.

"Then I went mad. I fled from that accursed house and buried myself in this retreat, where I have spent every moment since, denying myself both food and sleep, deeming every second left me all too short to beg divine forgiveness for the terrible sacrilege I have committed."

"So, my friends, you see?" de Grandin turned to Costello and me as the half-hysterical Pole concluded his preposterous narrative.

"Sure, I do," the detective returned. "Didn't th' felly say he's mad? Be dad, they say crazy folks tell th' truth, an' he ain't stretchin' it none when he says his steeple's full o' bats."

"Ah bah!" de Grandin shot back. "You weary me, my friend."

To Kolisko he said: "Your story supplies the information which we so sorely needed, sir. Whatever the result of your experiment, your motives were good, nor do I think the good God will be too hard upon you. If you do truly wish

forgiveness, pray that we shall be successful in destroying the monster before more harm is done. *Cordieu*, but we shall need all your prayers, and a vast deal of luck as well, I think; for killing that which is already dead is no small task."

"Now what?" demanded Costello with a sidelong glance at de Grandin as we emerged from the religious house. "Got some more loonies for us to listen to?"

"*Parbleu*, if you will but give ear to your own prattle, you shall have all that sort of conversation you wish, I think, *cher Sergent*," the little Frenchman jerked back with a smile which took half the acid from his words. Then:

"Friend Trowbridge, convoy our good, unbelieving friend to Harrisonville and await my return. I have one or two things to attend to before I join you; but when I come I think I can promise you a show the like of which you have not before seen. *Au revoir, mes enfants*."

Ten o'clock sounded on the city's clocks; eleven; half-past. Costello and I consumed innumerable cigars and more than one potion of some excellent cognac I had stored in my cellar since the days before prohibition; still no sign of my little friend. The sergeant was on the point of taking his departure when a light step sounded on the porch and de Grandin came bounding into the consulting-room, his face wreathed in smiles, a heavy-looking parcel gripped under his right arm.

"*Bien*, my friends, I find you in good time," he greeted, poured himself a monstrous stoup of amber liquor, then helped himself to one of my cigars. "I think it high time we were on our way. There is that to do which may take considerable doing this night, but I would not that we delay our expedition because of difficulties in the road."

"Be gorry, he's caught it from th' other nut!" Costello confided to the surrounding atmosphere with a serio-comic grimace. "Which crazy house are we goin' to now, sor?"

"Where but to the house of Monsieur Kolisko?" returned the Frenchman with a grin. "I think there will be another there before long, and it is highly expedient that we be there first."

"Humph, if it's Coroner Martin or his physician, you needn't be worryin' yourself anny," Costello assured him. "They'll be takin' no more interest in th' case till someone else gets kilt, I'm thinkin'."

"*Morbleu*, then their days of interest are ended, or Jules de Grandin is a colossal liar," was the response. "Come; *allons vite!*"

The lowest workings of a coal mine were not darker than the Kolisko house when we let ourselves in some fifteen minutes later. Switching on the electric light, de Grandin proceeded to unpack his parcel, taking from it a folded black

object which resembled a deflated association football. Next he produced a shining nickel-plated apparatus consisting of a thick upright cylinder and a transverse flat piece which opened in two on hinges, disclosing an interior resembling a waffle-iron with small, close-set knobs. Into a screw-stopped opening in the hollow cylinder of the contrivance he poured several ounces of gray-black powder; then, taking the flat rubber bag, he hurried from the house to my car, attached the valve of the bag to my tire pump and proceeded to inflate the rubber bladder almost to the bursting point. This done, he attached the bag to a valve in the nickeled cylinder by a two-foot length of rubber hose, poured some liquid over the corrugated “waffle-iron” at the top of the cylinder, and, with the inflated bag hugged under his arm, as a Highland piper might hold the bag of his pipes, he strode across the room, snapped off the light, and took his station near the open window.

Several times Costello and I addressed him, but each time he cut us short with a sharp, irritable “Sssh!” continuing his crouching watch beside the window, staring intently into the shaded garden beyond.

It must have been some three-quarters of an hour later that we sensed, rather than heard, the scuffling of light foot-falls on the grass outside, heard the door-knob cautiously tested, then the scuttering of more steps, scarcely louder than the sound of wind-blown leaves, as the visitant rounded the cottage wall and made for the window beside which de Grandin mounted guard.

A puff of autumn wind, scented with the last blooms of summer’s rosebeds, sent the light clouds drifting from before the moon’s pale lantern, and, illuminated in the pallid light of the night’s goddess, we saw framed at the window-square the terrifying vision which had followed young Ratliff’s story of his escape two nights before.

“My Gawd!” Costello’s bass voice was shrill and treble with sudden terror as the thing gazed malevolently in at us. Next instant his heavy service revolver was out, and shot after shot poured straight into the hideous, grinning face at the window.

He might as well have fired boiled beans from a pea-shooter for all the effect his bullets had. Distinctly I saw a portion of the mummy’s ear clipped off by a flying slug of lead, saw an indentation sink in the thing’s head half an inch above the right eye as a soft-nosed bullet tore through skin and withered flesh and frontal bone; but the emaciated body never paused in its progress. One withered leg was lifted across the window sill; two long, unfleshed arms, terminating in hands of enormous length, were thrust out toward the Irishman; a grin of such hellish hatred and triumph as I had never conceived possible disfigured the object’s visage as it pressed onward, its long, bony fingers opening and closing convulsively, as though they already felt their victim’s neck within their grasp.

“*Monsieur*, you do play truant from hell!” De Grandin’s announcement was made in the most casual manner as he rose from his half-kneeling posture beside the window and placed himself directly in the mummy’s path, but there was a quaver in his voice which betrayed the intensity of his emotion.

A noise — you could hardly call it a snarl nor yet a scream, but a sound midway between the two — emanated from the thing’s desiccated throat as it turned on him, threw out one hand and snatched at his throat.

There was a tiny spark of light, as though a match had been struck, then a mighty, bursting blaze, as if time had turned backward in its flight for a second and the midday sun had thrown its beams through the midnight blackness of the room, a swishing, whistling sound, as of air suddenly released from tremendous pressure, and a shriek of mad, insupportable anguish. Then the fierce blazing of some inflammable substance suddenly set alight. My eyes started from my face as I seemed to see the mummy’s scraggly limbs and emaciated torso writhe within a very inferno of fire. Then:

“*Cher Sergent*, it might he well to call the fir department; this place will surely burn about our ears unless *les pompiers* hurry with their hose, I fear,” remarked Jules de Grandin as calmly as though advising us the night was fine.

“But—but—howly Mither o’ Moses!” Sergeant Costello demanded as we turned from watching the firemen salvaging the remnants of Kolisko’s cottage; “how did ye manage it, Doctor de Grandin, sor? May I never eat another mess o’ corned beef an’ cabbage if I didn’t shoot th’ thing clean through th’ head wid me gun, an’ it never so much as batted an eye, yet ye burned it up as clean as —”

“Precisely, *mon vieux*,” the Frenchman admitted with a chuckle. “Have you never heard the adage that one must fight the Devil with fire? It was something like that which I did.

“No later than night before last a young man came crying and whimpering at Friend Trowbridge’s door, begging for shelter from some ghastly thing which pursued him through the streets. Both Trowbridge and I thought he suffered from an overdose of the execrable liquor with which Monsieur Volstead has flooded this unhappy land, but before we could boot him from the door, behold, the same thing which you so unsuccessfully shot tonight did stick its unlovely countenance against our window, and I, who always go armed lest some miscreant do me a mischief, did fire eight shots directly into his face. Believe me, my friend, when Jules de Grandin shoots, he does not miss, and that night I shot exceptionally well. Yet when Friend Trowbridge and I searched the garden, neither hide nor hair of the one who should have been eight times dead did we find. ‘There is something here which will take much explaining,’ I say to

me after we could not find him.

“Next morning you did come and tell us of Professor Kolisko’s murder, and when we had viewed his remains, I wondered much what sort of creature could have done this thing. The pressure exerted on his neck were superhuman, but the marks of the hand were not those of an ape, for no ape possesses such a long, thin thumb.

“Then we did find the dead professor’s diary and I have the tiny shivers playing tag with each other up and down my back as I read and translate it. It sounds like the dream of one crazed with dope, I know, but there was the possibility of truth in it. Do you know the vampire, my friends?”

“The vampire?” I echoed.

“*Précisément*; the vampire you have said it. He is not always one who can not die because of sin or misfortune in life. No. Sometimes he is a dead body possessed by some demon — perhaps by some unhappy, earthbound spirit. Yes.

“Now, as I read the professor’s journal, I see that everything which had transpired were most favorable for the envampirement of that body which his cousin had brought from Egypt so long ago. Yet the idea seemed — how do you say? — ah, yes — to have the smell of the fish on it.

“But when you came and say Miss Adkinson have been erased in the same manner as Professor Kolisko, I begin to wonder if perhaps I have not less nuts in my belfry than I at first thought. In Professor Kolisko’s journal there was reference to his cousin. ‘How, does it come that this cousin have not come forward and told us what, if anything, he knows?’ I ask me as we view the poor dead woman’s body, and the answer was, ‘He has most doubtless seen that which will not be believed, and hides because he fears arrest on a false charge of murder.’

“Right away I rush to New York and inquire at the *Musée Metropolitain* for the address of Monsieur Michel Kolisko, the Egyptologist. I find his living-quarters in East Eighty-Sixth Street. Then they tell me he have gone to the Carmelite retreat. *Morbleu*, had he hidden in lost Atlantis, I should have hunted him out, for I desired speech with him!

“At first he would not talk, dreading I intended to drag him to the jail, but after I had spoken with him for a time, he opened his heart, and told me what he later told you.

“Now, what to do? By Monsieur Kolisko’s story, it were useless to battle with this enlivened mummy, for the body of him was but the engine moved by an alien spirit — he had no need of brains, hearts and such things as we must use. Also, I knew from experience, bullets were as useless against him as puffs of wind against a fortress wall. ‘Very well,’ I tell me, ‘he may be invulnerable to bullets and blows, but living or dead, he is still a mummy — a dry, desiccated mummy — and we have had no rain lately. It are entirely unlikely that he have gotten greatly moistened in his trips through the streets, and all mummies are as tinder to

fire. *Mordieu*, did they not once use them as fuel for locomotives in Egypt when railways were first built there? Yes.’

“And so I prepare the warm reception for him. At one time and another I have taken photographs at night, and to do so I have used magnesium flares — what you call flashlight powder. At a place where they sell such things in New York I procure a flashlight burner — a hollow cylinder for the powder magazine with a benzine wick at its top and a tube through which air can be blown to force the powder through the burning petrol and so give a continuous blaze. I get me also a rubber bag which I can inflate and attach to the windpipe of the apparatus, thus leaving my lips free for swearing and other important things, and also giving a greater force of air.

“I reason: ‘Where will this living mummy go most naturally? Why not to the house where he received his new life, for the town in which he goes about committing murder is still new to him?’ And so, when *Monsieur la Momie* returns to the place of his second nativity, I am all ready for him. Your shots, they are as ineffectual as were mine two nights ago, but I have my magnesium flare ready, and as he turns on me I blow the fierce flame from it all over him. He are dry like tinder, the fire seized on him like a hungry little boy on a jam-tart, and — *pouf* — he is burn up, incinerated; he is no more!”

“Do you actually mean Heschler’s soul entered that dried-up body?” I demanded.

The Frenchman shook his head. “I do not know,” he replied. “Perhaps it were Heschler; more likely not. The air is full of strange and terrible things, my friend. Not for nothing did the old divines call Satan the Prince of the Powers of the Air. How do we know some of those elementals who are ever on the watch to do mankind an injury did not hear the mad Kolisko’s scheme and take advantage of the opportunity to enter into the mummy’s body? Such things have been before; why may they not be again?”

“But —” I commenced.

“But —” expostulated Sergeant Costello.

“But, my friends,” the little man cut in “did you behold how dry that so abominable mummy was before I applied the fire?”

“Yes,” I answered wonderingly.

“*Cordieu*, he was wet as the broad Atlantic Ocean beside the dryness of Jules de Grandin at this moment! Friend Trowbridge, unless my memory plays me false, I beheld a bottle of cognac upon your office table. Come, I faint, I die, I perish; talk to me no more till I have consumed the remainder of that bottle, I do beseech you!”

Restless Souls

“TENTHOUSAND small green devils! What a night; what an odious night!” Jules de Grandin paused beneath the theater’s porte-cochère and scowled ferociously at the pelting rain.

“Well, summer’s dead and winter hasn’t quite come,” I reminded soothingly. “We’re bound to have a certain amount of rain in October. The autumnal equinox—”

“May Satan’s choicest imps fly off with the autumnal equinox!” the little Frenchman interrupted. “*Morbleu*, it is that I have seen no sun since God alone knows when; besides that, I am most abominably hungry!”

“That condition, at least, we can remedy,” I promised, nudging him from the awning’s shelter toward my parked car. “Suppose we stop at the Café Bacchanale? They usually have something good to eat.”

“Excellent, capital,” he agreed enthusiastically, skipping nimbly into the car and rearranging the upturned collar of his raincoat. “You are a true philosopher, *mon vieux*. Always you tell me that which I most wish to hear.”

They were having an hilarious time at the cabaret, for it was the evening of October 31, and the management had put on a special Halloween celebration. As we passed the velvet rope that looped across the entrance to the dining room a burst of Phrygian music greeted us, and a dozen agile young women in abbreviated attire were performing intricate gyrations under the leadership of an apparently boneless damsel whose costume was principally composed of strands of jangling hawk-bells threaded round her neck and wrists and ankles.

“Welsh rabbit?” I suggested. “They make a rather tasty one here.” He nodded almost absent-mindedly as he surveyed a couple eating at a nearby table.

At last, just as the waiter brought our bubbling-hot refreshment: “Regard them, if you will, Friend Trowbridge,” he whispered. “Tell me what, if anything, you make of them.”

The girl was, as the saying goes, “a knockout.” Tall, lissome, lovely to regard, she wore a dinner dress of simple black without a single hint of ornament except a single strand of small matched pearls about her slim and rather long throat. Her hair was bright chestnut, almost copper-colored, and braided round her small head in a Grecian coronal, and in its ruddy frame her face was like some strange flower on a tall stalk. Her darkened lids and carmined mouth and pale cheeks made an interesting combination.

As I stole a second glance at her it seemed to me she had a vague yet unmistakable expression of invalidism. Nothing definite, merely the combination of certain factors which pierced the shell of my purely masculine admiration and stock response from my years of experience as a medical practitioner — a certain blueness of complexion which meant “interesting pallor” to the layman but spelled imperfectly oxidized blood to the physician; a slight tightening of the muscles about the mouth which gave her lovely pouting lips a pathetic droop; and a scarcely perceptible retraction at the junction of cheek and nose which meant fatigue of nerves or muscles, possibly both.

Idly mingling admiration and diagnosis, I turned my glance upon her escort, and my lips tightened slightly as I made a mental note: “Gold digger!” The man was big-boned and coarse-featured, bullet-headed and thick-necked, and had the pasty, toad-belly complexion of one who drinks too much and sleeps and exercises far too little. He hardly changed expression as the girl talked eagerly in a hushed whisper. His whole attitude was one of proprietorship, as if she were his thing and chattel, bought and paid for, and constantly his fishy eyes roved round the room and rested covetously on attractive women supping at the other tables.

“I do not like it, me,” de Grandin’s comment brought my wandering attention back. “It is both strange and queer; it is not right.”

“Eh?” I returned. “Quite so; I agree with you. It’s shameful for a girl like that to sell — or maybe only rent — herself to such a creature —”

“*Non, non*,” he interrupted testily. “I have no thought of censoring their morals, such are their own affair. It is their treatment of the food that intrigues me.”

“Food?” I echoed.

“*Oui-da*, food. On three distinct occasions they have ordered refreshment, yet each time they allowed it to grow cold; let it remain untouched until the *garçon* carried it away. I ask you, is that right?”

“Why — er —” I temporized, but he hurried on.

“Once as I watched I saw the woman make as though to lift a goblet to her lips, but the gesture of her escort halted her; she set the beverage down untasted. What sort of people ignore wine — the living soul of the grape?”

“Well, are you going to investigate?” I asked, grinning. I knew his curiosity was well-nigh as boundless as his self-esteem, and should not have been too greatly surprised if he had marched to the strange couple’s table and demanded an

explanation.

“Investigate?” he echoed thoughtfully. “Um. Perhaps I shall.”

He snapped the pewter lid of his beer-mug back, took a long, pensive draught, then leant forward, small round eyes unwinkingly on mine. “You know what night this is?” he demanded.

“Of course, it’s Halloween. All the little devils will be out stealing garden gates and knocking at front doors —”

“Perhaps the larger devils will be abroad, too.”

“Oh, come, now,” I protested, “you’re surely not serious—”

“By blue, I am,” he affirmed solemnly. “*Regardez, s’il vous plaît.*” He nodded toward the pair at the adjoining table.

Seated directly opposite the strange couple was a young man occupying a table by himself. He was a good-looking, sleek-haired youngster of the sort to be found by scores on any college campus. Had de Grandin brought the same charge of food wastage against him that he had leveled at the other two he would have been equally justified, for the boy left an elaborate order practically untasted while his infatuated eyes devoured every line of the girl at the next table.

As I turned to look at him I noted from the corner of my eye that the girl’s escort nodded once in the same direction, then rose and left the table abruptly. I noticed as he walked toward the door that his walk was more like the rapid amble of an animal than the step of a man.

The girl half turned as she was left alone and under lowered lashes looked at the young man so indifferently that there was no mistaking her intent.

De Grandin watched with what seemed bleak disinterest as the young man rose to join her, and, save for an occasional covert glance paid no attention as they exchanged the inane amenities customary in such cases, but when they rose to leave a few minutes later he motioned me to do likewise. “It is of importance that we see which way they go,” he told me earnestly.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake, be sensible!” I chided. “Let them flirt if they want to. I’ll warrant she’s in better company now than she came in with —”

“*Précisément*, exactly, quite so!” he agreed. “It is of that ‘better company’ I think when I have the anxiety.”

“H’m, that *was* a tough-looking customer she was with,” I conceded. “And for all her innocent-looking prettiness she might be the bait in a badger-game —”

“A badger-game? *Mais oui*, my friend. A game-of-the-badger in which the stakes are infinitely high!” Of the ornate doorman he demanded, “That couple, that young man and woman — they did go what way, *Monsieur le Concierge?*”

“Huh?”

“The young man and young woman — you saw them depart? We would know their direction —” a crumpled dollar bill changed hands, and the doorman’s memory revived miraculously.

“Oh, them. Yeah, I seen ’em. They went down th’ street that-away in a big black taxi. Little English feller drivin’ ’em. Looked like th’ feller’s made a mash. He’ll *get* mashed, too, if th’ tough bimbo ’at brought th’ broad in ketches ’im messin’ round with her. That gink’s one awful mean-lookin’ bozo, an’ —”

“Assuredly,” de Grandin agreed. “And this *Monsieur le Gink* of whom you speak, he went which way, if you please?”

“He come outer here like a bat outer hell ’bout ten minutes ago. Funny thing ’bout him, too. He was walkin’ down th’ street, an’ I was watchin’ him, not special, but just lookin’ at him, an’ I looked away for just a minute, an’ when I looked back he was gone. He wasn’t more’n half way down th’ block when I last seen him, but when I looked again he wasn’t there. Dam’ if I see how he managed to get round th’ comer in that time.”

“I think that your perplexity is justified,” de Grandin answered as I brought the car to a stop at the curb, then, to me: “Hasten, Friend Trowbridge. I would that we get them in sight before they are lost in the storm.”

It was a matter of only a few minutes to pick up the tail light of the big car in which the truants sped toward the outskirts of town. Occasionally we lost them, only to catch them again almost immediately, for their route led straight out Orient Boulevard toward the Old Turnpike. “This is the craziest thing we’ve ever done,” I grumbled. “There isn’t any more chance that we’ll catch them than — great Scott, they’ve stopped!”

Improbably, the big car had drawn up at the imposing Canterbury Gate of Shadow Lawn Cemetery.

De Grandin leant forward in his seat like a jockey in the saddle. “Quick, hurry, make all speed, my friend!” he besought. “We must catch them before they alight!”

Try as I would my efforts were futile. Only an empty limousine and a profanely bewildered chauffeur awaited us when we drew up at the burying ground, our engine puffing like a winded horse.

“Which way, my friend — where did they go?” de Grandin vaulted from the car before we had come to a full stop.

“Inside th’ graveyard!” answered the driver. “What th’ hell d’ye know about that? Bringin’ me way out here where th’ devil says ‘Good Night!’ an’ leavin’ me as flat as a dam’ pancake.” His voice took on a shrill falsetto in imitation of a woman’s. “You needn’t wait for us, driver, we’ll not be com’ back,” she says. Good God A’ mighty, who th’ hell but

dead corpses goes into th' cemet'ry an' don't come back?"

"Who, indeed?" the Frenchman echoed, then, to me: "Come, Friend Trowbridge, we must hasten, we must find them all soon, or it is too late!"

Solemn as the purpose to which it was dedicated, the burial park stretched dark and forbidding about us as we stepped through the grille in the imposing stone gateway. The curving ravelled avenues, bordered with double rows of hemlocks, stretched away like labyrinthine mazes, and the black turf with its occasional corrugations of mounded graves or decorations of pallid marble, sloped upward from us, seemingly to infinity.

Like a terrier on the scent de Grandin hurried forward, bending now and then to pass beneath the downward-swaying bough of some rain-laden evergreen, then hurrying still faster.

"You know this place, Friend Trowbridge?" he demanded during one of his brief halts.

"Better than I want to," I admitted. "I've been here to several funerals."

"Good!" he returned. "You can tell me then where is the — how do you call him? — the receiving vault?"

"Over there, almost in the center of the park," I answered, and he nodded understandingly, then took up his course, almost at a run.

Finally we reached the squat grey-stone receiving mausoleum, and he tried one of the heavy doors after another. "A loss!" he announced disappointedly as each of the tomb's great metal doors defied his efforts. "It seems we must search elsewhere."

He trotted to the open space reserved for parking funeral vehicles and cast a quick appraising look about, arrived at a decision and started like a cross-country runner down the winding road that led to a long row of family mausoleums. At each he stopped, trying the strong metal gratings at its entrance, peering into its gloomy interior with the aid of his pocket flashlight.

Tomb after tomb we visited, till both my breath and patience were exhausted. "What's all this nonsense?" I demanded. "What're you looking for —"

"That which I fear to find," he panted, casting the beam of his light about. "If we are balked — *ah?* Look, my friend, look and tell me what it is you see."

In the narrow cone of light cast by his small electric torch I descried a dark form draped across the steps of a mausoleum. "Wh-why, it's a man!" I exclaimed.

"I hope so," he replied. "It may be we shall find the mere relic of one, but — *ah?* So. He is still breathing."

Taking the flashlight from him I played its ray on the still form stretched upon the tomb steps. it was the young man we had seen leave the café with the strange woman. On his

forehead was a nasty cut, as though from some blunt instrument swung with terrific force — a blackjack, for instance.

Quickly, skillfully, de Grandin ran his supple, practised hands over the youngster's body, pressed his fingers to his pulse, bent to listen at his chest. "He lives," he announced at the end of his inspection, "but his heart, I do not like it. Come; let us take him hence, my friend."

"And now, *mon brave*," he demanded half an hour later when we had revived the unconscious man with smelling salts and cold applications, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell us why you left the haunts of the living to foregather with the dead?"

The patient made a feeble effort to rise from the examination table, gave it up as too difficult and sank back. "I thought I was dead," he confessed.

"U'm?" the Frenchman regarded him narrowly. "You have not yet answered our question, young Monsieur."

The boy made a second attempt to rise, and an agonized expression spread over his face, his hand shot up to his left breast, and he fell back, half lolling, half writhing on the table.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge, the amyl nitrite, where is it?" de Grandin asked.

"Over there," I waved my hand toward the medicine cabinet. "You'll find some three-minim capsules in the third bottle."

In a moment he secured the pearly little pellets, crushed one in his handkerchief and applied it to the fainting boy's nostrils. "Ah, that is better, *n'est-ce-pas*, my poor one?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks," the other replied, taking another deep inhalation of the powerful restorative, "much better." Then, "How'd you know what to give me? I didn't think —"

"My friend," the Frenchman interrupted with a smile, "I was practising the treatment of angina pectoris when you were still unthought of. Now, if you are sufficiently restored, you will please tell us why you left the Café Bacchanale, and what occurred thereafter. We wait."

Slowly, assisted by de Grandin on one side and me on the other, the young man descended from the table and seated himself in an easy chair. "I'm Donald Rochester," he introduced himself, "and this was to have been my last night on earth."

"Ah?" Jules de Grandin murmured.

"Six months ago," the young man continued, "Dr. Simmons told me I had angina pectoris. My case was pretty far advanced when he made his diagnosis, and he gave me only a little while to live. Two weeks ago he told me I'd be lucky to see the month out, and the pain was getting more severe and the attacks more frequent; so today I decided to

give myself one last party, then go home and make a quick, clean job of it.”

“Damn!” I muttered. I knew Simmons, a pompous old ass, but a first-rate diagnostician and a good heart man, though absolutely brutal with his patients.

“I ordered the sort of meal they haven’t allowed me in the last half year,” Rochester went on, “and was just about to start enjoying it when — when I saw her come in. Did” — he turned from de Grandin to me as if expecting greater understanding from a fellow countryman — “did you see her, too?” An expression of almost religious rapture over-spread his face.

“Perfectly, *mon vieux*,” de Grandin returned. “We all saw her. Tell us more.”

“I always thought this talk of love at first sight was a lot of tripe, but I’m cured now. I even forgot my farewell meal, couldn’t see or think of anything but her. If I’d had even two more years to live, I thought, nothing could have kept me from hunting her out and asking her to marry —”

“*Précisément*, assuredly, quite so,” the Frenchman interrupted testily. “We do concede that you were fascinated, Monsieur; but, for the love of twenty thousand pale blue monkeys, I entreat you tell us what you did, not what you thought.”

“I just sat and goggled at her sir. Couldn’t do anything else. When that big brute she was with got up and left and she smiled at me, this poor old heart of mine almost blinked out, I tell you. When she smiled a second time there wasn’t enough chain in the country to keep me from her.

“You’d have thought she’d known me all her life, the way she fell in step when we went out of the café. She had a big black car waiting outside and I climbed right in with her. Before I knew it, I was telling her who I was, how long I had to live, and how my only regret was losing her, just when I’d found her. I —”

“*Parbleu*, you told her that?”

“I surely did, and a lot more — blurted out that I loved her before I knew what I was about.”

“And she —”

“Gentlemen, I’m not sure whether I ought to have delirium or not with this disease, but I’m pretty sure I’ve had a touch of something. Now, I want you to know I’m not crazy before I tell you the rest; but I might have had a heart attack or something, then fallen asleep and dreamed it.”

“Say on, Monsieur,” de Grandin ordered rather grimly. “We listen.”

“Very well. When I said I loved her that girl just put her hands up to her eyes — like this — as if to wipe away some unshed tears. I half expected she’d be angry, or maybe giggle, but she didn’t. All she said was, ‘Too late — oh, too late!’

“‘I know it is,’ I answered. ‘I’ve already told you I’m as

good as dead, but I can’t go west without telling you how I feel.’

“Then she said, ‘Oh, no, it’s not that, my dear. That’s not at all what I meant. For I love you, too, though I’ve no right to say so — I’ve no right to love anyone — it’s too late for me, too.’

“After that I just took her in my arms and held her tight, and she sobbed as if her heart would break. Finally I asked her to make me a promise. ‘I’ll rest better in my grave if I know you’ll never go out with that ugly brute I saw you with tonight,’ I told her, and she let out a little scream and cried harder than ever.

“Then I had the awful thought that maybe she was married to him, and that was what she meant when she said it was too late. So I asked her point blank.

“She said something devilish queer then. She told me, ‘I must go to him whenever he wants me. Though I hate him as you can never understand; when he calls I have to go. This is the first time I’ve ever gone with him, but I must go again, and again, and again! She kept screaming the word till I stopped her mouth with kisses.

“Presently the car stopped and we got out. We were at some sort of park, I think, but I was so engrossed in helping her compose herself I didn’t notice much of anything.

“She led me through a big gate and down a winding road. At last we stopped before some sort of lodge-house, and I took her in my arms for one last kiss.

“I don’t know whether the rest of it really happened or whether I passed out and dreamed it. What I thought happened was this: instead of putting her lips against mine, she put them around them and seemed to draw the very breath out of my lungs. I could feel myself go faint, like a swimmer caught in the surf and mauled and pounded till the breath’s knocked out of him, and my eyes seemed blinded with a sort of mist; then everything went sort o’ dark green round me, and I began sagging at the knees. I could still feel her arms round me, and remember being surprised at her strength, but it seemed as if she’d transferred her lips to my throat. I kept getting weaker and weaker with a sort of languorous ecstasy, if that means anything to you. Rather like sinking to sleep in a soft dry bed with a big drink of brandy tucked under your belt after you’re dog-tired with cold and exposure. Next thing I knew I’d toppled over and fallen down the steps with no more strength in my knees than a rag doll has. I must have got an awful crack on the head when I went down, for I passed out completely, and the next thing I remember was waking to find you gentlemen working over me. Tell me, did I dream it all? I’m — just — about — played — out.”

The sentence trailed off slowly, as if he were falling to sleep, and his head dropped forward while his hands slipped nervelessly from his lap, trailing flaccidly to the floor.

"Has he gone?" I whispered as de Grandin sprang across the room and ripped his collar open.

"Not quite," he answered. "More amyl nitrite, if you please; he will revive in a moment, but go home he shall not unless he promises not to destroy himself. *Mon Dieu*, destroyed he would be, body and soul, were he to put a bullet through his brain before — ah-*ha*? Behold, Friend Trowbridge, it is even as I feared!"

Against the young man's throat there showed two tiny perforated wounds, as though a fine needle had been thrust through a fold of skin.

"H'm," I commented. "If there were four of them I'd say a snake had bitten him."

"She has! Name of a little blue man, she has!" he retorted. "A serpent more virulent and subtle than any which goes on its belly has sunk her fangs in him; he is envenomed surely as if he had been the victim of a cobra's bite; but by the wings of Jacob's Angel we shall thwart her, my friend. We shall show her Jules de Grandin must be reckoned with — her, and that fish-eyed paramour of hers as well, or may I eat stewed turnips for my Christmas dinner and wash them down with ditch-water!"

It was a serious face he showed at breakfast the next day. "You have perhaps a half hour's liberty this morning?" he asked as he drained his fourth cup of coffee.

"H'm, I suppose so. Anything special you'd like to do?"

"There is, indeed. I should like to go again to Shadow Lawn Cemetery. I would examine it by daylight, if you please."

"Shadow Lawn?" I echoed in amazement. "What in this world —"

"Only partially," he interrupted. "Unless I am much more mistaken than I think our business has as much to do with the next world as this. Come; you have your patients to attend, I have my duties to perform. Let us go."

The rain had vanished with the night and a bright November sun was shining when we reached the graveyard. Making straight for the tomb where we had found young Rochester the night before, de Grandin halted and inspected it carefully. On the lintel of the massive doorway he invited my attention to the single incised word:

HEATHERTON

"U'm?" he nursed his narrow pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "That name I must remember, Friend Trowbridge."

Inside the tomb, arranged in two superimposed rows, were the crypts containing the remains of deceased Heathertons, each sealed by a white marble slab set with cement in a bronze frame, a two-lined legend telling the

name and vital data of the occupant. The withering remains of a wreath clung by a knot of ribbon to the bronze ring-bolt ornamenting the marble panel of the farthest crypt, and behind the desiccating circle of roses and ruscus leaves I made out:

ALICE HEATHERTON

Sept. 28, 1926

Oct. 2, 1948

"You see?" he asked.

"I see a girl named Alice Heatherton died a month ago at the age of twenty-two," I admitted, "but what that has to do with last night is more than I can —"

"Of course," he broke in with a chuckle somehow lacking merriment. "But certainly. There are many things you do not see, my old one, and there are many more at which you blink your eyes, like a child passing over the unpleasant pages of a picture book. Now, if you will be so kind as to leave me, I shall interview *Monsieur l'Intendant* of this so lovely park, and several other people as well. If possible I shall return in time for dinner, but" — he raised his shoulders in a fatalistic shrug — "at times we must forego a meal in deference to duty. Yes, it is unfortunately so."

The consommé had grown cold and the roast lamb kiln-dried in the oven when the stutter of my study telephone called me. "Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin's voice, shrill with excitement, came across the wire, "meet me at Adelphi Mansions quickly as you can. I would have you for witness!"

"Witness?" I echoed. "What —" A sharp click notified me he had hung up and I was left bewildered at the unresponsive instrument.

He was waiting for me at the entrance of the fashionable apartment house when I arrived, and refused to answer my impatient questions as he dragged me through the ornate entrance and down the rug-strewn foyer to the elevators. As the car shot upward he reached in his pocket and produced a shiny thumb-smudged photograph. "This I begged from *le Journal*," he explained. "They had no further use for it."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed as I looked at the picture. "Wh — why, it's —"

"Assuredly it is," he answered in a level tone. "It is the girl we saw last night beyond a doubt; the girl whose tomb we visited this morning; the girl who gave the kiss of death to the young Rochester."

"But that's impossible! She —"

His short laugh interrupted. "I was convinced you would say just that, Friend Trowbridge. Come, let us hear what Madame Heatherton can tell us."

A trim Negro maid in black-and-white uniform answered

our summons and took our cards to her mistress. As she left the rather sumptuous reception room I glanced covertly about, noting rugs from China and the Near East, early American mahogany and an elaborately wrought medieval tapestry depicting a scene from the *Nibelungenlied* with its legend in formal Gothic text: “*Hic Siegfriedum Aureum Occidunt — Here They Slay Siegfried the Golden.*”

“Dr. Trowbridge? Dr. de Grandin?” the soft, cultured voice recalled me from my study of the fabric as an imposing white-haired lady entered.

“Madame, a thousand pardons for this intrusion!” de Grandin clicked his heels together and bowed stiffly from the hips. “Believe me, we have no desire to trespass on your privacy, but a matter of the utmost importance brings us. You will forgive me if I inquire of the circumstances of your daughter’s death, for I am of the *Sûreté* of Paris, and make investigation as a scientific research.”

Mrs. Heatherton was, to use an overworked expression, a “perfect lady.” Nine women out of ten would have frozen at de Grandin’s announcement, but she was the tenth. The direct glance the little Frenchman gave her and his evident sincerity, combined with perfect manners and immaculate dress, carried conviction. “Please be seated, gentlemen,” she invited. “I cannot see where my poor child’s tragedy can interest an officer of the Paris secret police, but I’ve no objection to telling all I can; you could get a garbled version from the newspapers anyway.

“Alice was my youngest child. She and my son Ralph were two years apart, almost to the day. Ralph graduated from Cornell year before last, majoring in civil engineering, and went to Florida to take charge of some construction work. Alice died while visiting him.”

“But — forgive my seeming rudeness, Madame — your son, is not he also deceased?”

“Yes,” our hostess assented. “He is dead, also. They died almost together. There was a man down there, a fellow townsman of ours, Joachim Palenzeke — not the sort of person one knows, but Ralph’s superior in the work. He had something to do with promoting the land development, I believe. When Alice went to visit Ralph this person presumed on his position and the fact that we were all from Harrisonville, and attempted to force his attentions on her.”

“One sees. And then?” de Grandin prompted softly.

“Ralph resented his overtures. Palenzeke made some insulting remarks — some scurrilous allusions to Alice and me, I’ve been told, and they fought. Ralph was a small man, but a thoroughbred. Palenzeke was almost a giant, but a thoroughgoing coward. When Ralph began to get the better of him he drew a pistol and fired five shots into my poor son’s body. Ralph died the next day after hours of terrible suffering.

“His murderer fled to the swamps where it would be

difficult to track him with hounds, and according to some Negro squatters he committed suicide, but there must have been some mistake, for —” she broke off, pressing her crumpled handkerchief to her mouth, as if to force back the sobs.

De Grandin reached from his chair and patted her hand gently, as if consoling a child. “Dear lady,” he murmured, “I am distressed, believe me, but also please believe me when I say I do not ask these so heart-breaking questions idly. Tell me, if you will, why you believe the story of this vile miscreant’s suicide an error.”

“Because — because he was seen again! He killed Alice!”

“*Nom d’un nom!* Do you say so?” His comment was a suppressed shout. “Tell me, tell me, Madame, how came this vileness about? This is of the great importance; this explains much which was inexplicable. Say on, *chère Madame*, I implore you!”

“Alice was prostrated at the tragedy of Ralph’s murder — somehow, she seemed to think she was responsible for it — but in a few days she recovered enough to make preparations to return home with his body.

“There was no railway nearer than fifteen miles, and she wanted to catch an early train, so she set out by motor the night before her train was due. As she drove through a length of lonely, unlighted road between two stretches of undrained swampland someone emerged from the tall reeds — we have the chauffeur’s statement for this — and leaped upon the running-board. He struck the driver senseless with a single blow, but not before he had been recognized. It was Joachim Palenzeke. The car ran into the swamp when the driver lost consciousness, but fortunately for him the mud was deep enough to stall the machine, though not deep enough to engulf it. He recovered in a short time and raised the alarm.

“A sheriff’s posse found them both next morning. Palenzeke had apparently slipped in the bog while trying to escape and been drowned. Alice was dead — from shock, the doctors said. Her lips were terribly bruised, and there was a wound on her throat, though not serious enough to have caused death; and she had been —”

“Enough! No more, Madame, I entreat you! *Sang de Saint Denis*, is Jules de Grandin a monster that he should roll a stone upon a mother’s breaking heart? *Dieu de Dieu, non!* But tell me, if you can, and then I shall ask you no more — what became of this ten-thousand-times-damned — your pardon, Madame! — this so execrable *cochon* of a Palenzeke?”

“They brought him home for burial,” Mrs. Heatherton replied softly. “His family is very wealthy. Some of them were bootleggers during prohibition, some are real estate speculators, some are politicians. He had the most elaborate

funeral ever seen in the local Greek Orthodox Church — they say the flowers alone cost more than five thousand dollars — but Father Apostolakos refused to say Mass over him, merely recited a short prayer, and denied him burial in the consecrated part of the church cemetery.”

“Ah!” de Grandin looked meaningfully at me, as if to say, “I told you as much!”

“This may interest you, too, though I don’t know,” Mrs. Heatherton added: “A friend of mine who knows a reporter on the *Journal* — newspapermen know everything,” she added with simple naïveté “told me that the coward really must have tried suicide and failed, for there was a bullet-mark on his temple, though of course it couldn’t have been fatal, since they found him drowned in the swamp. Do you suppose he could have wounded himself purposely where those Negro swamp-dwellers could see, so that the story of his suicide would get about and the officers stop looking for him?”

“Quite possibly,” de Grandin agreed as he rose. “Madame, we are your debtors more than you suspect, and though you cannot know it, we have saved you at least one pang this night. *Adieu, chère Madame*, and may the good God watch over you — and yours.” He laid his lips to her fingers and bowed himself from the room.

As we passed through the outer door we caught the echo of a sob and Mrs. Heatherton’s despairing cry: “Me and mine — there are no ‘mine.’ All, all are gone!”

“*La Pauvre!*” de Grandin murmured as he closed the door softly. “All the more reason for *le bon Dieu*’s watchfulness, though she knows it not!”

“Now what?” I demanded, dabbing furtively at my eyes with my handkerchief.

The Frenchman made no effort to conceal his tears. They trickled down his face as if he had been a half-grown schoolboy. “Go home, my friend,” he ordered. “Me, I shall consult the priest of that Greek Church. From what I hear of him he must be a capital fellow. I think he will give credence to my story. If not, *parbleu*, we must take matters into our own hands. Meantime, crave humble pardon from the excellent Nora for having neglected her dinner and ask that she prepare some slight refreshment, then be ready to accompany me again when we shall have regaled ourselves. *Nom d’un canard vert*, we have a busy night before us, my old and rare!”

It was nearly midnight when he returned, but from the sparkle in his eyes I knew he had successfully attended to some of his “offices.”

“*Barbe d’une chèvre*,” he exclaimed as he disposed of his sixth cold lamb sandwich and emptied his eighth glass of Ponte Canet, “that Father Apostolakos is no man’s fool, my friend. He is no empty-headed modem who knows so much

that he knows nothing; a man versed in the occult may talk freely with him and be understood. Yes. He will help us.”

“U’m?” I commented noncommittally, my mouth half-filled with lamb sandwich.

“Precisely,” he agreed, refilling his glass and lifting another sandwich from the tray. “Exactly, my friend. The good *papa* is supreme in matters ecclesiastical, and tomorrow he will give the necessary orders without so much as ‘by your leave’ from the estimable ex-bootleggers, real estate dealers and politicians who compose the illustrious Palenzeke clan. The sandwiches are all gone, and the bottle empty? Good, then let us be upon our way.”

“Where?” I demanded.

“To the young Monsieur Rochester’s. Me, I would have further talk with that one.”

As we left the house I saw him transfer a small oblong packet from his jacket to his overcoat. “What’s that?” I asked.

“A thing the good father lent me. I hope we shall have no occasion to use it, but it will prove convenient if we do.”

A light mist, dappled here and there with chilling rain, was settling in the streets as we set off for Rochester’s. Half an hour’s cautious driving brought us to the place, and as we drew up at the curb the Frenchman pointed to a lighted window on the seventh floor. “That burns in his suite,” he informed me. “Can it be he entertains at this hour?”

The night elevator operator snored in a chair in the lobby, and, guided by de Grandin’s cautious gesture, I followed his lead up the stairs. “We need not announce our coming,” he whispered as we rounded the landing of the sixth floor. “It is better that we come as a surprise, I think.”

Another flight we climbed silently, and paused before the door of Rochester’s apartment. De Grandin rapped once softly, repeated the summons more authoritatively, and was about to try the knob when we heard footsteps beyond the panels.

Young Rochester wore a silk robe over his pyjamas, his hair was somewhat disarranged, but he looked neither sleepy nor particularly pleased to see us.

“We are unexpected, it seems,” de Grandin announced, “but we are here, nevertheless, Be kind enough to stand aside and let us enter, if you please.”

“Not now,” the young man refused. “I can’t see you now. If you’ll come back tomorrow morning —”

“This is tomorrow morning, *mon vieux*,” the little Frenchman interrupted. “Midnight struck an hour ago.” He brushed past our reluctant host and hurried down the long hall to the living room.

The room was tastefully furnished in typically masculine style, heavy chairs of hickory and maple, Turkish carpets, a table with a shaded lamp, a long couch piled with pillows

before the fireplace in which a bed of cannel coal glowed in a brass grate. An after-tang of cigarette smoke hung in the air, but mingled with it was the faint, provocative scent of heliotrope.

De Grandin paused upon the threshold, threw his head back and sniffed like a hound at fault. Directly opposite the entrance was a wide arch closed by two Paisley shawls hung lambrequinwise from a brass rod, and toward this he marched, his right hand in his topcoat pocket, the ebony cane which I knew concealed a sword blade held lightly in his left.

“De Grandin!” I cried in shocked protest, aghast at his air of proprietorship.

“Don’t!” Rochester called warningly. “You mustn’t —”

The hangings at the archway parted and a girl stepped from between them. The long, close-clinging gown of purple tissue she wore was almost as diaphanous as smoke, and through it we could see the white outlines of her body. Her copper-colored hair flowed in a cloven tide about her face and over smooth bare shoulders. Halted in the act of stepping, one small bare foot showed its blue-veined whiteness in sharp silhouette against the rust-red of the Borkhara rug.

As her eyes met de Grandin she paused with a sibilant intake of breath, and her eyes widened with a look of fright. It was no shamefaced glance she gave him; no expression of confusion at detected guilt or brazen attempt at facing out a hopelessly embarrassing situation. Rather, it was the look of one in dire peril, such a look as she might have given a rattlesnake writhing toward her.

“So!” she breathed, and I could see the thin stuff of her gown grow tight across her breasts. “So you know! I was afraid you would, but —” She broke off as he took another step toward her and swerved until his right-hand coat pocket was within arm’s length of her.

“*Mais oui, mais oui, Mademoiselle la Morte,*” he returned, bowing ceremoniously, but not removing his hand from his pocket. “I know, as you say. The question now arises, ‘What shall we do about it?’”

“See here,” Rochester flung himself between them, “what’s the meaning of this unpardonable intrusion —”

The little Frenchman turned to him, a look of mild inquiry on his face. “*You demand an explanation? If explanations are in order —*”

“See here, damn you, I’m my own man, and not accountable to anyone. Alice and I love each other. She came to me tonight of her own free will —”

“*En vérité?*” the Frenchman interrupted. “How did she come, Monsieur?”

The young man seemed to catch his breath like a runner struggling to regain his wind at the end of a hard course. “I — I went out for a little while,” he faltered, “and when I

came back —”

“My poor one!” de Grandin broke in sympathetically. “You do lie like a gentleman, but also you lie very poorly. You are in need of practice. Attend me, I will tell you how she came: this night, I do not know exactly when, but well after sundown, you heard a knock-rap at your window or door, and when you looked out, voilà, there was the so lovely *demoiselle*. You thought you dreamed, but once again the pretty fingers tap-tapped at the windowpane, and the soft, lovely eyes looked love at you, and you opened your door or window and bade her enter, content to entertain the dream of her, since there was no chance of her coming in the flesh. Tell me, young Monsieur, and you, too, lovely Mademoiselle, do I not recite the facts?”

Rochester and the girl stared at him in amazement. Only the quivering of the young man’s eyelids and the trembling of the girl’s sensitive lips gave testimony he had spoken accurately.

For a moment there was a tense, vibrant silence; then with a little gasping cry the girl lurched forward on soft, soundless feet and dropped to her knees before de Grandin. “Have pity — be merciful!” she begged. “Be merciful to me as you may one day hope for mercy. It’s such a little thing I ask. You know what I am; do you also know who I am, and why I am now — now the accursed thing you see?” She buried her face in her hands. “Oh, it’s cruel — too cruel!” she sobbed. “I was so young; my whole life lay before me. I’d never known real love until it was too late. You can’t be so unkind as to drive me back now; you *can’t!*”

“*Ma pauvre!*” de Grandin laid his hand upon the girl’s bowed, shining head. “My innocent, poor lamb who met the butcher ere you had the lambkin’s right to play! I know all there is to know of you. Your sainted mother told me far more than she dreamed this evening. I am not cruel, my little lovely one; I am all sympathy and sorrow, but life is cruel and death is even crueller. Also, you know what the inevitable end must be if I forbear to do my duty. If I could work a miracle I would roll back the gates of dead, and bid you live and love until your natural time had come to die, but —”

“I don’t care what the end must be!” the girl blazed, sinking back until she sat upon the upturned soles of her bare feet. “I only know that I’ve been cheated out of every woman’s birthright. I’ve found love now, and I want it; I want it! He’s mine, I tell you, mine —” She cowered, groveling before him — “Think what a little thing I’m asking!” Inching forward on her knees she took his hand in both of hers and fondled it against her cheek. “I’m asking just a little drop of blood now and then; just a little, tiny drop to keep my body whole and beautiful. If I were like other women and Donald were my lover he’d be glad to give me a transfusion — to give me a whole pint or quart of

his blood any time I needed it. Is it so much, then, when I ask only an occasional drop? Just a drop now and then, and once in a while a draft of living breath from his lungs to —”

“To slay his poor sick body, then destroy his young, clean soul!” the Frenchman interrupted softly. “It is not of the living that I think so much, but of the dead. Would you deny him quiet rest in his grave when he shall have lost his life because of you? Would you refuse him peaceful sleep until the dawn of God’s Great Tomorrow?”

“O-o-oh!” the cry wrung from her writhing lips was like the wail of a lost spirit. “You’re right — it is his soul we must protect. I’d kill that, too, as mine was killed that night in the swamps. Oh, pity, pity me, dear Lord! Thou who didst heal the lepers and despised not the Magdalen, have pity on me, the soiled, the unclean!”

Scalding tears of agony fell between the fingers of her long, almost transparent hands as she held them before her eyes. Then: “I am ready,” she announced, seeming to find courage for complete renunciation. “Do what you must to me. If it must be the knife and stake, strike quickly. I shall not scream or cry, if I can help it.”

For a long moment he looked in her face as he might have looked in the casket of a dear friend. “*Ma pauvre*,” he murmured compassionately. “My poor, brave, lovely one!”

Abruptly he turned to Rochester. “Monsieur,” he announced sharply, “I would examine you. I would determine the state of your health.”

We stared at him astounded as he proceeded to strip back the — young man’s pyjamas jacket and listen carefully at his chest, testing by percussion, counting the pulse action, then feeling slowly up and down the arm. “U’m” he remarked judicially at the end of the examination, “you are in bad condition, my friend. With medicines, careful nursing, and more luck than the physician generally has, we might keep you alive another month. Again, you might drop over any moment. But in all my life I have never given a patient his death warrant with more happiness.”

Two of us looked at him in mute wonder; it was the girl who understood. “You mean,” she trilled, laughter and a light the like of which there never was on land or sea breaking in her eyes, “you mean that I can have him till —”

He grinned at her delightedly. There was a positively gleeful chuckle in his voice as he replied: “Precisely, exactly, quite so, *Mademoiselle*.” Turning from her he addressed Rochester.

“You and *Mademoiselle Alice* are to love each other as much as you please while life holds out. And afterwards” — he stretched his hand out to grasp the girl’s fingers — “afterwards I shall do the needful for you both. Ha, *Monsieur Diable*, I have tricked you nicely; Jules de Grandin had made one great fool of hell!” He threw his head back and assumed an attitude of defiance, eyes flashing, lips

twitching with excitement and elation.

The girl bent forward, took his hand and covered it with kisses. “Oh, you’re kind — kind!” she sobbed brokenly. “No other man in all the world, knowing what you know, would have done what you have done!”

“*Mais non, mais certainement non, Mademoiselle*,” he agreed imperturbably. “You do forget that I am Jules de Grandin.

“Come, Trowbridge, my friend,” he admonished, “we obtrude here most unwarrantably. What have we, who drained the purple wine of youth long years ago, to do with those who laugh and love the night away? Let us go.”

Hand in hand, the lovers followed us to the hall, but as we paused upon the threshold —

Rat-tat-tat! something struck the fog-glazed window, and as I wheeled in my tracks I felt the breath go hot in my throat. Beyond the window, seemingly adrift in the fog, there was a human form. A second glance told me it was the brutal-faced man we had seen at the café the previous night. But now his ugly, evil face was like the devil’s, not merely a wicked man’s.

“*Eh bien*, Monsieur, is it you, indeed?” de Grandin asked nonchalantly. “I thought you might appear, so I am ready for you.

“Do not invite him in,” he called the sharp command to Rochester. “He cannot come in unbidden. Hold your beloved, place your hand or lips against her mouth, lest she who is his thing and chattel, however unwillingly, give him permission to enter. Remember, he cannot cross the sill without the invitation of someone in this room!”

Flinging up the sash he regarded the apparition sardonically. “What have you to say, *Monsieur le Vampire*, before I send you hence?” he asked.

The thing outside mouthed at us, very fury robbing it of words. At last: “She’s mine!” it shrieked. “I made her what she is, and she belongs to me. I’ll have her, and that dough-faced, dying thing she holds in her arms, too. All, all of you are mine! I shall be king, I shall be emperor of the dead! Not you nor any mortal can stop me. I am all-powerful, supreme, I am —”

“You are the greatest liar outside burning hell,” de Grandin cut in icily. “As for your power and your claims, Monsieur Monkey-Face, tomorrow you shall have nothing, not even so much as a little plot of earth to call a grave. Meanwhile, behold this, devil’s spawn; behold and be afraid!”

Whipping his hand from his topcoat pocket he produced a small flat case like the leather containers sometimes used for holding photographs, pressed a concealed spring and snapped back its top. For a moment the thing in the night gazed at the object with stupefied, unbelieving horror; then with a wild cry fell backward, its uncouth motion somehow

reminding me of a hooked bass.

"You do not like it, I see," the Frenchman mocked. "*Parbleu*, you stinking truant from the charnel-house, let us see what nearer contact will effect!" He stretched his hand out till the leather-cased object almost touched the phantom face outside the window.

A wild, inhuman screech echoed, and as the demon face retreated we saw a weal of red across its forehead, as if the Frenchman had scored it with a hot iron.

"Close the windows, *mes amis*," he ordered casually as though nothing hideous hovered outside. "Shut them tight and hold each other close until the morning comes and shadows flee away. *Bonne nuit!*"

"For heaven's sake," I besought as we began our homeward drive, "what's it all mean? You and Rochester called that girl Alice, and she's the speaking image of the girl we saw in the café last night. But Alice Heatherton is dead. Her mother told us how she died this evening; we saw her tomb this morning. Are there two Alice Heathertons, or is this girl her double —"

"In a way," he answered. "It was Alice Heatherton we saw back there, my friend, yet not the Alice Heatherton of whom her mother spoke this evening, nor yet the one whose tomb we saw this morning —"

"For God's sake," I burst out, "stop this damned double-talk! Was or was it not Alice Heatherton —"

"Be patient, my old one," he counseled. "At present I can not tell you, but later I will have a complete explanation — I hope."

Daylight was just breaking when his pounding on my bedroom door roused me from coma-like sleep. "Up, Friend Trowbridge!" he shouted, punctuating his summons with another knock. "Up and dress as quickly as may be. We must be off at once. Tragedy has overtaken them!"

Scarcely knowing what I did I stumbled from the bed, felt my way into my clothes and, sleep still filming my eyes, descended to the lower hall where he waited in a perfect frenzy of excitement.

"What's happened?" I asked as we started for Rochester's.

"The worst," he answered. "Ten minutes ago I was awakened by the telephone. 'It is for Friend Trowbridge,' I told me. 'Some patient with the *mal de l'estomac* desires a little paregoric and much sympathy. I shall not waken him, for he is all tired with the night's exertions.' But still the bell kept ringing, and so I answered it. My friend, it was Alice. *Hélas*, as strong as her love was, her bondage was still stronger. But when the harm was done she had the courage to call us. Remember that when you come to judge her."

I would have paused for explanation, but he waved me on impatiently. "Make haste; oh, hurry, hurry!" he urged. "We

must go to him at once. Perhaps it is even now too late."

There was no traffic in the streets, and we made the run to Rochester's apartment in record time. Almost before we realized it we were at his door once more, and this time de Grandin stood upon no ceremony. Flinging the door open he raced down the hall and into the living room, pausing at the threshold with a sharp indrawn breath. "So!" he breathed. "He was most thorough, that one."

The place was a shambles. Chairs were overturned, pictures hung awry, bits of broken bric-à-brac were strewn about, the long throw-cover of the center table had been jerked off, overturning the lamp and scattering ashtrays and cigarette boxes indiscriminately.

Donald Rochester lay on the rug before the dead fire, one leg bent queerly under him, his right arm stretched out flaccidly along the floor and bent at a sharp right angle at the wrist.

The Frenchman crossed the room at a run, unclasping the lock of his kit as he leaped. Dropping to his knees he listened intently at the young man's chest a moment, then stripped back his sleeve, swabbed his arm with alcohol and thrust the needle of his hypodermic through a fold of skin. "It is a desperate chance I take," he muttered as he drove the plunger home, "but the case is urgent; *le bon Dieu* knows how urgent."

Rochester's eyelids fluttered as the powerful stimulant took effect. He moaned and turned his head with great effort, but made no move to rise. As I knelt beside de Grandin and helped him raise the injured man I understood the cause of his lethargy. His spine had been fractured at the fourth dorsal vertebra, paralysis resulting.

"Monsieur," the little Frenchman whispered softly, "you are going fast. Your minutes are now more than numbered on the circle of the watch-face. Tell us, tell us quickly, what occurred." Once more he injected stimulant into Rochester's arm.

The young man wet his blued lips with the tip of his tongue, attempted a deep breath, but found the effort too great. "It was he — the fellow you scared off last night," he whispered hoarsely.

"After you'd gone Alice and I lay on the hearth rug, counting our minutes together as a miser counts his gold. I heaped coals on the fire, for she was chilled, but it didn't seem to do any good. Finally she began to pant and choke, and I let her draw breath from me. That revived her a little, and when she'd sucked some blood from my throat she seemed almost herself again, though I could feel no movement of her heart as she lay against me.

"It must have been just before daybreak — I don't know just when, for I'd fallen asleep in her arms — when I heard a clattering at the window, and someone calling to be let in. I remembered your warning, and tried to hold Alice, but she

fought me off. She ran to the window and flung it up as she called, 'Enter, master; there is none to stop you now.'

"He made straight for me, and when she realized what he was about she tried to stop him, but he flung her aside as if she were a rag doll — took her by the hair and dashed her against the wall. I heard her bones crack as she struck it.

"I grappled with him, but I was no more his match than a three-year-old child was mine. He threw me down and broke my arms and legs with his feet. The pain was terrible. Then he grabbed me up and hurled me to the floor again, and after that I felt no pain, except this dreadful headache. I couldn't move, but I was conscious, and the last thing I remember was seeing Alice stepping out the window with him, hand in hand. She didn't even look back."

He paused a moment, fighting desperately for breath, then, still lower, "Oh, Alice — how could you? And I loved you so!"

"Peace, my poor one," bade de Grandin. "She did not do it of her own accord. That fiend holds her in bondage she cannot resist. She is his thing and chattel more completely than ever black slave belonged to his master. Hear me; go with this thought uppermost in your mind: She loved you, she loves you. It is because she called us we are here now, and her last word was one of love for you. Do you hear me? Do you understand? 'Tis sad to die, *mon pauvre*, but surely it is something to die loving and beloved. Many a man lives out his whole life without as much, and many there are who would trade a whole span of four score gladly for five little minutes of the ecstasy that was yours last night.

"Monsieur Rochester — do you hear me?" he spoke sharply, for the young man's face was taking on the greyness of impending death.

"Ye-es. She loves me — she loves me. Alice!" With the name sighing on his lips his facial muscles loosened and his eyes took on the glazed, unwinking stare of eyes that see no more.

De Grandin gently drew the lids across the sightless eyes and raised the fallen jaw, then set about straightening the room with methodical haste. "As a licensed practitioner you will sign the death certificate," he announced matter-of-factly. "Our young friend suffered from angina pectoris. This morning he had an attack, and after calling us fell from the chair on which he stood to reach his medicine, thereby fracturing several bones. He told us this when we arrived to find him dying. You understand?"

"I'm hanged if I do," I denied. "You know as well as I—"

"That the police would have awkward questions to address to us," he reminded me. "We were the last ones to see him alive. Do you conceive that they would credit what we said if we told them the truth?"

Much as I disliked it, I followed his orders to the letter and the poor boy's body was turned over to the ministrations

of Mortician Martin within an hour.

As Rochester had been an orphan without known family de Grandin assumed the role of next friend, made all arrangements for the funeral, and gave orders that the remains be cremated without delay, the ashes to be turned over to him for final disposition.

Most of the day was taken up in making these arrangements and in my round of professional calls. I was thoroughly exhausted by four o'clock in the afternoon, but de Grandin, hustling, indefatigable, seemed fresh as he had been at daybreak.

"Not yet, my friend," he denied as I would have sunk into the embrace of an easy chair, "there is yet something to be done. Did not you hear my promise to the never-quite-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized Palenzeke last night?"

"Eh, your promise?"

"*Précisément*. We have one great surprise in store for that one."

Grumbling, but with curiosity that overrode my fatigue, I drove him to the little Greek Orthodox parsonage. Parked at the door was the severely plain black service wagon of a funeral director, its chauffeur yawning audibly at the delay in getting through his errand.

De Grandin ran lightly up the steps, gained admission and returned in a few minutes with the venerable priest arrayed in full canonicals. "*Allons mon enfant*," he told the chauffeur, "be on your way; we follow."

Even when the imposing granite walls of the North Hudson Crematory loomed before us I failed to understand his hardly suppressed glee.

All arrangements had apparently been made. In the little chapel over the retort Father Apostolakos recited the orthodox burial office, and the casket sank slowly from view on the concealed elevator provided for conveying it to the incineration chamber below.

The aged priest bowed courteously to us and left the building, seating himself in my car, and I was about to follow when de Grandin motioned to me imperatively. "Not yet, Friend Trowbridge," he told me. "Come below and I will show you something."

We made our way to the subterranean chamber where incineration took place. The casket rested on a low wheeled track before the yawning cavern of the retort, but de Grandin stopped the attendants as they were about to roll it into place. Tiptoeing across the tiled floor he bent above the casket, motioning me to join him.

As I paused beside him I recognized the heavy, evil features of the man we had first seen with Alice, the same bestial, furious face which had mouthed curses at us from outside Rochester's window the night before. I would have drawn back, but the Frenchman clutched me firmly by the elbow, drawing me still nearer the body.

“*Tiens, Monsieur le Cadavre,*” he whispered as he bent above the dead thing, “what think you of this, *hein?* You who would be king and emperor of the dead, you who boasted that no power on earth could balk you — did not Jules de Grandin promise you that you should have nothing, not even one poor plot of earth to call a grave? Pah, murderer and ravisher of women, man-killer, where is now your power? Go — go through the furnace fire to hell-fire, and take this with you!” He pursed his lips and spat full in the cold upturned visage of the corpse.

It might have been a trick of overwrought nerves or an optical illusion produced by the electric lights, but I still believe I saw the dead, long-buried body writhe in its casket and a look of terrible, unutterable hate disfigure the waxen features.

He stepped back, nodding to the attendants, and the casket slid noiselessly into the retort. A whirring sounded as the pressure pump was started, and in a moment came the subdued roar of oil-flames shooting from the burners.

He raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug. “*C’est une affaire finie.*”

It was somewhat after midnight when we made our way once more to Shadow Lawn Cemetery. Unerringly as though going to an appointment de Grandin led the way to the Heatherton family mausoleum, let himself through the massive bronze gates with a key he had procured somewhere, and ordered me to stand guard outside.

Lighted by the flash of his electric torch he entered the tomb, a long cloth-covered parcel clasped under his arm. A moment later I heard the clink of metal on metal the sound of some heavy object being drawn across the floor; then, as I grew half hysterical at the long continued silence, there came the short, half-stifled sound of a gasping cry, the sort of cry a patient in the dental chair gives when a tooth is extracted without anaesthetic.

Another period of silence, broken by the rasp of heavy objects being moved, and the Frenchman emerged from the tomb, tears streaming down his face. “Peace,” he announced chokingly. “I brought her peace, Friend Trowbridge, but oh! how pitiful it was to hear her moan, and still more pitiful to see the lovely, live-seeming body shudder in the embrace of relentless death. It is not hard to see the living die, my old one, but the dead! *Mordieu*, my soul will be in torment every time I think of what I had to do tonight for mercy’s sake!”

Jules de Grandin chose a cigar from the humidior and set it glowing with the precision that distinguished his every movement. “I grant you the events of the last three days have been decidedly queer,” he agreed as he sent a cloud of fragrant smoke ceilingward. “But what would you? All that

lies outside our everyday experience is queer. To one who has not studied biology the sight of an amoeba beneath the microscope is queer; the Eskimos undoubtedly thought Monsieur Byrd’s airplane queer; we think the sights which we have seen these nights queer. It is our luck — and all mankind’s — that they are.

“To begin: just as there exist today certain protozoa which are probably identical with the earliest forms of life on earth, so there are still, though constantly diminishing in numbers, certain holdovers of ancient evil. Time was when earth swarmed with them — devils and devilkins, imps, satyrs and demons, elementals, werewolves and vampires. All once were numerous; all, perhaps, exist in considerable numbers to this day, though we know them not, and most of us never so much as hear of them. It is with the vampire that we had to deal this time. You know him, no?”

“Strictly, he is an earthbound soul, a spirit which because of manifold sins and wickedness is bound to the world wherein it once worked evil and cannot take itself to its proper place. He is in India in considerable numbers, also in Russia, Hungary, Romania and throughout the Balkans — wherever civilization is very old and decadent, there he seems to find a favorable soil. Sometimes he steals the body of one already dead; sometimes he remains in the body which he had in life, and then he is most terrible of all, for he needs nourishment for that body, but not such nourishment as you or I take. No, he subsists on the life force of the living, imbibed through their blood, for the blood is the life. He must suck the breath from those who live, or he cannot breathe; he must drink their blood, or he dies of starvation. And here is where the danger rises: a suicide, one who dies under a curse, *or one who has been inoculated with the vampire virus* by having his blood sucked by a vampire, becomes a vampire after death. Innocent of all wrong he may be, often is, yet he is doomed to tread the earth by night, preying ceaselessly upon the living, ever recruiting the grisly ranks of his tribe. You apprehend?”

“Consider this case: This *sacré* Palenzeke, because of his murder and suicide, perhaps partly because of his Slavic ancestry, maybe also because of his many other sins, became a vampire when he killed himself to death. Madame Heatherton’s informant was correct, he had destroyed himself; but his evil body and more evil soul remained in partnership, ten thousand times a greater menace to mankind than when they had been partners in their natural life.

“Enjoying the supernatural power of his life-in-death, he rose from the swamplands, waylaid Mademoiselle Alice, assaulted her chauffeur, then dragged her off into the bog to work his evil will on her, gratifying at once his bestial lust, his vampire’s thirst for blood and his revenge for her rejection of his wooing. When he had killed her, he had

made her such a thing as he was. More, he had gained dominion over her. She was his toy, his plaything, his automaton, without will or volition of her own. What he commanded she must do, however much she hated doing it. You will recall, perhaps, how she told the young Rochester that she must go out with the villain, although she hated him? Also, how she bade him enter the apartment where she and her beloved lay in love's embrace, although his entrance meant her lover's undoing?

"Now, if the vampire added all the powers of living men to his dead powers we should have no defense, but fortunately he is subject to unbreakable laws. He can not independently cross the thread of a running stream, he must be carried; he can not enter any house or dwelling until invited by someone therein; he can fly through the air, enter at keyholes and window-chinks, or through the crack of the door, but he can move about only at night — between sunset and cock-crow. From sunrise to dark he is only a corpse, helpless as any other, and must lie corpse-dead in his tomb. At such times he can easily be slain, but only in certain ways. First, if his heart be pierced by a stake of ash and — his head severed from his body, he is dead in good earnest, and can no more rise to plague us. Second, if he can be completely burned to ashes he is no more, for fire cleanses all things.

"Now, with this information, fit together the puzzle that so mystifies you: the other night at the Café Bacchanale I liked the looks of that one not at all. He had the face of a dead man and the look of a born villain, as well as the eye of a fish. Of his companion I thoroughly approved, though she, too, had an other-worldly look. Wondering about them, I watched them from my eye's tail, and when I observed that they ate nothing I thought it not only strange, but menacing. Normal people do not do such things; abnormal people usually are dangerous.

"When Palenzeke left the young woman, after indicating she might flirt with the young Rochester, I liked the look of things a little less. My first thought was that it might be a game of decoy and robbery — how do you call him? — the game of the badger? Accordingly, I thought it best to follow them to see what we should see. *Eh bien*, my friend, we saw a plenty, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"You will recall young Rochester's experience in the cemetery. As he related it to us I saw at once what manner of foeman we must grapple with, though at that time I did not know how innocent Mademoiselle Alice was. Our information from Madame Heatherton confirmed my worst fears. What we beheld at Rochester's apartment that night

proved all I had imagined, and more.

"But me, I had not been idle meantime. Oh, no. I had seen the good Father Apostolakos and told him what I had learned. He understood at once, and made immediate arrangements to have Palenzeke's foul body exhumed and taken to the crematory for incineration. He also lent me a sacred *ikon*, the blessed image of a saint whose potency to repel demons had more than once been proved. Perhaps you noticed how Mademoiselle Alice shrank from me when I approached her with the relic in my pocket? And how the restless soul of Palenzeke flinched from it as flesh recoils from white-hot iron?

"Very well. Rochester loved this woman already dead. He himself was moribund. Why not let him taste of love with the shade of the woman who returned his passion for the few days he had yet to live? When he died, as die he must, I was prepared to treat his poor clay so that, though he were already half a vampire from the vampire's kisses on his throat, he could yet do no harm. You know I have done so. The cleansing fire has rendered Palenzeke impotent. Also, I had pledged myself to do as much for the poor, lovely, sinned-against Alice when her brief aftermath of earthly happiness should have expired. You heard me promise her, and I have kept my word.

"I could not bear to hurt her needlessly, so when I went to her with stake and knife tonight I took also a syringe loaded with five grains of morphine and gave her an injection before I began my work. I do not think she suffered greatly. Her moan of dissolution and the portion of her poor body as the stake pierced through her heart, they were but reflex acts, not signs of conscious misery."

"But look here," I objected, "if Alice were a vampire, as you say, and able to float about after dark, how comes it that she lay in her casket when you went there tonight?"

"Oh, my friend," tears welled up in his eyes, "she waited for me."

We had a definite engagement; the poor one lay in her casket, awaiting the knife and stake which should set her free from bondage. She — she smiled at me and pressed my hand when I had dragged her from the tomb!"

He wiped his eyes and poured an ounce or so of cognac into a bud-shaped inhaler. "To you, young Rochester, and to your lovely lady," he said as he raised the glass in salute. "Though there be neither marrying nor giving in marriage where you are, may your restless souls find peace and rest eternally — together."

The fragile goblet shattered as he tossed it, emptied, into the fireplace.

The Chapel of Mystic Horror

THE WIND was blowing half a gale and little spits of sudden snow were whirling through the gray November twilight as we alighted from the accommodation train and looked expectantly up and down the uncovered way-station platform. "Seasonable weather for Thanksgiving," I murmured, setting my face against the howling blast and making for the glowing disk of the station-master's light.

"*Barbe d'un pelican, yes!*" assented Jules de Grandin, sinking his chin an inch or so lower in the fur collar of his overcoat. "A polar bear might give thanks for a warm fireside on such a night!"

"Trowbridge — I say there — Trowbridge!" a voice hailed from the lee side of the little red-brick depot as my friend Tandy Van Riper stepped forward, waving a welcoming hand. "This way, old-timer; the car's waiting — so's dinner."

"Glad to meet you, Dr. de Grandin," he acknowledged as I presented the little Frenchman; "it was mighty good of you to come out with Trowbridge and help us light the hearth fires at the Cloisters."

"Ah, then it is a new house that you have, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked as he dropped into a seat in Van Riper's luxurious roadster and tucked the bearskin rug snugly about his knees.

"Well, yes and no," our host replied. "The house has been up — in America — for something like eight years, I believe, but it's new to us. We've been in residence just a little over a month, and we're giving a regular old-fashioned Thanksgiving party by way of housewarming."

"U'm," the Frenchman nodded thoughtfully. "Your pardon, *Monsieur*, it is perhaps that I do not speak the American well, but did you not say the new house had been up in this country for only eight years? I fear I do not apprehend. Is it that the house stood elsewhere before being erected here?"

"Precisely," Van Riper agreed with a laugh. "The Cloisters were built or rebuilt, I suppose you'd say — by Miles Batterman shortly after the close of the World War. Batterman made a potful of money during the war, and a lot more in lucky speculations between the Armistice and the Treaty of Versailles. I reckon he didn't know just what to do with it all, so he blew in a couple of hundred thousand on an old Cyprian villa, had it taken down stone by stone, shipped over here, and re-erected. The building was a sort of remodeled monastery, I believe, and took Batterman's eye

while he was cruising about the Mediterranean in '20. He went to a lot of trouble having it moved here and put up, and everything about the place is exactly as it was in Cyprus, except the heating and plumbing, which he added as a sort of afterthought. Quaint idea, wasn't it?"

"Decidedly," the Frenchman agreed. "And this Monsieur Batterman, did he so soon tire of his expensive toy?"

"Humph, not exactly. I got it from the administrators. I couldn't have afforded to pay a quarter the price Batterman spent on the place, let alone give him a profit on the transaction, but the fact is the old boy dropped off suddenly a year or so ago — so did his wife and daughter. The doctors said they died from eating toadstools by mistake for mushrooms. Whatever the cause was, the whole family died in a single night and the property would have gone to the State by escheat if the lawyers hadn't dug up some ninety-second cousins in Omaha. We bought the house at public auction for about a tenth its value, and I'm figuring on holding it for a while. It'll be novel, living in a place the Knights Templar once occupied, eh?"

"Very novel — very novel, indeed, *Monsieur*," de Grandin replied in a queer, flat voice. "You say the Knights of the Temple once occupied this house?"

"So they tell me — some of their old furniture's still in it."

De Grandin made an odd sound in his throat, and I turned quickly to look at him, but his face was as set and expressionless as the features of a Japanese Buddha, and if the half-smothered exclamation had been meant for conversation, he had evidently thought better of it, for he sat in stony silence during the rest of the drive.

The snow squalls had stopped by the time we drew up at the house, but the wind had increased in velocity, and in the zenith we could see the gibbous moon buffeted about in a surf of windblown clouds. Against the background of the winter sky the irregular outline of the Cloisters loomed in a forbidding silhouette. It was a high, rambling pile of gray masonry in which the characteristics of Romanesque, Gothic and Byzantine architecture were oddly blended. The walls were strengthened by a series of buttresses, crenelated with battlements and punctuated here and there with small, cylindrical watch-towers; the windows were mere slits between the great stones, and the massive entrance-way seemed fitted for a portcullis, yet a great, hemispherical dome rose from the center of the building, and a wide, shallow portico with graceful, fluted columns topped by

Doric capitals stood before the gateway.

Cocktail hour had just struck as we passed through the wide entrance to the main hall, and a party of sleek-haired gentlemen and ladies in fashionably scanty attire were gathered before the cavernous fireplace, chatting and laughing as they imbibed the appetite-whetting amber drinks.

It was an enormous apartment, that hall, clear fifty feet from tiled floor to vaulted ceiling, and the darkness was scarcely more than stained by the flickering glow of blazing logs in the fireplace and the yellow beams of the tall, ecclesiastical candles which stood, singly, in high, wrought-iron standards at intervals along the walls. Draped down the bare stone sides of the hall hung a pair of prodigious tapestries, companion pieces, I thought, depicting particularly gory battle scenes, and I caught a fugitive glimpse of a black-armored knight with a cross-emblazoned surtout hacking the turbaned head from a Saracen, and the tag end of the Latin legend beneath — “*ad Majorem De Gloriam.*”

Piloted by our host we mounted the wide, balustraded staircase to the second of three balconies which ran round three sides of the long hall, found the big, barnlike room assigned us, changed quickly to dinner clothes, and joined the other guests in time to file through a high archway to the oak-paneled apartment where dinner was served by candlelight on a long refectory table set with the richest silver and most opulent linen I had ever seen.

Greatly to his chagrin de Grandin drew a kittenish, elderly spinster with gleaming and palpably false dentition. I was paired off with a Miss O’Shane, a tall, tawny-haired girl with tapering, statuesque limbs and long, smooth-jointed fingers, milk-white skin of the pure-bred Celt and smoldering, rebellious eyes of indeterminate color.

During the soup and fish courses she was taciturn to the point of churlishness, responding to my attempts at conversation with curt, unisyllabic replies, but as the claret glasses were filled for the roast, she turned her strange, half-resentful gaze directly on me and demanded: “Dr. Trowbridge, what do you think of this house?”

“Why — er,” I temporized, scarcely knowing what to reply, “it seems rather gorgeous, but—”

“Yes,” she interrupted as I paused at a loss for an exact expression, “but what?”

“Well, rather depressing — too massive and mediaeval for present-day people, if you get what I mean.”

“I do,” she nodded almost angrily, “I most certainly do. It’s beastly. I’m a painter — a painter of sorts,” she hurried on as my eyes opened in astonishment at her vehemence — “and I brought along some gear to work with between times during the party. Van told me this is liberty hall, and I could do exactly as I pleased, and gave me a big room on the north side for a workshop. I’ve a commission I’ve simply got to finish in two weeks, and I began some preliminary sketches

yesterday, but—” She paused taking a sip of burgundy and looking at me from the corners of her long, brooding eyes as though speculating whether or not to take me further into her confidence.

“Yes?” I prompted, assuming an air of interest.

“It’s no go. Do you remember the Red King in *Through the Looking Glass*?”

“The Red King?” I echoed. “I’m afraid I don’t quite.”

“Don’t you remember how Alice took the end of his pencil in her hand when he was attempting to enter a note in his diary and made him write, ‘The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly’?”

I must have looked my bewilderment, for she laughed aloud, a deep, gurgling laugh in keeping with her rich, contralto speaking voice. “Oh, I’m not a psychopathic case — I hope,” she assured me, “but I’m certainly in a position to sympathize with the poor king. It’s a Christmas card I’m doing — a nice, frosty, sugar-sweet Christmas card — and I’m supposed to have a Noel scene with oxen and asses and sheep standing around the manager of a chubby little naked boy, you know — quite the conventional sort of thing.” She paused again and refreshed herself with a sip of wine, and I noticed that her strong, white-fingered hand trembled as she raised the glass to her lips.

My professional interest was roused. The girl was a splendid, vital animal, lean and strong as Artemis, and the pallor of her pale skin was natural, not unhealthy; yet it required no special training to see she labored under an almost crushing burden of suppressed nervousness.

“Won’t it work out?” I asked soothingly.

“No!” her reply was almost explosive. “No, it won’t! I can block in the interior, all right, though it doesn’t look much like a stable; but when it comes to the figures, something outside me — behind me, like Alice behind the Red King, you know, and just as invisible — seems to snatch the end of my charcoal and guide it. I keep drawing—”

Another pause broke her recital.

“Drawing what, if you please, *Mademoiselle*?” De Grandin turned from his partner who was in the midst of recounting a risqué anecdote and leaned forward, his narrow eyebrows elevated in twin arches, his little, round blue eyes fixed and unwinking in a direct, questioning stare.

The girl started at his query. “Oh, all manner of things,” she began, then broke off with a sharp, half-hysterical laugh. “Just what the Red King said when his pencil wouldn’t work!” she shrilled.

For a moment I thought the little Frenchman would strike her, so fierce was the uncompromising gaze he bent on her; then: “*Ah, bah*, let us not think too much of fairy tales, pleasant or grim, if you please, *Mademoiselle*,” he returned. “After dinner, if you will be so good, Dr. Trowbridge and I shall do ourselves the honor of inspecting these so

mysterious self-dictated drawings of yours. Until then, let us consider this excellent food which the good Monsieur Van Riper has provided for us." Abruptly he turned to his neglected partner. "Yes, *Mademoiselle*," he murmured in his deferential, flattering manner, "and then the bishop said to the rector—?"

II

Dinner completed, we trooped into the high, balconied hall for coffee, tobacco and liqueurs. A radio, artfully disguised as a mediaeval Flemish console, squawked jazz with a sputtering obligato of static, and some of the guests danced, while the rest gathered at the rim of the pool of firelight and talked in muted voices. Somehow, the great stone house seemed to discourage frivolity by the sheer weight of its antiquity.

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin whispered almost fiercely in my ear as he plucked me by the sleeve, "Mademoiselle O'Shane awaits our pleasure. Come, let us go to her studio at once before old *Mère l'Oie* tells me another of her so detestable stories of unvirtuous clergymen!"

Grinning as I wondered how the little Frenchman's late dinner partner would have enjoyed hearing herself referred to as Mother Goose, I followed him up the first flight of stairs, crossed the lower balcony and ascended a second stairway, narrow and steeper than the first, to the upper gallery where Miss O'Shane waited before the heavily carved door of a great, cavelike room paneled from flagstone floor to beamed ceiling with age-blackened oak wainscot. Candles seemed the only mode of illumination available in the house, and our hostess had lighted half a dozen tapers which stood so that their luminance fell directly on an oblong of eggshell bristol board anchored to her easel by thumbtacks.

"Now, here's what I started to do," she began, indicating the sketch with a long, beautifully manicured forefinger. "This was supposed to be the inside of the stable at Bethlehem, and — oh?" The short, half-choked exclamation, uttered with a puzzled, questioning rising inflection, cut short her sentence, and she stared at her handiwork as though it were something she had never seen before.

Leaning forward, I examined the embryonic picture curiously. As she had said at dinner, the interior, rough and elementary as it was, did not resemble a stable. Crude and rough it undoubtedly was, but with a rudeness unlike that of a barn. Cubic, rough-hewn stones composed the walls, and the vaulting of the concatenated roof was supported by a series of converging arches with piers based on blocks of oddly carved stone representing wide, naked feet, toes forward, standing on the crowns of hideous, gargoyle-like

heads with half-human, half-reptilian faces which leered hellishly in mingled torment and rage beneath the pressure. In the middle foreground was a raised rectangular object which reminded me of a flat-topped sarcophagus, and beside it, slightly to the rear, there loomed the faint, spectral outline of a sinister, cowed figure with menacing, upraised hand, while in the lower foreground crouched, or rather groveled, a second figure, a long, boldly sketched female form with outstretched supplicating hands and face concealed by a cascade of downward sweeping hair. Back of the hooded, monkish form were faint outlines of what had apparently first been meant to represent domestic animals, but I could see where later, heavier pencil strokes had changed them into human shapes resembling the cowed and hooded figure.

I shuddered involuntarily as I turned from the drawing, for not only in half-completed line and suggestive curve, but also in the intangible spirit of the thing was the suggestion of something bestial and unhallowed. Somehow, the thing seemed to suggest something revolting, something pregnant with the disgusting incongruity of a ribald song bawled in church when the *Kyrie* should be sung, or of rose-water sprinkled on putrefying offal.

De Grandin's slender dark brown eyebrows elevated till they almost met the shoreline of his sleekly combed fair hair, and the waxed points of his diminutive blond mustache reared upward like a pair of horns as he pursed his thin lips, but he made no verbal comment.

Not so Miss O'Shane. As though a sudden draft of air had blown through the room, she shivered, and I could see the horror with which she stared wide-eyed, at her own creation. "It wasn't like that!" she exclaimed in a thin, rasping whisper like the ghost of a scream. "I didn't do that!"

"Eh, how do you say, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin challenged, regarding her with his unwinking cat-stare. "You would have us to understand that—"

"Yes!" She still spoke in a sort of awed, wondering whisper. "I didn't draw it that way! I blocked in the interior and made it of stone, for I was pretty sure the Holy Land stables were masonry, but I didn't draw those beastly arch-supports! They were just plain blocks of stone when I made them. I did put in the arches — not that I wanted to, but because I felt compelled to do it, but this — this is all different!" Her words trailed off till we could scarcely catch them, not because of lowered tone, but because they came higher, thinner, with each syllable. Stark, unreasoning terror had her by the throat, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she managed to breathe.

"H'm," de Grandin tweaked the pointed ends of his mustache. "Let us recapitulate, if you please, *Mademoiselle*: Yesterday and today you worked on this sketch? Yes? You drew what you conceived to be a Jewish stable in the days of Caesar Augustus — and what else, if you recall?"

“Just the stable and the bare outlines of the manger, then a half-completed figure which was to have been Joseph, and the faintest outlines of the animals and a kneeling figure before the cradle — I hadn’t determined whether it would be male or female, or whether it would be full-draped or not, for I wasn’t sure whether I’d have the Magi or the shepherds or just some of the village folk adoring the Infant, you see. I gave up working about four this afternoon, because the light was beginning to fail and because—”

“*Eh bien*, because of what, if you please, *Mademoiselle*?” the Frenchman prompted sharply as the girl dropped her recital.

“Because there seemed to be an actual physical opposition to my work — almost as if an invisible hand were gently but insistently forcing my pencil to draw things I hadn’t conceived — things I was afraid to draw! Now, do you think I’m crazy?”

She paused again, breathing audibly through slightly parted lips, and I could see the swelling of her throat as she swallowed convulsively once or twice.

Ignoring her question, the little Frenchman regarded her thoughtfully a moment, then examined the drawing once more. “This who was to have been the good Saint Joseph, now,” he asked softly, “was he robed after this fashion when you limned him?”

“No, I’d only roughed out the body. He had no face when I quit work.”

“U’m, *Mademoiselle*, he is still without a face,” de Grandin replied.

“Yes, but there’s a place for his face in the opening of his hood, and if you look closely you can almost see his features — his eyes, especially. I can feel them on me, and they’re not good. They’re bad, wicked, cruel — like a snake’s or a devil’s. See, he’s robed like a monk; I didn’t draw him that way!”

De Grandin took up one of the candelabra and held it close to the picture, scanning the obscene thing with an unhurried, critical stare, then turned to us with a half-impatient shrug. “*Tenez*, my friends,” he remarked. “I fear we make ourselves most wretchedly unhappy over a matter of small moment. Let us join the others.”

III

Midnight had struck and de Grandin and I had managed to lose something like thirty dollars at the bridge tables before the company broke up for the evening.

“Do you really think that poor O’Shane girl is a little off her rocker?” I asked as we made ready for bed.

“I doubt it,” he replied, as he fastened the sash of his pale lavender pajama jacket with a nervous tug; “indeed, I am inclined to believe all that she told us — and something

more.”

“You think it possible she could have been in a sort of day-dream while she drew those awful things, thinking all the while she was drawing a Christmas card?” I asked incredulously.

“*Ah bah*,” he returned, as he kicked off his purple lizard-skin slippers and leaped into bed, “what matters it what we think? Unless I am more mistaken than I think, we shall know with certitude before very long.” And turning his back upon me, he dropped off to sleep.

I might have slept an hour, perhaps only a few minutes, when the sharp impact of an elbow against my ribs aroused me. “Eh?” I demanded, sitting up in bed and rubbing my eyes sleepily.

“Trowbridge, my friend,” de Grandin’s sharp whisper came through the darkness, “Listen! Do you hear it?”

“Huh?” I responded, but:

“*Ps-s-st!*” he shut me off with a minatory hiss, and I held my peace, straining my ears through the chill November night.

At first I heard nothing but the skirling of the wind-fiends racing past the turreted walls, and the occasional creak of a rusty hinge as some door or shutter swung loose from its fastenings; then, very faint and faraway seeming, but growing in clarity as my ears became attuned to it, I caught the subdued notes of a piano played very softly.

“Come!” de Grandin breathed, slipping from the bed and donning a mauve-silk gown.

Obedying his summons, I rose and followed him on tiptoe across the balcony and down the stairs. As we descended, the music became clearer, more distinct. Someone was in the music room, touching the keys of the big grand piano with a delicate harpsichord touch. *Liebesträum* the composition was, and the gently struck notes fell, one after another, like drops of limpid water dripping from a moss-covered ledge into a quiet woodland pool.

“Why, it’s exquisite,” I began, but de Grandin’s upraised hand cut short my commendation as he motioned me forward.

Seated before the piano was Dunroe O’Shane, her long, ivory fingers flitting over the ivory keys, her loosened tawny hair flowing over her uncovered white shoulders like molten bronze. From gently swelling breast to curving instep she was draped in a clinging shift of black-silk tissues which revealed the gracious curves of her pale body.

As we paused at the doorway the dulcet German air came to an abrupt ending, the girl’s fingers began weaving sinuous patterns over the keys, as though she would conjure up some nether-world spirit from their pallid smoothness, and the room was suddenly filled with a libidinous, macabre theme in B minor, beautiful and seductive, but at the same time revolting. Swaying gently to the rhythm of the frenetic music, she turned her face toward us, and I saw her eyes

were closed, long lashes sweeping against white cheeks, pale fine-veined lids calmly lowered.

“Why,” I exclaimed softly, “why, de Grandin, she’s asleep, she’s—”

A quick movement of his hand stayed my words, as he stole softly across the rug-strewn floor, bent forward till his face was but a few inches from hers, and stared intently into veiled eyes. I could see the small blue veins in his temples swell and throb, and muscles of his throat bunch and contract with the physical effort he made to project his will into her consciousness. His thin, firm lips moved, forming soundless words, and one of his small, white hands rose slowly, finger-tips together, as though reeling thread from an invisible skein, paused a moment before her face, then moved slowly back, with a gliding, stroking motion.

Gradually, with a slow diminuendo, the wicked, salacious tune came to a pause, died to a thin, vibrating echo, ceased. Still with lowered lids and gently parted lips, the girl rose from the piano, wavered uncertainly a moment, then walked from the room with a slow, gliding step, her slim, naked feet passing soundlessly as a drift of air, as slowly she mounted the stairs.

Silently, in a sort of breathless wonder, I watched her disappear around the curve of the stone stairway, and was about to hazard a wandering opinion when a sharp exclamation from the Frenchman silenced me.

“Quick, my friend,” he ordered, extinguishing the tall twin candles which burned beside the piano, “let us go up. Unless I am more badly mistaken than I think, there is that up there which is worth seeing!”

I followed him up the stairs, down the first gallery to the second flight and down the upper balcony to the bare, forbidding room Miss O’Shane used as studio. “Ah,” he breathed as he struck a wax match and ignited the candles before the drawing-board, “did I not say it? *Parbleu*, Friend Trowbridge, Mademoiselle O’Shane has indulged in more than one unconscious art this night, or Jules de Grandin is a liar!”

As the candle flames leaped to burning points in the still air of the room I started forward, then shrank back from the sketch their radiance revealed. Progress had been made on the picture since we had viewed it earlier in the evening. The hooded figure in the foreground was now clearly drawn, and it was no monk, but a steel-clad warrior with long white surtout worn over his armor and a white hood pulled forward, half concealing his thin, bearded face. But there was a face there, where there had been none before — a thin, vulpine, wicked face with set, cruel eyes which gloated on the prostrate figure before him. The upraised arm which had no hand when Miss O’Shane showed us the drawing after dinner now terminated in a mailed fist, and between the steel-sheathed fingers it held the stem of a chalice, a lovely, tulip-shaped cup of crystal, as though it

would scatter its contents to the polished stone with which the picture room was paved. One other thing I noted before my glance shifted to the female figure — the long, red passion cross upon the white surtout was reversed, its long arm pointing upward, its transverse bar lowered, and even as I saw this I remembered vaguely that when knightly orders flourished it was the custom of heraldic courts thus to reverse a sir-knight’s coats of arms when he was degraded from his chivalry as unworthy to maintain his traditions.

What had been the rough outlines of the manger were now firmly drawn into the representation of an altar, complete with the crucifix and tabernacle, but veiling the cross, so lightly sketched that, stare as I would, I could not make it out, was an odd-shaped, winged form, somewhat resembling a bat with outstretched wings.

Before the altar’s lowest step the female figure, now drawn with the detail of an engraving, groveled starkly, chin and breasts, knees and elbows, instep and wrists pressed tightly to the stones; open, suppliant hands stretched forward, palms upward; rippling masses of hair flowing forward, like a plume of smoke blown in the wind, and obscuring the face.

And what was that upon the second step leading to the sanctuary? At first I thought it an alms-basin, but a second glance showed me it was a wide, shallow dish, and in it rested a long, curve-bladed knife, such as I had seen French butchers wear in their belts while enjoying a noonday smoke and resting for a space from their gory trade before the entrance of an abattoir.

“Good heavens!” I gasped, turning from the grisly scene with a feeling of physical sickness. “This is terrible, de Grandin! What are we going to do—?”

“*Barbe et tête de Saint Denis*, we do this!” he replied in a furious hissing voice. “*Parbleu*, shall Jules de Grandin be made a fool of twice in one night? Not if he knows it!”

Seizing an eraser from the tray, he bent forward, and with half a dozen vigorous strokes reduced the picture to a meaningless smear of black and gray smudges.

“And now,” he dusted his hands one against the other, as though to cleanse them of something foul, “let us to bed once more, my friend. I think we shall find something interesting to talk of tomorrow.”

Shortly after breakfast next morning he found an excuse for separating Dunroe O’Shane from the rest of the company. “Will you not have pity on our loneliness, *Mademoiselle*?” he asked. “Here we lie, imprisoned in this great jail of a house, without so much as a radio program to cheer us through the morning hours. May we not trespass on your kindness and beg that you play for our delectation?”

“I play?” the girl answered with a half-incredulous smile. “Why, Dr. de Grandin. I don’t know one note from another. I never played the piano in my life!”

“U’m?” He looked polite doubt as he twisted the ends of

his mustache. "It is perhaps that I do not plead our cause fervently enough, *Mademoiselle*?"

"But truly, I can't play," she persisted.

"That's right, Dr. de Grandin," one of the young men chimed in. "Dunroe's a whiz at drawing, but she's absolutely tone-deaf. Can't carry a tune in a basket. I used to go to school with her, and they always gave her a job passing out programs or selling tickets when the class chorus sang."

De Grandin shot me a quick glance and shook his head warningly.

"What does it mean?" I asked as soon as we were together once more. "She declares she can't play, and her friends corroborate her, but—"

"But stranger things have happened, and *Mordieu*, still stranger ones will happen again, or the presentiment which I have is nothing more than the consequences of a too hearty breakfast!" he broke in with one of his quick, elfin smiles. "Let us play the silly fool, Friend Trowbridge; let us pretend to believe that the moon is composed entirely of green cheese and that mice terrorize the pussy-cat. So doing, we shall learn more than if we attempt to appear filled with wisdom which we do not possess."

IV

"Oh, I know what let's do!" Miss Prettybridge, the lady of the scintillating teeth, whom de Grandin had squired to dinner the previous evening, exclaimed shortly after ten o'clock that night. "This is such a romantic old house — I'm sure it's just full of memories. Let's have a séance!"

"Fine, splendid, capital!" chorused a dozen voices. "Who'll be the medium? Anybody got a Ouija board or a planchette table?"

"Order, order, please!" the self-constituted chairwoman rapped peremptorily on a bridge table with her lorgnette "I know how to do it! We'll go into the dining room and gather about the table. Then, when we've formed the mystic circle, if there are any spirits about we'll make 'em talk to us by rapping. Come on, everybody!"

"I don't think I like this," Miss O'Shane murmured as she laid her hand on my arm. Her usually pale face was paler still, and there was an expression of haunted fear in her eyes as she hesitated at the doorway.

"I don't care much for such nonsense myself," I admitted as we followed the others reluctantly into the refectory.

"Be close to me while this progresses, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered as he guided me to a seat beside him. "I care not much for this business of the monkey, but it may be the old she-fool yonder will serve our purpose unwittingly. The greatest danger is to *Mademoiselle* Dunroe. Keep watch on her."

The candles in the dining-room wall sconces were

extinguished, and with Miss Prettybridge at the head of the table, the entire company was seated at the board, each one with his hands outspread on the dark, polished oak before him, his thumbs touching lightly, his little fingers in contact with those of his neighbors to right and left.

"Spirits," Miss Prettybridge, in her role of priestess, threw out the customary challenge, "spirits, if you are here tonight, signify your presence by rapping once on the table."

Thirty seconds or so elapsed without an answer to the lady's invitation. A woman half-way down the board tittered in half-hysterical embarrassment, and her neighbor silenced her with an impatient "*sh-s-s-sh!*" Then, distinctly as though thumped with a knuckle, the ancient table gave forth a resounding crack.

"If the spirit is a man, rap once; if a woman, twice," instructed Miss Prettybridge.

Another pause, somewhat longer, this time, then slowly, distinctly, two soft knocks from the very center of the table.

"Oh, a woman!" trilled one of the girls. "How perfectly thrilling!"

"And your name is — what?" demanded the mistress of ceremonies in a voice which trembled slightly in spite of her effort at control.

Thirteen slow, clear strokes sounded on the table, followed by one, then by eighteen, then others in series until nine distinct groups of blows were recorded.

"M-a-r-i-e-a-n-n-e Marie Anne — a French girl!" exclaimed Miss Prettybridge. "Whom do you wish to speak with, Marie Anne? Rap when I come to the name as I call the roll. Dr. Trowbridge?"

No response.

"Dr. de Grandin?"

A sharp, affirmative knock answered her, and the visitant was bidden to spell out her message.

Followed a rapid, telegraphic series of blows on the table, sometimes coming so quickly that it was impossible for us to decode them.

I listened as attentively as I could; so did everyone else, except Jules de Grandin. After a moment, during which his sleek blond head was thrust forward inquiringly, he turned his attention to Dunroe O'Shane.

The logs were burning low in the fireplace, but a shifting, flickering glow soaked through the darkness now and again, its red reflection lighting up the girl's face with a strange, unearthly illumination like the nimbus about the head of a saint in a medieval painting.

I felt the Frenchman's fingers stiffen against mine, and realized the cause of his tenseness as I stole a fleeting glance at Miss O'Shane. Her eyes had closed, and her red, petulant lips were lightly parted, as though in sleep. Over her small, regular features had crept a look of longing ecstasy.

Even my limited experience with psychotherapy was sufficient to tell me she was in a condition verging on

hypnosis, if not actually over the borderline of consciousness, and I was about to leap from my seat with an offer of assistance when the insistent pressure of de Grandin's fingers on mine held me back. Turning toward him, I saw his head nod sharply toward the doorway behind the girl, and following his silent bidding, I cast my glance into the passageway in time to see someone slip quickly and noiselessly down the hall.

For a moment I sat in wondering silence, debating whether I had seen one of the servants creep past or whether I was the victim of an optical illusion, when my attention was suddenly compelled to a second figure, then a third, a fourth and a fifth passing the archway's opening like flashes of light against a darkened wall. My reason told me my eyes were playing pranks, for the gliding, soundless figures filing in quick procession past the proscenium of the dining-room door were tall, bearded men encased in gleaming black armor, and shrouded from shoulder to spurs in sable cloaks.

I blinked my eyes and shook my head in bewilderment, wondering if I had fallen into a momentary doze and dreamed the vision, but sharply, with theatrical suddenness, there sounded the raucous, brazen bray of a bugle, the skirling squeal of an uncoiled windlass reeling out rope, the thud of a drawbridge falling into place; then, above the whistling November wind there winded another trumpet flourish and the clatter of iron-shod hooves against stone paving-blocks.

"Why, what was that?" Miss Prettybridge forgot the spirit message still being thumped out on the table and threw back her head in momentary alarm.

"Sounds like a troop of scouts out for an evening's lark," put in our host, rising from the table. "Queer they should come out here to toot their bugles, though."

"Ha, *Parbleu*, you say rightly, my friend," de Grandin, broke in, rising so suddenly that his chair tilted back and fell to the floor with a resounding crash. "It is queer, most damnably queer. Boy scouts did you say? Pray they be not scouts of evil in search of some hapless little lad while a company of empty-headed fools sit idly by listening to the chatter of their decoy!

"Did none of you recognize the message the spirit had for me?"

We looked at him in silent astonishment as he lighted the wall-candles one after another and faced us with a countenance gone livid with fury.

"*Ah bah*, it is scarcely worth troubling to tell you," he cried, "but the important message the spirit had for me was a silly little nursery rhyme:

"Great A, little a,
Bouncing B.
The cat's in the cupboard,
And can't see me!"

"No, the cat might not see that accursed decoy spirit, but

Jules de Grandin could see the others as they slunk past the door upon their devil's work! Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, look at Mademoiselle O'Shane, if you will."

Startled by his command, I turned round. Dunroe O'Shane had fallen forward across the table, her long, tawny hair freed from its restraining pins and lying about her head like a pool of liquid bronze. Her eyes were still closed, but the peaceful expression had gone from her face, and in its stead was a look of unutterable fear and loathing.

"Take her up, some of you," de Grandin almost shrieked. "Bear her to her chamber and Dr. Trowbridge and I will attend to her. Then, Monsieur Van Riper, if you will be so good, I shall ask you to lend us one of your swiftest motor cars."

"A motor car — now?" Van Riper's incredulous tone showed he doubted his ears.

"*Précisément, Monsieur*, permit that I compliment you on the excellence of your hearing," the Frenchman replied. "A swift motor car with plenty of fuel, if you please. There are certain medicines needed to attend this sickness of body and soul, and to strike directly at its cause, and we must have them without delay. Dr. Trowbridge will drive; you need not trouble your chauffeur to leave his bed."

Ten minutes later, having no more idea of our destination than I had of the underlying causes of the last half hour's strange events, I sped down the turnpike, Van Riper's powerful motor warming up with every revolution, and gaining speed with every foot we traveled.

"Faster, faster, my friend," the little Frenchman besought as we whirled madly around a banked curve in the road and started down the two-mile straightaway with the speedometer registering sixty-five miles an hour.

Twin disks of lurid flame arose above the crest of the gradient before us, growing larger and brighter every second, and the pounding staccato of high powered motorcycles driven at top speed came to us through the shrieking wind.

I throttled down our engine to a legal speed as the State Troopers neared, but instead of rushing past they came to a halt, one on each side of us. "Where you from?" demanded the one to our left, on whose arm a sergeant's chevrons showed.

"From Mr. Van Riper's house — the Cloisters," I answered. "I'm Dr. Trowbridge, of Harrisonville, and this is Dr. de Grandin. A young lady at the house had been taken ill, and were rushing home for medicine."

"Ump?" the sergeant grunted. "Come from th' Cloisters, do you? Don't suppose you passed anyone on the road?"

"No—" I began, but de Grandin leaned past me.

"For whom do you seek, *mon sergent*?" he demanded.

"Night riders!" the words fairly spat from the policeman's lips. "Lot o' dam' kidnapers, sir. Old lady down th' road about five miles — name o' Stebbens — was walkin' home

from a neighbor's with her grandson, a cute little lad about three years old, when a crowd o' bums came riding hell-bent for election past her, knocked her for a loop an' grabbed up the kid. Masqueraders they was — wore long black gowns, she said, an' rode on black horses. Went away whoopin' an' yellin' to each other in some foreign language, an' laughin' like a pack o' dogs. Be God, they'll laugh outa th' other side o' their dirty mouths if we catch 'em!"

"Come on, Shoup, let's roll," he ordered his companion.

The roar of their motorcycles grew fainter and fainter as they swept down the road, and in another moment we were pursuing our way toward the city, gathering speed with every turn of the wheels.

V

We had gone scarcely another mile before the slate-colored clouds which the wind had been piling together in the upper sky ripped apart and great clouds of soft, feathery snowflakes came tumbling down, blotting out the road ahead and cutting our speed to a snail's pace. It was almost gray light before we arrived at the outskirts of Harrisonville, and the snow was falling harder than ever as we headed up the main thoroughfare.

"*Hélas*, my friend, there is not the chance that we can return to the Cloisters before noon, be our luck of the best," de Grandin muttered disconsolately; "therefore I suggest that we go to your house and obtain a few hours' rest."

"But how about the medicine you wanted?" I objected. "Hadn't we better see about getting that first?"

"*Non*," he returned. "It will keep. The medicine I seek could not be administered before tonight — if that soon — and we can secure it later as well as now."

Rather surprised at our unheralded return, but used to the vagaries of a bachelor physician and his eccentric friend, Nora McGinnis, my housekeeper and general-factotum, prepared a toothsome breakfast for us next morning, and we had completed the meal, lingering over coffee and cigarettes a little longer than usual, when de Grandin's face suddenly went livid as he thrust the folded newspaper he had been reading into my hand.

"Look, *mon ami*," he whispered raspily. "Read what is there. They did not wait long to be about their deviltry!"

STATE COP DEAD IN MYSTERY KILLING

announced the headline to which he had directed my attention. Below was a brief dispatch, evidently a bit of last-minute news, sandwiched between the announcement of a sheriff's sale and a patent medicine advertisement:

JOHNSKILL — Sergeant Rosswell of the state constabulary is dead and Private Shoup in a serious condition as the result of

a battle with a mysterious band of masked ruffians near this place early this morning. Shortly after ten o'clock last night Matilda Stebbens, of Osmondville, who was returning from a visit to a neighbor's with her three-year-old grandson, George, was attacked by a company of men mounted on black or dark-colored horses and enveloped in long black gowns, according to her story to the troopers. The leader of the gang struck her a heavy blow with a club or blackjack, evidently with the intention of stunning her and seized the little boy, lifting him to his saddle. Had it not been for the fact that Mrs. Stebbens still affects long hair and was wearing a stiff felt hat, the blow would undoubtedly have rendered her unconscious, but as it was she was merely knocked into the roadside ditch without losing consciousness, and as she lay there, half stunned from the blow, she heard the kidnapers exchange several words in some foreign language, Italian, she thought, before they set out at a breakneck pace, giving vent to wild whoops and yells. The direction of their flight was toward this place, and as soon as she was able to walk, Mrs. Stebbens hobbled to the nearest telephone and communicated with the state police.

Sergeant Rosswell and Private Shoup were detailed to the case and started in pursuit of the abductors on their motorcycles, encountering no one along the road who would admit having seen the company of mysterious mounted gangsters. About two miles this side of the Cloisters, palatial country place of Tandy Van Riper, well-known New York financier, according to Trooper Shoup, he and his companion came upon the kidnapers, riding at almost incredible speed. Drawing their pistols, the state policemen, called on the fleeing men to halt, and receiving no reply, opened fire. Their bullets, though fired at almost point-blank range, seemed to take no effect, Trooper Shoup declares, and the leader of the criminal band turned about, and charged him and his companion, deliberately riding Sergeant Rosswell down. According to Shoup, a shot fired by Rosswell, directly at the horse which was about to trample him, took no effect, though the pistol was less than three feet from the beast's breast. Shoup is suffering from a broken arm, three fractured ribs and a severe bruise on the head, which, he alleges, was dealt him when one of the thugs struck him with the flat of a sword.

Physicians at Mercy Hospital, believing Shoup's description of the criminals and the fight to be colored by the beating he received, intimate that he is not wholly responsible for his statements, as he positively declares that every member of the band of criminals was fully arrayed in black armor and armed with a long sword.

Working on the theory that the kidnapers are a band of Italian desperadoes who assumed this fantastic disguise, strong posses of state police are scouring the neighborhood. It is thought the little Stebbens boy was abducted by mistake, as the family are known to be in very moderate circumstances and the chances of obtaining a ransom for the lad are slight.

"You see?" de Grandin asked as I put the paper down with an exclamation of dismay.

"No. I'm hanged if I do," I shot back. "The whole gruesome business is beyond me. Is there any connection between what we saw at the Cloisters last night and—"

"*Mort d'un rat noir*, is there connection between the

serpent and his venom — the Devil and the flames of hell?” he cried. “Yes, my friend, there is such a connection as will take all our skill and courage to break, I fear. Meantime, let us hasten, let us fly to the City Hospital. There is that there which shall prove more than a surprise to those vile miscreants, those forsworn servants of the Lord, when next we see them, *mon vieux*.”

“What in the world are you talking about?” I demanded. “Whom do you mean by ‘forsworn servants of the Lord’?”

“Ha, good friend,” he returned, his face working with emotion, “you will know in due time, if what I suspect is true. If not—” He raised his narrow shoulders in a fatalistic shrug as he snatched his overcoat.

For upward of half an hour I cooled my heels in the frosty winter air while de Grandin was closeted in conference with the superintendent of the City Hospital, but when he came out he was wearing such a smile of serene happiness that I had not the heart to berate him for leaving me outside so long.

“And now, kind friend, if you will take me, so far as the procathedral, I shall have done the last of my errands, and we may begin our journey to the Cloisters,” he announced as he leaped nimbly into the seat beside me.

The Right Reverend De Motte Gregory, suffragan bishop of our diocese, was seated at his desk in the synod house as de Grandin and I were announced, and graciously consented to see us at once. He had been a more than ordinarily successful railway executive, a licensed legal practitioner and a certified public accountant before he assumed the cloth, and his worldly training had taught him the value of time and words, both his own and others’, and rarely did he waste either.

“*Monsieur l’Eveque*,” de Grandin began after he had greeted the gray-haired cleric with a rigidly formal European bow, “in the garden of your beautiful church there grows a bush raised from a sprig of the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury — the tree which sprang from the staff of the blessed Joseph of Arimathea when he landed in Britain after his voyage and travail. *Monseigneur*, we are come to beg a so little spray of that shrub from you.”

The bishop’s eyes opened wide with surprise, but de Grandin gave him no time for reflection.

“Sir,” he hurried on, “it is not that we wish to adorn our own gardens, nor yet to put it to a shameful commercial use, but we need it — need it most urgently in a matter of great importance which is toward—”

Leaving his chair he leaned across the bishop’s wide rosewood desk and began whispering rapidly in the churchman’s ear.

The slightly annoyed frown which mounted to the bishop’s face as the little Frenchman took the liberty changed slowly to a look of incredulity, then to an expression of amazement, “You really believe this?” he

asked at length.

“More, *Monseigneur*, I almost know it,” de Grandin assured him earnestly, “and if I am mistaken, as I hope I am but fear I am not, the holy thorn can do no harm, while it may—” He paused, waving his hand in an expressive gesture.

Bishop Gregory touched one of the row of call-buttons on his desk. “You shall have the cutting from the tree, and be very welcome,” he assured my friend, “but I join with you in the hope you are mistaken.”

“*Grand merci, Monseigneur!*” de Grandin acknowledged with another bow. “*Mordieu*, but your great heart is equaled only by your massive intellect! Half the clergy would have said I raved had I told them one small quarter of what I related to you.”

The bishop smiled a little wearily as he put the sprig of thorn-bush into de Grandin’s hand. “Half the clergy, like half the laity, know so much that they know next to nothing,” he replied.

“Name of a name,” de Grandin swore enthusiastically as we turned toward the Cloisters, “and they say he is a worldly man! *Pardieu*, when will the foolish ones learn that the man who dedicates worldly wisdom to heaven’s service is the most valuable servant of all?”

VI

Dunroe O’Shane was attired in a long, brown-linen smock and hard at work on her drawing when we arrived at the Cloisters shortly before luncheon. She seemed none the worse for her fainting fit of the previous night, and the company were rather inclined to rally de Grandin on the serious diagnosis he had made before rushing away to secure medicine for her.

I was amazed at the good-natured manner in which he took their chaffing, but a hasty whisper in my ear explained his self-control. “Apes’ anger and fools’ laughter are alike to be treated with scorn, my friend,” he told me. “We — you and I — have work to do here, and we must not let the hum of pestilent gnats drive us from our purpose.”

Bridge and dancing filled the evening from dinner to midnight, and the party broke up shortly after twelve with the understanding that all were to be ready to attend Thanksgiving services in the near-by parish church at eleven o’clock next morning.

“Ts-s-st, Friend Trowbridge, do not disrobe,” de Grandin ordered as I was about to shed my dinner clothes and prepare for bed; “we must be ready for an instant sortie from now until cockcrow tomorrow, I fear.”

“What’s this all about, anyhow?” I demanded a little irritably, as I dropped on the bed and wrapped myself in a blanket. “There’s been more confounded mystery here than I ever saw in a harmless old house, what with Miss O’Shane

making funny drawings, throwing fainting-fits, and bugles sounding in the courtyard, and—”

“Ha, harmless, did you say?” he cut in with a grim smile. “My friend, if this house be harmless, then prussic acid is a healthful drink. Attend me with care, if you please. Do you know what this place is?”

“Certainly I do,” I responded with some heat. “It’s an old Cypriote villa brought to America and—”

“It was once a chapter house of the Knights of the Temple,” he interrupted shortly, “and a Cyprian chapter house, at that. Does that mean nothing to you? Do you not know the Knights Templars my friend?”

“I ought to,” I replied. “I’ve been one for the last fifteen years.”

“*Oh, la, la!*” he laughed. “You will surely slay me, my friend. You good, kind American gentlemen who dress in pretty uniforms and carry swords are no more like the old Knights of the Temple of Solomon than are these other good men who wear red tarbooshes and call themselves Nobles of the Mystic Shrine like the woman-stealing, pilgrim-murdering Arabs of the desert.

“Listen: The history of the Templars’ order is a long one, but we can touch its high spots in a few words. Formed originally for the purpose of fighting the Infidel in Palestine and aiding poor pilgrims to the Holy City they did yeomen service in the cause of God; but when Europe forsook its crusades and the Saracens took Jerusalem, the knights, whose work was done, did not disband. Not they. Instead, they clung to their various houses in Europe, and grew fat, lazy and wicked in a life of leisure, supported by the vast wealth they had amassed from gifts from grateful pilgrims and the spoils of battle. In 1191 they bought the Isle of Cyprus from Richard I of England and established several chapter houses there, and it was in those houses that unspeakable things were done. Cyprus is one of the most ancient dwelling places of religion, and of her illegitimate sister, superstition. It was there that the worshipers of Cytherea, goddess of beauty and of love — and other things less pleasant — had their stronghold. Before the Romans held the land it was drenched with unspeakable orgies. The very name of the island has passed into an invidious adjective in your language — do you not say a thing is Cyprian when you would signify it is lascivious? Certainly.”

“But—”

“Hear me,” he persisted, waving aside my interruption. “This Cytherea was but another form of Aphrodite, and Aphrodite, in turn, was but another name for the Eastern Goddess Astarte or Istar. You begin to comprehend? Her rites were celebrated with obscene debaucheries, but her worshipers became such human swine that only the most revolting inversions of natural things would satisfy them. The flaunting and sacrifices of virtue were not enough; they must need sacrifice — literally — those things which

impersonated virtue — little, innocent children and chaste young maidens. Their foul altars must run red with the blood of innocence. These things were traditions in Cyprus long before the Knights Templars took up their abode there, and, as one cannot sleep among dogs without acquiring fleas, so the knights, grown slothful and lazy, with nothing to do but think up ways of spending their time and wealth, became addicts to the evils of the earlier, heathen ways of their new home. Thoughts are things, my friend, and the evil thoughts of the old Cyprians took root, and flourished in the brains of those unfortunate old warrior-monks whose hands were no longer busy with the sword and whose lips no longer did service to the Most High God.

“You doubt it? Consider: Though Philip IV and Clement V undoubtedly did Jacques de Molay to death for no better reason than that they might cast lots for his raiment, the fact remains that many of the knights confessed to dreadful sacrileges committed in the chapter houses — to children slain on the altars once dedicated to God, all in the name of the heathen goddess Cytherea.

“This very house wherein we sit was once the scene of such terrible things as those. About its stones must linger the presence of the evil men, the renegade priests of God, who once did them. These discarnate intelligences have lain dormant since the Fourteenth Century, but for some reason, which we will not now discuss, I believe they have wakened into physical beings once more. It was their reincarnated spirits we saw flitting past the door last night while Made-moiselle Dunroe lay in a trance; it was they who took the little boy from his grandmother’s arms; it was they who slew the brave policeman; it is they who will soon attempt to perform the hideous inversion of the mass.”

“See here, de Grandin,” I expostulated, “there have been some deucedly queer goings-on here, I’ll admit, but when you try to tell me that a lot of old soldier-monks have come to life again and are traipsing around the countryside stealing children, you’re piling it on a bit too thick. Now, if there were any evidence to prove that—”

“Silence!” his sharp whisper brought me up with a start as he rose from his chair and crept, catlike, toward the door, opening it a crack and glancing down the darkened corridor outside. Then:

“Come, my friend,” he bade in a low breath, “come and see what I behold.”

As he swung the door back I glanced down the long, stone-paved gallery, dark as Erebus save as cancellated bars of moonlight shot obliquely down from the tiny mullioned windows piercing the dome, and made out a gliding, wraithlike figure in trailing white garments.

“Dunroe O’Shane!” I murmured dazedly, watching the retreating form slipping soundlessly down the dark balcony. The wavering light of the candle she bore in her upraised hand cast gigantic shadows against the carved balustrade

and the sculptured uprights of the interlaced arches supporting the gallery above, and hobgoblin shades seemed to march along beside her like an escort of unclean genii from the legions of Eblis. I watched openmouthed with amazement as she slipped down the passage, her feet, obscured in a haze of trailing draperies, treading noiselessly, her free hand stretched outward toward the balcony rail. Next moment the gallery was deserted; abruptly as a motion picture fades from the screen when the projecting light winks out, Dunroe O'Shane and her flickering rushlight vanished from our sight.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," the Frenchman whispered, "after her — it was through that further door she went!"

Quietly as possible we ran down the gallery, paused before the high, pointed-topped door and wrenched at its wrought-iron handle. The oaken panels held firm, for the door was latched on the farther side.

"Ten thousand little devils!" de Grandin cried in vexation. "We are stalemated!"

For a moment I thought he would hurl himself against the four-inch planks of the door in impotent fury, but he collected himself with an effort, and drawing a flashlight from his jacket pocket, handed it to me with the command, "Hold the light steady on the keyhole, my friend." The next instant he sank to his knees, produced two short lengths of thin steel wire and began methodically picking the lock.

"Ha," he exclaimed, as he rose and dusted the knees of his trousers, "those old ones built for strength, Friend Trowbridge, but they knew little of subtlety. Little did that ancient locksmith dream his handiwork would one day meet with Jules de Grandin."

The unbarred door swung inward beneath his touch, and we stepped across the stone sill of a vast, dungeon-dark apartment.

"*Mademoiselle*?" he called softly. "Mademoiselle Dunroe — are you here?"

He shot the searching beam of his flashlight hither and yon about the big room, disclosing high walls of heavy carved oak, a great canopy bed, several cathedral chairs and one or two massive, iron-bound chests — but found no living thing.

"*Mordieu*, but this is strange!" he muttered, sinking to his knees to flash his light beneath the high-carved bed.

"Into this room she did most certainly come but a few little minutes ago, gliding like a spirit, and now, pouf, out of this same room she does vanish like a ghost!"

Though somewhat larger, the room was similar to most other bedchambers in the house, paneled with rather crudely carved, age-blackened wood for the entire height of its walls, ceiled with great beams which still bore the marks of the adz, and floored with octagonal marble tile of alternate black and white. We went over every inch of it, searching for some secret exit, for, save the one by which we had

entered, there was no door in the place and the two great windows were of crude, semitransparent glass let into metal frames securely cemented to the surrounding stones. Plainly, nobody had left the room that way.

At the farther end of the apartment stood a stall wardrobe, elaborately decorated with carved scenes of chase and battle. Opening one of the double doors letting into the press, de Grandin inspected the interior, which, like the outside was carved in every available place. "Um?" he said, surveying the walls under his flashlight. "It may be that this is but the anteroom to — ha!"

He broke off, pointing dramatically to a carved group in the center of one of the back panels. It represented a procession of hunters returning from their sport, deer, boar and other animals lashed to long poles which the huntsmen bore shoulder-high. The men were filing through the arched entrance to a castle, the great doors of which swung back to receive them. One of the doorleaves, apparently, had warped loose from the body of the plank from which it was carved.

"*C'est très adroit, n'est-ce pas?*" my companion asked with a delighted grin. "Had I not seen such things before, it might have imposed on me. As it is—"

Reaching forward, he gave the loosened door a sharp, quick push, and the entire back of the wardrobe slipped upward revealing a narrow opening.

"And what have we here?" de Grandin asked, playing his spotlight through the secret doorway.

Straight ahead for three or four feet ran a flagstone sill, worn, smooth in the center, as though with the shuffling tread of many feet. Beyond that began a flight of narrow, stone stairs which spiraled steeply down a shaft like the flue of a monster chimney.

De Grandin turned to me, and his little, heart-shaped face was graver than I had ever seen it.

"Trowbridge, dear, kind friend," he said in a voice so low and hoarse I could scarcely make out his words, "we have faced many perils together — perils of spirit and perils of flesh — and always we have triumphed. This time we may not. If I do not mistake rightly, there lies below these steps an evil more ancient and potent than any we have hitherto met. I have armed us against it with the weapons of religion and of science, but — I do not know that they will avail. Say, then, will you turn back now and go to your bed? I shall think no less of you, for no man should be compelled to face this thing unknowingly, and there is now no time to explain. If I survive, I shall return and tell you all. If I come not back with daylight, know that I have perished in my failure, and think kindly of me as one who loved you deeply. Will you not now say *adieu*, old friend?" He extended his hand and I saw the long, smooth-jointed fingers were trembling with suppressed nervousness.

"I will not!" I returned hotly, stung to the quick by his suggestion. "I don't know what's down there, but if you go,

I go, too!”

Before I realized what he was about, he had flung his arms about my neck and kissed me on both cheeks. “Onward, then, brave comrade!” he cried. “This night we fight such a fight as had not been waged since the sainted George slew the monster!”

VII

Round and round a steadily descending spiral, while I counted a hundred and seventy steps, we went, going deeper into inky blackness. Finally, when I had begun to grow giddy with the endless corkscrew turns, we arrived at a steeply sloping tunnel, floored with smooth black-and-white tiles. Down this we hastened, until we traversed a distance of a hundred feet; then for a similar length we trod a level path, and began an ascent as steep as the first decline.

“Careful — cautiously, my friend,” the Frenchman warned in a whisper.

Pausing a moment while he fumbled in the pocket of his jacket, my companion strode toward the barrier and laid his left hand on its heavy, wrought-iron latch.

The portal swung back almost as he touched it, and:

“*Qui va la?*” challenged a voice from the darkness.

De Grandin threw the ray of his torch across the doorway, disclosing a tall, spare form in gleaming black plate-armor over which was drawn the brown-serge habit of a monk. The sentry wore his hair in a sort of bob approximating the haircut affected by children today, and on his sallow immature face sprouted the rudiments of a straggling beard. It was a youthful face and a weak one which de Grandin’s light disclosed, but the face of youth already well schooled in viciousness.

“*Qui vive?*” the fellow called doubtfully in a rather high, effeminate voice, laying a hand on the hilt of a heavy broadsword dangling from the wide, brass-studded baldric looped over his cassock.

“Those on the service of the Most High God, *petit bête!*” returned de Grandin, drawing something (a pronged sprig of wood, I thought) from his jacket pocket and thrusting it toward the warder’s face.

“*Ohé!*” cried the other sharply, shrinking back. “Touch me not, good *messires*, I pray — I—”

“Ha — so?” de Grandin gritted between his teeth, and drew the branched stick downward across the sentry’s face.

Astonishingly, the youth seemed to shrink and shrivel in upon himself. Trembling as though with an ague, he bent forward, buckled at the knees, fell toward the floor, and — was gone! Sword, armor, cassock and the man who wore them dwindled to nothingness before our sight.

A hundred feet or so farther on, our way was barred by another door, wider, higher and heavier than the first. While no tiler guarded it, it was so firmly locked that all our efforts

were powerless to budge it.

“Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin announced, “it seems we shall have to pick this lock, even as we did the other. Do you keep watch through yonder grille while I make the way open for us.” Reaching up, he moved aside a shutter covering a barred peephole in the door’s thick panels; then, dropping to his knees, drew forth his wires and began working at the lock.

Gazing through the tiny wicket, I beheld a chapel-like room of circular formation, cunningly floored with slabs of polished yellow stone, inlaid with occasional plaques of purple.

By the glow of a wavering vigil lamp and the flicker of several guttering ecclesiastical candles, I saw the place was roofed with a vaulted ceiling supported by a number of converging arches, and the pier of each arch was supported by the carved image of a huge human foot which rested on the crown of a hideous, half-human head, crushing it downward and causing it to grimace hellishly with mingled pain and fury.

Beyond the yellow sanctuary lamp loomed the altar, approached by three low steps, and on it was a tall wooden crucifix from which the corpus had been stripped and to which had been nailed, in obscure caricature, a huge black bat. The staples fastening the poor beast to the cross must have hurt unmercifully, for it strove hysterically to free itself.

Almost sickened at the sight, I described the scene to de Grandin as he worked at the lock, speaking in a muted whisper, for, though there was no sign of living thing save the tortured bat, I felt that there were listening ears concealed in the darkness.

“Good!” he grunted as he hastened with his task. “It may be we are yet in time, good friend.” Even as he spoke there came a sharp click, and the door’s heavy bolts slipped back under the pressure of his improvised picklock.

Slowly, inch by careful inch, we forced the great door back.

But even as we did so, there came from the rear of the circular chamber the subdued measures of a softly intoned Gregorian chant, and something white moved forward through the shadows.

It was a man arrayed in black-steel armor over which was drawn a white surtout emblazoned with a reversed passion cross, and in his hands he bore a wide-mouthed brazen bowl like an alms-basin. In the tray rested a wicked-looking, curve-bladed knife.

With a mocking genuflection to the altar he strode up the steps and placed his burden on the second tread; then, with a coarse guffaw, he spat upon the pinioned bat and backed downward.

As a signal a double file of armored men came marching

out of the gloom, ranged themselves in two ranks, one to right, one to left of the altar, and whipped their long swords from their sheaths, clashing them together, tip to tip, forming an arcade of flashing steel between them.

So softly that I felt rather than heard him, de Grandin sighed in suppressed fury as blade met blade and two more men-at-arms, each bearing a smoking censer, strode forward beneath the roof of steel. The perfume of the incense was strong, acrid, sweet, and it mounted to our brains like the fumes of some accursed drug. But even as we sniffed its seductive scent, our eyes widened at the sight of the form which paced slowly behind the mailed acolytes.

Ceremoniously, step by pausing step, she came, like a bride marching under the arbor of uplifted swords at a military wedding, and my eyes fairly ached at the beauty of her. Milk-white, lissom and pliant as a peeled willow wand, clad only in the jeweled loveliness of her own pearly whiteness, long, bronze hair sweeping in a cloven tide from her pale brow and cataracting over her tapering shoulders, came Dunroe O'Shane. Her eyes were closed, as though in sleep, and on her red, full lips lay the yearning half-smile of the bride who ascends the aisle to meet her bridegroom, or the novice who mounts the altar steps to make her full profession. And as she advanced, her supple, long-fingered hands waved slowly to and fro, weaving fantastic arabesques in the air.

"Hail, Cytherea, Queen and Priestess and Goddess; hail, She Who Confers Life and Being on Her Servants!" came the full-throated salutation of the double row of armored men as they clashed their blades together in martial salute, then dropped to one knee in greeting and adoration.

For a moment the undraped priestess paused below the altar stairs; then, as though forced downward by invincible pressure, she dropped, and we heard the smacking impact of soft flesh against the stone floor as she flung herself prostrate and beat her brow and hands against the floor in utter self-abasement before the marble altar and its defiled calvary.

"Is all prepared?" The question rang out sonorously as a cowed figure advanced from the shadows and strode with a swaggering step to the altar.

"All is prepared!" the congregation answered with one voice.

"Then bring the paschal lamb, even the lamb without fleece!" The deep-voiced command somehow sent shivers through me.

Two armored votaries slipped quietly away, returning in an instant with the struggling body of a little boy between them — a chubby child, naked, who fought and kicked and offered such resistance as his puny strength allowed while he called aloud to "Mamma" and "Grandma" to save him.

Down against the altar steps the butchers flung the little man; then one took his chubby, dimpled hands in relentless

grip while the other drew backward at his ankles, suspending him above the wide-mouthed brazen bowl reposing on the second step.

"Take up the knife, Priestess and Queen of goodly Salamis," the hooded master of ceremonies commanded. "Take up the sacrificial knife, that the red blood may flow to our Goddess, and we hold high wassail in Her honor! O'er land and sea, o'er burning desert and heaving billow have we journeyed—"

"Villains — assassins — renegades!" Jules de Grandin bounded from his station in the shadow like a frenzied cat. "By the blood of all the blessed martyrs, you have journeyed altogether too far from hell, your home!"

"Ha? Interlopers?" rasped the hooded man. "So be it. Three hearts shall smoke upon our altar instead of one!"

"*Parbleu*, nothing shall smoke but the fires of your endless torture as your foul carcasses burn ceaselessly in hell!" de Grandin returned, leaping forward and drawing out the forked stick with which he had struck down the porter at the outer gate.

A burst of contemptuous laughter greeted him. "Thinkest thou to overcome me with such a toy?" the cowed one asked between shouts. "My warder at the gate succumbed to your charms — he was a poor weakling. Him you have passed, but not me. Now die!"

From beneath his cassock he snatched a long, two-handed sword, whirled its blade aloft in a triple flourish, and struck directly at de Grandin's head.

Almost by a miracle, it seemed, the Frenchman avoided the blow, dropped his useless spring of thornwood and snatched a tiny, quill-like object from his pocket. Dodging the devastating thrusts of the enemy de Grandin toyed an instant with the capsule in his hand, unscrewed the cap and, suddenly changing his tactics, advanced directly on his foe.

"Ha, Monsieur from the Fires, here is fire you know not of!" he shouted, thrusting forward the queer-looking rod and advancing within reach of the other's sword.

I stared in open-mouthed amazement. Poised for another slashing blow with his great sword, the armed man wavered momentarily, while an expression of astonishment, bewilderment, finally craven fear overspread his lean, predatory features. Lowering his sword, he thrust feebly with the point, but there was no force behind the stab; the deadly steel clattered to the floor before he could drive it into the little Frenchman's breast.

The hooded man seemed growing thinner; his tall, spare form, which had bulked a full head taller than de Grandin a moment before, seemed losing substance — growing gradually transparent, like an early morning fog slowly dissolving before the strengthening rays of the rising sun. Behind him, through him, I could dimly espy the outlines of the violated altar and the prostrate woman before its steps. Now the objects in the background became plainer and

plainer. The figure of the armored man was no longer a thing of flesh and blood and cold steel overspread with a monk's habit, but an unsubstantial phantom, like an oddly shaped cloud. It was composed of trailing, rolling clouds of luminous vapor which gradually disintegrated into strands and floating webs of phosphorescence, and these, in turn, gave way to scores of little nebulae of light which glowed like cigarette-ends of intense blue radiance. Then, where the nebulae had been were only dancing, shifting specks of bright blue fire, finally nothing but a few pin-points of light; then — nothing.

Like shadows thrown of forest trees when the moon is at her zenith, the double row of men-at-arms stood at ease while de Grandin battled with their champion; now their leader gone, they turned and scuttled in panic toward the rearward shadows, but Jules de Grandin was after them like a speeding arrow.

"Ha, renegades," he called mockingly, pressing closer and closer, "you who steal away helpless little boy-babies from the arms of their *grand-mères* and then would sacrifice, them on your altar, do you like the feast Jules de Grandin brings? You who would make wassail with the blood of babies — drink the draft I have prepared! Fools, mockers at God, where now is your deity? Call on her — call on Cytherea! *Pardieu*, I fear her not."

As it was with the master, so it was with the underlings: Closer and closer de Grandin pressed against the struggling mass of demoralized men, before his advance like ice when pressed upon by red-hot iron. One moment they milled and struggled, shrieking for aid to some unclean deity; the next they were dissolved into nebulous vapor, drifting aimlessly a moment in the still air, then swept away to nothingness.

"And so, my friend, that is done," announced de Grandin matter-of-factly as he might have mentioned the ending of a meal. "There crouches Mademoiselle O'Shane, Friend Trowbridge; come, let us seek her clothes — they should be somewhere here."

Behind the altar we found Dunroe's nightrobe and negligee lying in a ring, just as she had shrugged out of them before taking up her march between the upraised swords. Gently as a nurse attending a babe, the little Frenchman raised the swooning girl from her groveling posture before the altar, draped her robes about her, and took her in his arms.

A wailing cry, rising gradually to an incensed roar, echoed and reverberated through the vaulted chamber, and de Grandin thrust the unconscious girl into my hands. "*Mon Dieu*," he exclaimed, "I did forget. *Le petit garçon!*"

Crouched as close to the wall as he could get, we found the little lad, tears of surprising size streaming down his fat cheeks as his little mouth opened wide and emitted wail after broken-hearted wail. "*Holà*, my little cabbage, *mon brave soldat!*" de Grandin soothed him, stretching out his

hands to the weeping youngster. "Come with me. Come, we shall clothe you warmly against the cold and pop you into a bed of feathers, and tomorrow morning we return you to your mother's arms."

Panting under my burden, for she was no lightweight, I bore Dunroe O'Shane up the long, tortuous flight of steps.

"Morphine is indicated here, if I do not mistake," de Grandin remarked as we laid the girl on her bed.

"But we haven't any—" I began, only to be checked by his grin.

"Oh, but we have," he contradicted. "I foresaw something like this was likely to come about, and abstracted a quantity of the drug, together with a syringe, from your surgery before we left home."

When we had administered the narcotic, we set out for our own chamber, the little boy, warmly bundled in blankets, held tightly in de Grandin's arms. At a nod from the Frenchman we paused at Dunroe's studio, lighted several candles and inspected her work. Fairly spread upon her drawing-board was a pretty little scene — a dimpled little boy crowing and smiling in his mother's lap, a proud and happy father leaning over them, and in the foreground a group of rough bucolics kneeling in smiling adoration. "Why, the influence, whatever it was, seems to have left her before we went down those secret stairs!" I exclaimed, looking admiringly at the drawing.

"Do you say so?" de Grandin asked as he bent closer to inspect the picture. "Look here, if you please, my friend."

Bringing my eyes within a few inches of the board on which the Christmas scene was sketched, I saw, so faint it was hardly to be found unless the beholder looked for it another picture, lightly sketched in jerky, uneven lines, depicting another scene — a vaulted chapel with walls lined by armed men, two of whom held a child's body horizontally before the altar, while a woman, clothed only in her long, trailing hair, plunged a wicked, curve-bladed knife into the little one's body, piercing the heart.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed, in horror.

"Precisely," agreed Jules de Grandin. "The good Lord inspired talent in the poor girl's hand, but the powers of darkness dictated that sketch. Perhaps — I can not say for sure — she drew both the picture we see here, and the good one was formerly the faint one, but when I overcame the wicked ones, the wicked scene faded to insignificance and the pleasing one became predominant. It is possible, and — *nom d'un nom!*"

"What now?" I demanded as he turned a conscience-smitten face toward me and thrust the sleeping child into my arms.

"*La chauve-souris* — the bat!" he exclaimed. "I did forget the poor one's sufferings in the stress of greater things. Take the little man to our room, and soothe him, my friend. Me, I go down those ten-thousand-times-damned stairs to

that never-enough-to-be-cursed chapel and put the poor brute out of its misery!"

"You mean you're actually going into that horrible place again?" I demanded.

"*Eh bien*, why not?" he asked.

"Why — those terrible men — those—" I began, but he stopped me.

"My friend," he asked as he extracted a cigarette from his dressing gown pocket and lighted it nonchalantly, "have you not yet learned that when Jules de Grandin kills a thing — be it man or be it devil — it is dead? There is nothing there which could harm a new-born fly, I do solemnly assure you."

VIII

Jules de Grandin poured out a couple of tablespoonfuls of brandy into a wide-mouthed glass and passed the goblet under his nose, sniffing appreciatively. "Not at all, *cher ami*. From the first I did suspect there was something not altogether right about that house.

"To begin, you will recall that on the night Monsieur Van Ripper took us from the station he told us his progenitor had imported the house, stone by single stone, to this country from Cyprus?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"Very good. The stones of which it is erected were probably quarried from the ruins of some heathen temple, and like sponges soaked in water, they were full to overflowing with evil influences. This evil undoubtedly affected the old warrior knights who dwelt in that house, probably from 1191, when Richard of England sold Cyprus to their order, to 1308, when the French king and the Roman pope suppressed and destroyed the order — and shared its riches between them.

"That the souls of those old monks who had forsaken their vows to the God of Love to serve the Goddess of Lust with unclean rites and ceremonies could not find rest in peaceful graves there is little doubt. But that they were able to materialize and carry on the obscenities they had practiced in life, there is also much doubt. Some ghosts there are who can make themselves visible at will; others can materialize at certain times and in certain places only; others can show themselves only with the aid of a medium.

"When the rich Monsieur Profiteer took up the old house and brought it to America, he doubtless imported all its evil influences intact; but they were latent.

"Then, only one little week ago, that which was needful came to the house. It was nothing less than Mademoiselle O'Shane's so beautiful self. She, my friend, is what the spiritualists call a sensitive, a psychic. She is attuned to the fine vibrations which affect the ordinary person not at all. She was the innocent medium through which the wicked

knights were able to effect a reincarnation.

"The air may be filled with the ethereal waves from a thousand broadcasting stations, but if you have not a radio machine to entrap and consolidate those waves into sound, you are helpless to hear so much as a single squeal of static. Is it not so? Very good. Mademoiselle Dunroe was the radio set — the condenser and the amplifying agent needed to release the invisible wickedness which came from Cytherea's wicked altar — the discarnate intelligences which were once bad men. Do you not recall how she was greeted in the chapel of the Black Lodge: 'Hail, Priestess and Queen — She Who Gives Her Servants Life and Being?' Those wicked things which once were men admitted their debt to her in that salutation, my friend.

"Remember how Mademoiselle Dunroe told you of her inability to draw what she wished? The evil influences were already beginning to steal her brain and make her pliable to their base desires. They were beginning to lay plans to feed upon her vitality to clothe themselves in the semblance of humanity, and as they possessed her, she saw with her inward eye the scenes so many times heretofore enacted in that chapel.

"From the first I liked not the house, and when the poor Mademoiselle Dunroe told us of her troubles with her drawings, I liked it still less. How long it would have taken those old secret worshippers of evil to make themselves visible by the use of Mademoiselle Dunroe's vitality, I do not know. Perhaps they might never have succeeded. Perhaps she would have gone away and nothing more would have been heard of them, but that flap-eared she-ass of a Mademoiselle Prettybridge played the precise game the long-dead villains desired. When she held her so absurd séance in the dining-room that night, she furnished them just the atmosphere they needed to place their silent command in Mademoiselle O'Shane's mind. Her attention was fixed on ghostly things; 'Ah-ha,' says the master of the Black Lodge, 'now we shall steal her mind. Now we shall make her go into a trance like a medium, and she shall materialize us, and *la, la*, what deviltry we shall do!' And so they did. While they sent one of their number to thump upon the table and hold us spellbound listening to his nonsense rimes, the rest of them became material and rode forth upon their phantom steeds to steal them a little child. Oh, my friend, I dare not think what would have been had they carried through that dreadful blood-sacrifice. Warm blood acts upon the wicked spirits as tonic acts on humans. They might have become so strong, no power on earth could have stayed them! As it was, the ancient evil could be killed, but it died very, very hard."

"Was Dunroe under their influence when we saw her at the piano that night?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly. Already they had made her draw things she did not consciously understand; then, when they had

roused her from her bed and guided her to the instrument, she played first a composition of beauty, for she is a good girl at heart, but they wished her to play something evil. No doubt the wicked, lecherous tune she played under their guidance that night helped mightily to make good, Godfearing Dunroe O'Shane forget herself and serve as heathen priestess before the heathen altar of a band of forsworn renegade priests."

"H'm," I murmured dubiously. "Granting your premises, I can see the logic of your conclusions, but how was it you put those terrible ghosts to flight so easily?"

"I waited for that question," he answered. "Have you not yet learned Jules de Grandin is a very clever fellow?"

"Attend me, for what I say is worth hearing. When those evil men went forth in search of prey and killed the poor policeman, I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, you have here a tough nut, indeed!'

"I know it,' I reply.

"Very well, then,' I ask me, 'who are these goblin child-stealers?'

"Ghosts — or the evil representations of wicked men who died long years ago in mortal sin,' I return.

"Now,' I say, 'you are sure these men are materialized by Mademoiselle O'Shane — her strange playing, her unwitting drawings. What, then, is such a materialization composed of?'

"Of what some call ectoplasm, others psychoplasm,' I reply.

"But certainly' — I will not give myself peace till I have talked this matter over completely — 'but what is that psychoplasm, or ectoplasm? Tell me that?'

"And then, as I think, and think some more, I come to the conclusion it is but a very fine form of vibration given off by the medium, just as the ether-waves are given off by the broadcasting station. When it combines with the thin, unpowerful vibration set up by the evil entity to be materialized, it makes the outward seeming of a man — what we call a ghost.

"I decided to try a desperate experiment. A sprig of the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury may be efficacious as a charm, but charms are of no avail against an evil which is very old and very powerful. Nevertheless, I will try the Holy Thorn-bush. If it fail, I must have a second line of defense. What shall it be?"

"Why not radium salt? Radium does wonderful things. In its presence non-conductors of electricity become conductors; Leyden jars cannot retain their charges of electricity in its presence. For why? Because of its tremendous vibration. If I uncover a bit of radium bromide from its lead box in that small, enclosed chapel, the terrific bombardment of the Alpha, Tau and Gamma rays it gives off as its atoms disintegrate will shiver those thin-vibration ghosts to nothingness even as the *Boche* shells crushed the forts of Liege!"

"I think I have an idea — but I am not sure it will work. At any rate, it is worth trying. So, while Mademoiselle O'Shane lies unconscious under the influence of evil, I rush here with you, borrow a tiny little tube of radium bromide from the City Hospital, and make ready to fight the evil ones. Then, when we follow Mademoiselle Dunroe into that accursed chapel under the earth, I am ready to make the experiment.

"At the first door stands the boy, who was not so steeped in evil as his elders, and he succumbed to the Holy Thorn sprig. But once inside the chapel, I see we need something which will batter those evil spirits to shreds, so I unseal my tube of radium, and — pouf! I shake them to nothing in no time!"

"But won't they ever haunt the Cloisters again?" I persisted.

"*Ah bah*, have I not said I have destroyed them — utterly?" he demanded. "Let us speak of them no more."

And with a single prodigious gulp he emptied his goblet of brandy.

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

The **BLACK MASTER**
by Seabury Quinn



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The Black Master

JULES DE GRANDIN poured a thimbleful of Boulogne cognac into a wide-mouthed glass and passed the goblet back and forth beneath his nose with a waving motion, inhaling the rich, fruity fumes from the amber fluid. “*Eh bien, young Monsieur,*” he informed our visitor as he drained the liqueur with a slow, appreciative swallow and set the empty glass on the tabouret with a scarcely suppressed smack of his lips “this is of interest. Pirate treasure, you do say? *Parbleu — c’est presque irresistible.* Tell us more, if you please.”

Eric Balderson looked from the little Frenchman to me with a half-diffident, deprecating smile. “There really isn’t much to tell,” he confessed, “and I’m not at all sure I’m not the victim of a pipe-dream, after all. You knew Father pretty well, didn’t you, Dr. Trowbridge?” he turned appealingly to me.

“Yes,” I answered, “he and I were at Amherst together. He was an extremely level-headed sort of chap, too, not at all given to daydreaming, and—”

“That’s what I’m pinning my faith on,” Eric broke in. “Coming from anyone but Dad the story would be too utterly fantastic to—”

“*Mordieu, yes, Monsieur,*” de Grandin interrupted testily, “We do concede your so excellent *père* was the ultimate word in discretion and sound judgment, but will you, for the love of kindly heaven, have the goodness to tell us all and let us judge for ourselves the value of the communication of which you speak?”

Eric regarded him with the slow grin he inherited from his father, then continued, quite unruffled, “Dad wasn’t exactly what you’d call credulous, but he seemed to put considerable stock in the story, judging from his diary. Here it is.” From the inside pocket of his dinner-coat he produced a small book bound in red leather and handed it to me. “Read the passages I’ve marked, will you please, Doctor,” he asked. “I’m afraid I’d fill up if I tried to read Dad’s writing aloud. He — he hasn’t been gone very long, you know.”

Adjusting my pince-nez, I hitched a bit nearer the library lamp and looked over the age-yellowed sheets covered with the fine, angular script of my old classmate:

8 Nov. 1898 — Old Robinson is going fast. When I called to see him at the Seaman’s Snug Harbor this morning I found him considerably weaker than he had been yesterday, though still in full possession of his faculties. There’s nothing specifically wrong with the old fellow, save as any worn-out bit of machinery in time gets ready for the scrap-heap. He will

probably go out sometime during the night, quite likely in his sleep, a victim of having lived too long.

“Doctor,” he said to me when I went into his room this morning, “ye’ve been mighty good to me, a poor, worn-out old hulk with never a cent to repay all yer kindness; but I’ve that here which will make yer everlastin’ fortune, providin’ ye’re brave enough to tackle it.”

“That’s very kind of you, John,” I answered, but the old fellow was deadly serious.

“’Tis no laughin’ matter, Doctor,” he returned as he saw me smile. “’Tis th’ truth an’ nothin’ else I’m tellin’ ye — I’d ’a’ had a go at it meself if it warn’t that seafarin’ men don’t hold with disturbin’ th’ bones o’ th’ dead. But you, bein’ a landsman, an’ a doctor to boot, would most likely succeed where others have failed. I had it from my gran’ther, sir, an’ he was an old man an’ I but a lad when he gave it me, so ye can see ’tis no new thing I’m passin’ on. Where he got it I don’t know, but he guarded it like his eyes an’ would never talk about it, not even to me after he’d give it to me.”

With that he asked me to go to his ditty-box and take out a packet done up in oiled silk, which he insisted I take as partial compensation for all I’d done for him.

I tried to tell him the home paid my fee regularly, and that he was beholden to me for nothing, but he would not have it; so, to quiet the old man, I took the plan for my “everlastin’ fortune” before I left.

9 Nov. 1898 — Old John died last night, as I’d predicted, and probably went with the satisfied feeling that he had made a potential millionaire of the struggling country practitioner who tended him in his last illness. I must look into the mysterious packet by which he set such store. Probably it’s a chart for locating some long-sunk pirate ship or unburying the loot of Captain Kidd, Blackbeard, or some other old sea-robber. Sailormen a generation ago were full of such yarns, and recounted them so often they actually came to believe them.

10 Nov. ’98 — I was right in my surmise concerning old John’s legacy, though it’s rather different from the usual run of buried-treasure maps. Some day, when I’ve nothing else to do, I may go down to the old church in Harrisonville and actually have a try at the thing. It would be odd if poor Eric Balderson, struggling country practitioner, became a wealthy man overnight. What would I do first? Would a sealskin dolman for Astrid or a new side-bar buggy for me be the first purchase I’d make? I wonder.

“H’m,” I remarked as I put down the book. “And this old seaman’s legacy, as your father called it—”

“Is here,” Eric interrupted, handing me a square of ancient, crackling vellum on which a message of some kind had been laboriously scratched. The edges of the parchment were badly frayed, as though with much handling, though the indentures might have been the result of hasty tearing in

the olden days. At any rate, it was a tattered and thoroughly decrepit sheet from which I read:

in y^e name of y^e most Holie Trinitie

I, Richard Thompson, being a right synfull manne and near unto mine ende do give greeting and warning to whoso shall rede herefrom. Y^e booty which my master whose name no manne did rightly know, but who was surnamed by some y^e Black Master and by somme Blackface y^e Merciless, lyes hydden in divers places, but y^e creame thereof is laid away in y^e churchyard of St. Davides hard by Harrison's village. There, by daye and by nite do y^e dedde stand guard over it for y^e Master sealed its hydinge place both with cement and with a curse which he fondlie sware should be on them & on their children who violated y^e sepulchre without his sanction. Yet if any there be who dare defye y^e curse (as I should not) of hym who had neither pitie ne mercie ne lovingkindness at all, let h^m go unto y^e burrieing ground at dedde of nite at y^e season of dies natalis invicti & obey y^e direction. Further hint I dast not gyvve, for fear of him who lurks beyant y^e portales of lyffe to hold to account such of hys servants as preceded him not in dethe. And of your charity, ye who rede this, I do charge and conjure ye that ye make goode and pieous use of y^e Master hys treasure and that ye expend such part of y^e same as may be fyttinge for masses for y^e good estate of Richard Thompson, a synfull man dieing in terror of his many iniquities & of y^e tongueless one who waites himme across y^e borderline

When y^e star shines from y^e tree
Be it as a sign to ye.
Draw ye fourteen cubit line
To y^e entrance unto lyfe
Whence across y^e graveyard sod
See spotte cursed by man & God

"It looks like a lot of childish nonsense to me," I remarked with an impatient shrug as I tossed the parchment to de Grandin. "Those old fellows who had keys to buried treasure were everlastingly taking such care to obscure their meaning in a lot of senseless balderdash that no one can tell when they're serious and when they're perpetrating a hoax. If—"

"*Cordieu*," the little Frenchman whispered softly, examining the sheet of frayed vellum with wide eyes, holding it up to the lamplight, then crackling it softly between his fingers. "Is it possible? But yes, it must be — Jules de Grandin could not be mistaken."

"Whatever are you maundering about?" I interrupted impatiently. "The way you're looking at that parchment anyone would think—"

"Whatever anyone would think, he would be far from the truth," de Grandin cut in, regarding us with the fixed, unwinking stare which meant deadly seriousness. "If this plat be a *mauvaise plaisanterie* — how do you call it? the practical joke? — it is a very grim one indeed, for the parchment on which it is engraved is human skin."

"What?" cried Eric and I in chorus.

"Nothing less," de Grandin responded. "Me, I have seen

such parchments in the Paris *musée*; I have handled them, I have touched them. I could not be mistaken. Such things were done in the olden days, my friends. I think, perhaps, we should do well to investigate this business. Men do not set down confessions of a sinful life and implore the possible finders of treasure to buy masses for their souls on human hide when they would indulge in pleasantries. No, it is not so."

"But—" I began, when he shut me off with a quick gesture.

"In the churchyard of Saint David's this repentant Monsieur Richard Thompson did say. May I inquire, Friend Trowbridge, if there be such a church in the neighborhood? Assuredly there was once, for does he not say, 'hard by Harrison's village,' and might that not have been the early designation of your present city of Harrisonville?"

"U'm — why, yes, by George!" I exclaimed. "You're right, de Grandin. There *is* a Saint David's church down in the old East End — a Colonial parish, too; one of the first English churches built after the British took Jersey over from the Dutch. Harrisonville was something of a seaport in those days, and there was a bad reef a few miles offshore. I've been told the church was built and endowed with the funds derived from salvaging cargo from ships stranded on the reef. The parish dates back to 1670 or '71, I believe."

"H'm-m." De Grandin extracted a vile-smelling French cigarette from his black-leather case, applied a match to it and puffed furiously a moment, then slowly expelled a twin column of smoke from his nostrils. "And '*dies natalis invicti*' our so scholarly Monsieur Richard wrote as the time for visiting this churchyard. What can that be but the time of Bonhomme Noël — the Christmas season? *Parbleu*, my friends, I think, perhaps, we shall go to that churchyard and acquire a most excellent Christmas gift for ourselves. Tonight is December 22, tomorrow should he near enough for us to begin our quest. We meet here tomorrow night to try our fortune, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

Crazy and harebrained as the scheme sounded, both Eric and I were carried away by the little Frenchman's enthusiasm, and nodded vigorous agreement.

"*Bon*," he cried, "*très bon!* One more drink, my friends, then let us go dream of the golden wheat awaiting our harvesting."

"But see here, Dr. de Grandin," Eric Balderson remarked, "since you've told us what this message is written on this business looks more serious to me. Suppose there's really something in this curse old Thompson speaks of? We won't be doing ourselves much service by ignoring it, will we?"

"Ah bah," returned the little Frenchman above the rim of his half-drained glass. "A curse, you do say. Young *Monsieur*, I can plainly perceive you do not know Jules de Grandin, A worm-eaten fig for the curse! Me, I can curse as

hard and as violently as any villainous old sea-robber who ever sank a ship or slit a throat!”

2

The bleak December wind which had been moaning like a disconsolate banshee all afternoon had brought its threatened freight of snow about nine o'clock and the factory- and warehouse-lined thoroughfares of the unfashionable part of town where old Saint David's church stood were noiseless and white as ghost-streets in a dead city when de Grandin, Eric Balderson and I approached the churchyard pentice shortly before twelve the following night. The hurrying flakes had stopped before we left the house, however, and through the wind-driven pluvial clouds the chalk-white winter moon and a few stars shone frostily.

“*Cordieu*, I might have guessed as much!” de Grandin exclaimed in exasperation as he tried the iron grille stopping the entrance to the church's little close and turned away disgustedly. “Locked — locked fast as the gates of hell against escaping sinners, my friends,” he announced. “It would seem we must swarm over the walls, and—”

“And get a charge of buckshot in us when the caretaker sees us,” Eric interrupted gloomily.

“No fear, *mon vieux*,” de Grandin returned with a quick grin. “Me, I have not been idle this day. I did come here to reconnoiter during the afternoon — *morbleu*, but I did affect the devotion at evensong before I stepped outside to survey the terrain! — and many things I discovered. First, this church stands like a lonely outpost in a land whence the expeditionary force has been withdrawn. Around here are not half a dozen families enrolled on the parish register. Were it not for churchly pride and the fact that heavy endowments of the past make it possible to support this chapel as a mission, it would have been closed long ago. There is no resident sexton, no *curé* in residence here. Both functionaries dwell some little distance away. As for the *cimetière*, no interments have been permitted here for close on fifty years. The danger of grave-robbers is *nil*, so also is the danger of our finding a night watchman. Come, let us mount the wall.

It was no difficult feat scaling the six-foot stone barricade surrounding Saint David's little God's Acre, and we were standing ankle-deep in fresh snow within five minutes, bending our heads against the howling midwinter blast and casting about for some starting-point in our search.

Sinking to his knees in the lee of an ancient holly tree, de Grandin drew out his pocket electric torch and scanned the copy of Richard Thompson's cryptic directions. “H'm,” he murmured as he flattened the paper against the bare ground beneath the tree's outspread, spiked branches, “what is it the

estimable Monsieur Thompson says in his so execrable poetry? ‘When the star shines from the tree.’ Name of three hundred demented green monkeys, when *does* a star shine from a tree, Friend Trowbridge?”

“Maybe he meant a Christmas tree,” I responded with a weak attempt at flippancy, but the little Frenchman was quick to adopt the suggestion.

“*Morbleu*, I think you have right, good friend,” he agreed with a nod. “And what tree is more in the spirit of Noël than the holly? Come, let us take inventory.

Slowly, bending his head against the wind, yet thrusting it upward from the fur collar of his greatcoat like a turtle emerging from its shell every few seconds, he proceeded to circle every holly and yew tree in the grounds, observing them first from one angle, then another, going so near that he stood within their shadows, then retreating till he could observe them without withdrawing his chin from his collar. At last:

“*Nom d'un singe vert*, but I think I have it!” he ejaculated. “Come and see.”

Joining him, we gazed upward along the line indicated by his pointing finger. There, like a glass ornament attached to the tip of a Yuletide tree, shone and winked a big, bright star — the planet Saturn.

“So far, thus good,” he murmured, again consulting the cryptogram. “‘Be it as a sign to ye,’ says our good Friend Thompson. *Très bien, Monsieur*, we have heeded the sign — now for the summons.

“‘Draw ye fourteen cubit line’ — about two hundred and fifty-two of your English inches, or, let us say, twenty-one feet,” he muttered. “Twenty-one feet, yes; but which way? ‘To the entrance unto life.’ U'm, what *is* the entrance to life in a burying-ground, *par le mort d'un chat noir*? A-a-ah? Perhaps yes; why not?”

As he glanced quickly this way and that, his eyes had come to rest on a slender stone column, perhaps three feet high, topped by a wide, bowl-like capital. Running through the snow to the monument, de Grandin brushed the clinging flakes from the bowl's lip and played the beam of his flashlight on it. “You see?” he asked with a delighted laugh.

Running in a circle about the weathered stone was the inscription:

SANCTVS, SANCTVS, SANCTVS
Vnleff a man be borne again of VVater &
Ye Holy Spirit he fhall in nowife ...

the rest of the lettering had withered away with the alternate frosts and thaws of more than two hundred winters.

“Why, of course!” I exclaimed with a nod of understanding. “A baptismal font — ‘the entrance unto life,’ as old Thompson called it.”

“My friend,” de Grandin assured me solemnly, “there are

times when I do not entirely despair of your intellect, but where shall we find that much-cursed spot of which *Monsieur*—”

“Look, look, for God’s sake!” croaked Eric Balderson, grasping my arm in his powerful hand till I winced under the pressure. “Look there, Dr. Trowbridge — *it’s opening!*”

The moon, momentarily released from a fetter of drifting clouds, shot her silver shafts down to the clutter of century-old monuments in the churchyard, and, twenty feet or so from us, stood one of the old-fashioned boxlike grave-markers of Colonial times. As we looked at it in compliance with Eric’s panic-stricken announcement, I saw the stone panel nearest us slowly slide back like a shutter withdrawn by an invisible hand.

“Sa-ha, it lies this way, then?” de Grandin whispered fiercely, his small, white teeth fairly chattering with eagerness. “Let us go, my friends; let us investigate. Name of a cockroach, but this is the *bonne aventure!*”

“No, my friend,” he pushed me gently back as I started toward the tomb, “Jules de Grandin goes first.”

It was not without a shudder of repulsion that I followed my little friend through the narrow opening in the tomb, for the air inside the little enclosure was black and terrible, and solid-looking as if formed of ebony. But there was no chance to draw back, for close behind me, almost as excited as the Frenchman, pressed Eric Balderson.

The boxlike tomb was but the bulkhead above a narrow flight of stone stairs, steep-pitched as a ship’s accommodation ladder, I discovered almost as soon as I had crawled inside, and with some maneuvering I managed to turn about in the narrow space and back down the steps.

Twenty steps, each about eight inches high, I counted as I descended to find myself in a narrow, stone-lined passageway which afforded barely room for us to walk in single file.

Marching ahead as imperturbably as though strolling down one of his native boulevards, de Grandin led the way, flashing the ray from his lantern along the smoothly paved passage. At length:

“We are arrived, I think,” he announced. “And, unless I am mistaken, as I hope I am, we are in a *cul-de-sac*, as well.”

The passage had terminated abruptly in a blank wall, and there was nothing for us to do, apparently, but edge around and retrace our steps. I was about to suggest this when a joyous exclamation from de Grandin halted me.

Feeling along the sandstone barrier, he had sunk to his knees, prodded the stone tentatively in several places, finally come upon a slight indentation, grooved as though to furnish hand-hold.

“Do you hold the light, Friend Trowbridge,” he directed

as he thrust the ferrule of his ebony cane into the depression and gave a mighty tug. “Ah, *parbleu*, it comes; it comes — we are not yet at the end of our tape!”

Resisting only a moment, the apparently solid block of stone had slipped back almost as easily as a well-oiled trap-door, disclosing an opening some three and a half feet high by twenty inches wide.

“The light, my friend — shine the light past me while I investigate,” de Grandin breathed, stooping almost double to pass through the low doorway.

I bent as far forward as I could and shot the beam of light over his head, and lucky for him it was I did so, for even as his head disappeared through the cleft he jerked back with an exclamation of dismay. “Ha, villain, would you so?” he rasped, snatching the keen, blade from his sword cane and thrusting it through the aperture with quick, venomous stabs.

At length, having satisfied himself that no further resistance offered beyond the wall, he sank once more to his bended knees and slipped through the hole. A moment later I heard him calling cheerfully, and, stooping quickly, I followed him, with Eric Balderson, making heavy work at jamming his great bulk through the narrow opening, bringing up the rear. De Grandin pointed dramatically at the wall we had just penetrated.

“*Morbleu*, he was thorough, that one,” he remarked, inviting our attention to an odd-looking contrivance decorating the stones.

It was a heavy ship’s boom, some six feet long, pivoted just above its center to the wall so that it swung back and forth like a gigantic pendulum. Its upper end was secured to a strand of heavily tarred cable, and fitted with a deep notch, while to its lower extremity was securely bolted what appeared to be the fluke from an old-fashioned ship’s anchor, weighing at least three stone and filed and ground to an axlike edge. An instant’s inspection of the apparatus showed us its simplicity and diabolical ingenuity. It was secured by a brace of wooden triggers in a horizontal position above the little doorway through which we had entered, and the raising of the stone-panel acted to withdraw the keepers till only a fraction of their tips supported the boom. Pressure on the sill of the doorway completed the operation, and sprung the triggers entirely back, permitting the timber with its sharpened iron tip to swing downward across the opening like a gigantic headsman’s ax, its knife-sharp blade sweeping an arc across the doorway’s top where the head of anyone entering was bound to be. But for the warning furnished by the beam of light preceding him, and the slowness of the machine’s operation after a century or more of inactivity, de Grandin would have been as cleanly decapitated by the descending blade as a convict lashed to the cradle of a guillotine.

“But what makes the thing work?” I asked curiously. “I

should think that whoever set it in place would have been obliged to spring it when he made his exit. I can't see—"

"*S-sst!*" the Frenchman cut me off sharply, pointing to the deadly engine.

Distinctly, as we listened, came the sound of tarred hawsers straining over pulley-wheels, and the iron-shod beam began to rise slowly, once more assuming a horizontal position.

I could feel the short hairs at the back of my neck rising in company with the boom as I watched the infernal spectacle, but de Grandin, ever fearless, always curious, wasted no time in speculation. Advancing to the wall, he laid his hand upon the cable, tugging with might and main, but without visible effect on the gradually rising spar. Giving over his effort, he laid his ear to the stones, listened intently a moment, then turned to us with one of his quick, elfish smiles. "He was clever, as well as wicked, the old villain who invented this," he informed us. "Behold, beyond this wall is some sort of a mechanism worked by running water, my friends. When the trigger retaining this death-dealer is released, water is also undoubtedly permitted to run from a cask or tank attached to the other end of this rope. When the knife-ax has descended and made the unwelcome visitor shorter by a head, the flowing water once more fills the tank, hoists the ax again to its original position, and *pouf!* he are ready to behead the next uninvited guest who arrives. It are clever, yes. I much regret that we have not the time to investigate the mechanism, for I am convinced something similar opens the door through which we entered — perhaps once each year at the season of the ancient Saturnalia — but we did come here to investigate something entirely quite different, eh, Friend Balderson?"

Recalled to our original purpose, we looked about the chamber. It was almost cubical in shape, perhaps sixteen feet long by as many wide, and slightly less in height. Save the devilish engine of destruction at the entrance, the only other fixture was a low coffin-like block of stone against the farther wall.

Examining this, we found it fitted with hand-grips at the sides, and two or three tugs at these heaved the monolith up on end, disclosing a breast-high, narrow doorway into a second chamber, somewhat smaller than the first, and reached by a flight of some five or six stone steps.

Quickly descending these, we found ourselves staring at a long stone sarcophagus, bare of all inscription and ornament, save the grisly emblem of the "Jolly Roger," or piratical skull and thigh-bones, graven on the lid where ordinarily the name-plate would have rested, and a stick of dry, double-forked wood, something like a capital X in shape, which lay transversely across the pirate emblem.

"Ah, what have we here?" inquired de Grandin coolly, approaching the coffin and prying at its lid with his cane-

sword.

To my surprise, the top came away with little or no effort on our part, and we stared in fascination at the unfleshed skeleton of a short, thick-set man with enormously long arms and remarkably short, bandy legs.

"Queer," I muttered, gazing at the relic of mortality. "You'd have thought anyone who went to such trouble about his tomb and its safeguards would have been buried in almost regal raiment, yet this fellow seems to have been laid away naked as the day he was born. This coffin has been almost airtight for goodness knows how many years, and there ought to be some evidence of cerements left, even if the flesh has moldered away.

De Grandin's little blue eyes were shining with a sardonic light and his small, even teeth were bared beneath the line of his miniature golden mustache as he regarded me. "Naked, unclothed, without fitting cerements, do you say, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked. Prodding with his sword blade between the skeleton's ribs a moment, he thrust the flashlight into my grip with an impatient gesture and put both hands elbow-deep into the charnel box, rummaging and stirring about in the mass of nondescript material on which the skeleton was couched. "What say you to this, and these — and these?" he demanded.

My eyes fairly started from my face as the electric torch ray fell on the things which rippled and flashed and sparkled between the little Frenchman's white fingers. There were chains of gold encrusted with rubies and diamonds and greenly glowing emeralds; there were crosses set with amethyst and garnet which any mitered prince of the church might have been proud to wear; there were ear- and finger-rings with brilliant settings in such profusion that I could not count them, while about the sides of the coffin were piled great stacks of broad gold pieces minted with the effigy of his most Catholic Majesty of Spain, and little hillocks of unset gems which sparkled and scintillated dazzlingly.

"Regal raiment did you say, Friend Trowbridge?" de Grandin cried, his breath coming fast as he viewed the jewels with ecstasy. "*Cordieu*, where in all the world is there a monarch who takes his last repose on such a royal bed as this?"

"It — it's real!" Balderson breathed unbelievably. "It wasn't a pipe-dream, after all, then. We're rich, men — *rich!* Oh, Marian, if it only weren't too late!"

De Grandin matter-of-factly scooped up a double handful of unset gems and deposited them in his overcoat pocket. "What use has this old *drôle* for all this wealth?" he demanded. "*Mordieu*, we shall find better use for it than bolstering up dead men's bones! Come, my friends, bear a hand with the treasure; it is high time we were leaving this — Trowbridge, my friend, watch the light!"

Even as he spoke I felt the flashlight slipping from my

fingers, for something invisible had struck me a numbing blow across the knuckles. The little lantern fell with a faint musical tinkle into the stone coffin beside the grinning skull and we heard the soft plop as its airless bulb exploded at contact with some article of antique jewelry.

“Matches — strike a light, someone, *pour l’amour de Dieu!*” de Grandin almost shrieked. “It is *nécessaire* that we have light to escape from this so abominable place without having our heads decapitated!”

I felt for my own flashlight, but even as I did so there was a faint hissing sound, the sputter of a safety match against its box, and — the breath of a glowing furnace seemed suddenly to sweep the room as the heavy, oppressive air was filled with dancing sheets of many-colored flames and a furious detonation shook the place. As though seized in some giant fist, I felt myself lifted bodily from the floor and hurled with devastating force against the wall, from which I rebounded and fell forward senseless on the stone-paved floor.

“Trowbridge — Trowbridge, good, kind friend, tell us that you survive!” I heard de Grandin’s tremulous voice calling from what seemed a mile or more away as I felt the fiery trickle of brandy between my teeth.

“Eh? Oh, I’m all right — I guess,” I replied as I sat up and forced the little Frenchman’s hip-flask from my lips. “What in the world happened? Was it—”

“*Morbleu,*” laughed my friend, his spirits already recovered, “I thought old Bare-bones in the coffin yonder had returned from hell and brought his everlasting fires with him. We, my friends, are three great fools, but Jules de Grandin is the greatest. When first I entered this altogether detestable tomb, I thought I smelled the faint odor of escaping illuminating-gas, but so great was my curiosity before we forced the coffin, and so monstrous my cupidity afterward, that I dismissed the matter from my mind. Assuredly there passes close by here some main of the city’s gas pipes, and there is a so small leak in one of them. The vapor has penetrated the graveyard earth in small quantities and come into this underground chamber. Not strong enough to overpower us, it was none the less in sufficient concentration to explode with one great *boom* when Friend Balderson struck his match. Fortunately for us, the doors behind are open, thus providing expansion chambers for the exploding gas. Otherwise we should have been annihilated altogether entirely.

“Come, the gas has blown away with its own force and we have found Friend Trowbridge’s flashlight. *Mordieu,* my ten fingers do itch most infernally to be at the pleasant task of counting this ill-gotten wealth!”

Scrambling over the cemetery wall was no light task, since each of us had filled his pockets with Spanish gold and

jewels until he scaled almost twice his former weight, and it was necessary for Balderson and de Grandin to boost me to the wall crest, then for de Grandin to push from below while I lent a hand from above to help Balderson up, finally for the pair of us to drag the little Frenchman up after us.

“Lucky for us the wind has risen and the snow recommenced,” de Grandin congratulated as we made our way down the deserted street, walking with a rolling gait, like heavy-laden ships in a high sea; “within an hour the snow inside the cemetery will be so drifted that none will know we visited there tonight. Let us hail a taxi, *mes amis*; I grow weary bearing this great weight of wealth about.”

3

“Name of a small green rooster,” Jules de Grandin exclaimed delightedly, his little blue eyes shining with elation in the light of the library lamp, “we are rich, my friends, rich beyond the wildest dreams of Monte Cristo! Me, I shall have a Parisian *appartement* which shall be the never-ending wonder of all beholders; a villa on the Riviera; a ducal palace in Venice — no less! — and — *grand Dieu,* what is that?”

Above the wailing of the storm-wind, half obliterated by the keening blasts, there came to us from the street outside the scream of a woman in mortal terror: “Help — help — ah, help!” the last desperate appeal so thin and high with panic horror that we could scarce distinguish it from the skirling of the gale.

“Hold fast — courage — we come! we come!” de Grandin shouted, as he burst through the front door, cleared the snow-swept porch with a single bound and raced hatless into the white-swathed street. “Where are you Madame?” he cried, pausing at the curb and looking expectantly up and down the deserted highway. “Call out, we are here!” For another moment he searched the desolate street with his gaze; then, “Courage!” he cried, vaulting a knee-high drift and rushing toward a dark, huddled object lying in the shifting snow a hundred feet or so away.

Balderson and I hurried after him but he had already raised the woman’s lolling head in the crook of his elbow and was preparing to administer stimulant from his ever-ready flask when we arrived.

She was a young girl, somewhere between seventeen and twenty, to judge by her face, neither pretty nor ill-favored, but with the clean, clear complexion of a well-brought-up daughter of lower middle-class people. About her flimsy party dress was draped a cloth coat, wholly inadequate to the chill of the night, trimmed with a collar of nondescript fur, and the hat which was pushed back from her blond bobbed hair was the sort to be bought for a few dollars at

any department store.

De Grandin bent above her with all the deference he would have shown a duchess in distress. "What was it, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked solicitously. "You did call for assistance — did you fall in the snow? Yes?"

The girl looked at him from big, terrified eyes, swallowed once convulsively, then murmured in a low, hoarse whisper: "His eyes! Those terrible eyes — they — ah, Jesus! Mercy!" In the midst of a pitiful attempt to sign herself with the cross, her body stiffened suddenly, then went limp in the Frenchman's arms; her slender bosom fluttered once, twice, then flattened, and her lower jaw fell slowly downward, as if in a half-stifled yawn. Balderson, layman that he was, mistook her senseless, imbecile expression for a bit of ill-timed horseplay and gave a half-amused titter. De Grandin and I, inured to vigils beside the moribund, recognized the trade mark stamped in those glazed, expressionless eyes and that drooping chin.

"*Ad te, Domine*—" the Frenchman bent his blond head as he muttered the prayer. Then: "Come, my friends, help me take her up. We must bear her in from the storm, then notify the police. Ha, something foul has been abroad this night; it were better for him if he runs not crosswise of the path of Jules de Grandin, *pardieu!*"

Breakfast was a belated meal next morning, for it was well after three o'clock before the coroner's men and police officers had finished their interrogations and taken the poor, maimed clay that once was gay little Kathleen Burke to the morgue for official investigation. The shadow of the tragedy sat with us at table, and none cared to discuss future joyous plans for squandering the pirate treasure. It was de Grandin who waked us from our gloomy reveries with a half-shouted exclamation.

"*Nom d'un nom* — another!" he cried. "Trowbridge, Balderson, my friends, give attention! Hear, this item from *le journal*, if you please:

TWO GIRLS VICTIMS OF FIEND

Early this morning the police were informed of two inexplicable murders in the streets of Harrisonville. Kathleen Burke, 19, of 17 Bonham Place, was returning from a party at a friend's house when Drs. Trowbridge and de Grandin, of 993 Susquehanna Avenue, heard her screaming for help and rushed out to offer assistance, accompanied by Eric Balderson, their house guest. They found the girl in a dying condition, unable to give any account of her assailant further than to mumble something concerning his eyes. The body was taken to the city morgue for an inquest which will be held today.

Rachel Müller, 26, of 445 Essex Avenue, a nurse in the operating-room at Mercy Hospital, was returning to her home after a term of special night duty a few minutes before

3 A.M. when she was set upon from behind by a masked man wearing a fantastic costume which she described to the police as consisting of a tight-fitting coat, loose, baggy pantaloons and high boots, turned down at the top, and a stocking-cap on his head. He seized her by the throat, and she managed to fight free, whereupon he attacked her with a dirk-knife, inflicting several wounds of a serious nature. Officer Timothy Dugan heard the woman's outcries and hurried to her rescue, finding her bleeding profusely and in a serious condition. He administered first aid and rang for an ambulance in which she was removed to Casualty Hospital, where she was unable to give a more detailed description of her attacker. She died at 4:18 this morning. Her assailant escaped. The police, however, claim to be in possession of several reliable clues and an arrest is promised in the near future.

"What say you to that, my friends?" the Frenchman demanded. "Me, I should say we would better consult—"

"Sergeant Costello, sor," Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, announced from the breakfast room door as she stood aside to permit the burly, red-haired Irishman to enter.

"*Ah, bonjour, Sergent,*" de Grandin greeted with a quick smile. "Is it that you come to lay the clues to the assassin of those two unfortunate young women before us?"

Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello's broad, red face went a shade more rubescent as he regarded the diminutive Frenchman with an affectionate grin. "Sure, Dr. de Grandin, sor, 'tis yerself as knows when we're handin' out th' straight goods an' when we're peddlin' th' bull," he retorted. "Ain't it th' same wid th' johnny darmes in Paree? Sure, it is. Be gorry, if we had so much as one little clue, rayliable or not, we'd be huggin' an' kissin' ourselves all over th' place, so we would. 'Tis fer that very reason, an' no other, I'm after troublin' ye at yer breakfast this marnin'. Wud ye be willin' to listen to th' case, as far as we know it, I dunno?"

"Say on, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin returned, his eyes shining and sparkling with the joy of the born manhunter in the chase. "Tell us all that is in your mind, and we may together arrive at some solution. Meantime, may I not make free of Dr. Trowbridge's hospitality to the extent of offering you a cup of coffee?"

"Thanks, sor, don't mind if I do," the detective accepted, "it's mortal cold outside today.

"Now to begin wid, we don't know no more about who committed these here murthers, or, why he done it, than a hog knows about a holiday, an' that's a fact. They tell me at headquarters that th' little Burke gur-rl (God rest her soul!) said something about th' felly's eyes to you before she died, an' Nurse Müller raved about th' same thing, though she was able to give some little bit of dayscription of him, as well. But who th' divil would be goin' around th' streets o' nights murtherin' pore, definseless young women — it's cases like this as makes policemen into nervous wrecks, Dr.

de Grandin, sor. Crimes o' passion an' crimes committed fer gain, they're meat an' drink to me, sor — I can understand 'em — but it's th' divil's own job runnin' down a johnny who goes about committin' murders like this. Sure, 'tis almost always th' sign of a loose screw in his steerin' gear, sor, an' who knows where to look fer 'im? He might be some tough mug, but 'tisin't likely. More apt to be some soft-handed gentleman livin' in a fine neighborhood an' minglin' wid th' best society. There's some queer, goin's on among th' swells, sor, an' that's gospel; but we can't go up to every bur-rd that acts funny at times an' say, 'Come wid me, young felly me lad; it's wanted fer th' murther o' Kathleen Burke an' Rachel Müller ye are,' now can we?"

"*Hélas, non,*" the Frenchman agreed sympathetically. "But have you no clue of any sort to the identity of this foul miscreant?"

"Well, sor, since ye mention it, we have one little thing," the sergeant replied, delving into his inside pocket and bringing forth a folded bit of paper from which he extracted a shred of twisted yarn. "Would this be manin' annything to ye?" he asked as he handed it to de Grandin.

"U'm," the little Frenchman murmured thoughtfully as he examined the object carefully. "Perhaps, I can not say at once. Where did you come by this?"

"'Twas clutched in Nurse Müller's hand as tight as be-damned when they brought her to th' hospital, sor," the detective replied. "We're not sure 'twas from th' murtherer's fancy-dress costume, o' course, but it's better'n nothin' to go on."

"But yes — most certainly," de Grandin agreed as he rose and took the find to the surgery.

For a few minutes he was busily engaged with jeweler's loop and microscope; finally he returned with the shred of yarn partly unraveled at one end. "It would seem," he declared as he returned the evidence to Costello, "that this is of Turkish manufacture, though not recent. It is a high grade of angora wool; the outer scales have smooth edges, which signifies the quality of the fleece. Also, interwoven with the thread is a fine golden wire. I have seen such yarn, the wool cunningly intermixed with golden threads, used for tarboosh tassels of wealthy Moslems. But the style has not prevailed for a hundred years and more. This is either a very old bit of wool, or a cunning simulation of the olden style — I am inclined to think the former. After all, though, this thread tells little more than that the slayer perhaps wore the headgear of a Mohammedan. The nurse described him as wearing a stocking-cap or toboggan, I believe. In her excitement and in the uncertain light of early morning a fez might easily be mistaken for such a piece of headgear."

"Then we're no better off than we were at first?" the Irishman asked disappointedly.

"A little," de Grandin encouraged. "Your search has

narrowed somewhat, for you need only include among your suspects those possessing genuine Turkish fezzes a hundred years or more old."

"Yeah," commented Costello gloomily. "An' after we've run all them down, all we haf ter do is go down ter th' seashore an' start countin' th' grains o' sand."

"*Tiens,* my friend, be not so downcast," de Grandin bade. "Like your so magnificent John Paul Jones, we have not yet commenced to fight. Come, *Sergent,* Trowbridge, let us to the morgue. Perhaps we shall discover something there, if the pig-clumsy physicians have not already spoiled matters with their autopsy knives.

"Balderson, *mon brave,* do you remain to guard that which requires watching. You have small stomach for the things Friend Trowbridge and I shall shortly look upon."

Side by side in the zinc-lined drawers of the city morgue's refrigerator lay the bodies of Kathleen Burke and Rachel Müller. De Grandin bent above the bodies, studying the discolorations on their throats in thoughtful silence. "U'm," he commented, as he turned to me with a quizzical expression, "is there not something these contusions have in common, Friend Trowbridge?"

Leaning forward, I examined the dark, purplish ridges banding both girls' throats. About the thickness of a lead-pencil, they ran about the delicate white skins, four on the left side, one on the right, with a small circular patch of discoloration in the region of the larynx, showing where the strangler had rested the heel of his hand as a fulcrum for his grip. "Why," I began, studying the marks carefully, "er, I can't say that I notice — by George, yes! The center finger of the throttler's hand was amputated at the second joint!"

"*Précisément,*" the Frenchman agreed. "And which hand is it, if you please?"

"The right, of course; see how his thumb pressed on the right side of his victim's throats."

"*Exactement,* and—"

"And that narrows Costello's search still more," I interrupted eagerly. "All he has to do now is search for someone with half the second finger of his right hand missing, and—"

"And you do annoy me excessively," de Grandin cut in frigidly. "Your interruptions, they vex, they harass me. If I do not mistake rightly, we have already found him of the missing finger; at least, we have seen him."

I looked at him in open-mouthed amazement. Men afflicted with mysterious sadistic impulses, I knew, might move in normal society for years without being subject to suspicion, but I could recall no one of our acquaintance who possessed the maimed hand which was the killer's trade mark. "You mean—?" I asked blankly.

"Last night, or early this morning, *mon vieux,*" he

returned. “You, perhaps, were too immediately concerned with dodging exploding gases to take careful note of all we saw in the charnel chamber beneath the ground, but me, I see everything. *The right middle finger of the skeleton we found in the coffin with the treasure was missing at the second joint.*”

“You’re joking!” I shot back incredulously.

For answer he pointed silently to the still, dead forms before us. “Are *these* a joke, my friend?” he demanded. “*Cordieu*, if such they be, they are an exceedingly grim jest.”

“But for heaven’s sake,” I demanded, “how could that skeleton leave its tomb and wander about the streets? Anyhow, Nurse Müller declared it was a man who attacked her, not a skeleton. And skeletons haven’t eyes, yet poor little Kathleen spoke of her assailant’s eyes the first thing when we found her.”

He turned his back on my expostulations with a slight shrug and addressed himself to the morgue master. “Have they arrived at the precise causes of death, *Monsieur*?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” the official replied. “The little Burke girl died o’ heart failure consequent upon shock. Miss Müller died from loss o’ blood an’—”

“Never mind, my friend, it is enough,” de Grandin interrupted. “Strangulation was present in both cases, but apparently was not the primary cause of either death. That was all I desired to learn.

“Trowbridge, my friend,” he assured me as we parted at the mortuary door, “he practises.”

“Practises — who?” I demanded. But de Grandin was already out of earshot, walking down the street at a pace which would have qualified him for entry in a professional pedestrians’ race.

4

The consommé was growing cold in the tureen, Balderson and I were becoming increasingly aware of our appetites, and Nora McGinnis was on the verge of nervous prostration as visions of her elaborate dinner spoiling on the stove danced before her mind’s eye when Jules de Grandin burst through the front door, a film of snowflakes from the raging storm outside decorating his shoulders like the ermine on a judge’s gown. “Quick, Friend Trowbridge,” he ordered as he drew up his chair to the table, “fill my plate to overflowing. I hunger, I starve, I famish. Not so much as one little crumb of luncheon has passed my lips this day.”

“Find out anything?” I asked as I ladled out a liberal portion of smoking chicken broth.

“*Cordieu*, I shall say so, and he who denies it is a most

foul liar!” he returned with a grin. “Observe this, if you please.”

From his pocket he produced an odd-looking object, something like a fork of dried weed or a root of desiccated ginger, handing it first to me, then to Eric Balderson for inspection.

“All right, I’ll bite — what is it?” Eric admitted as the little Frenchman eyed us in turn expectantly.

“*Mandragora officinalis* — mandrake,” he replied with another of his quick smiles. “Have you not seen it before?—”

“U’m” — I searched the pockets of my memory a moment — “isn’t this the thing we found on the old pirate’s coffin last night?”

“Exactly, precisely, quite so!” he replied delightedly, patting his hands together softly as though applauding at a play. “You have right, good friend; but last night we were too much concerned with saving our silly heads from the swinging ax, with finding gold and gems, and similar useless things to give attention to matters of real importance. Behold, my friends, with this bit of weed-root and these, I shall make one *sacré singe* — a monkey, no less — of that so vile murderer who terrorizes the city and slays inoffensive young women in the right. Certainly.” As he finished speaking, he thrust his hand into another pocket and brought forth a dozen small conical objects which he pitched onto the table-cloth with a dramatic gesture.

“Bullets!” Balderson remarked wonderingly. “What—”

“Bullets, no less,” de Grandin agreed, taking a pair of the little missiles into his hand and juggling them up and down playfully. “But not such bullets as you or Friend Trowbridge have seen before, I bet me your life. Attend me: these are silver, solid silver, without a trace of alloy. *Eh bien*, but I did have the fiend’s own time finding a jeweler who would undertake to duplicate the bullets of my pistol in solid silver on such short notice. But at last, *grâce à Dieu*, I found him, and he fashioned these so pretty things to my order and fitted them into the shells in place of the nickel-plated projectiles. For good measure I ordered him to engrave each one with a cross at its tip, and then, on my way home, I did stop at the church of Saint Bernard and dip them each and every one into the font of *eau bénite*. Now, I damn think, we shall see what we shall see this night.”

“What in the world—” I began, but he shut me off with upraised hand.

“The roast, Friend Trowbridge,” he implored, “for dear friendship’s sake, carve me a liberal portion of the roast and garnish it well with potatoes. Do but permit that I eat my fill, and, when the time arrives, I shall show you such things as to make you call yourself one colossal liar when you recall them to memory!”

Sergeant Costello, thoroughly disgruntled at hours of vigil in the snowy night and completely mystified, was waiting for us beside the entrance to Saint David's churchyard. "Sure, Dr. de Grandin, sor," he announced as he stepped from the shelter of the pentice, blowing on his numbed fingers, "'tis th' divil's own job ye gave me tonight. Me eyes have been skinned like a pair o' onions all th' night long, but niver a bit o' annyone comin' in or out o' th' graveyard have I seen."

"Very good, my friend," de Grandin commented. "You have done most well, but I fear me one will attempt to pass you, and by the inward route, before many minutes have gone. You will kindly await our outcoming, if you please, and we shall be no longer than necessary, I assure you."

Forcing the sliding door of the tombstone, we hastened down the stairway to the burial chamber in de Grandin's wake, sprung the guarding ax at the entrance of the first room and crept into the inner cavern. One glance was sufficient to confirm our suspicions. The stone coffin was empty.

"Was — was it like this when you were here today?" I faltered.

"No," de Grandin answered, "he lay in his bed as calmly as a babe in its cradle, my friend, *but he lay on his side.*"

"On his side? Why, that is impossible! The skeleton was on its back when we came here last night and we didn't move it. How came the change of posture?"

"*Tiens*, who can say?" he replied. "Perhaps he rests better that way. Of a certainty, he had lain long enough on his posterior to have become tired of it. It may be — *sssh!* Lights out. To your quarters!"

Balderson and I rushed to opposite corners of the room, as de Grandin had previously directed, our powerful electric bull's-eye lanterns shut off, but ready to flood the place with light at a second's notice. De Grandin stationed himself squarely in line with the door, his head thrust forward, his knees slightly bent, his entire attitude one of pleased anticipation.

What sixth sense had warned him of approaching danger I know not, for in the absolute quiet of the pitch dark chamber I could hear no sound save the low, short breaths of my two companions and the faint trickle-trickle of water into the tank of the beheading machine which guarded the entrance of the farther room. I was about to speak, when:

Bang! The muffled detonation of a shot fired somewhere above ground sounded startlingly, followed by another and still another; then the rasping, high-pitched cackle of a maniacal laugh, a scraping, shuffling step on the narrow stone stairs, and:

"Lights, *pour l'amour de Dieu*, lights!" de Grandin shrieked as something — some malign, invisible, unutterably wicked *presence* seemed suddenly to fill the chamber,

staining the inky darkness still more black with its foul effluvium.

As one man Balderson and I snapped up the shutters of our lanterns, and the converging beams displayed a frightful tableau.

Crouched at the low entrance of the cavern, like a predatory beast with its prey, was a fantastic figure, a broad, squat — almost humpbacked — man arrayed in leathern jerkin, Turkish fez and loose, baggy pantaloons tucked into hip-boots of soft Spanish leather. About his face, mask-like, was bound a black-silk kerchief with two slits for eyes, and through the openings there glowed and glittered a pair of baleful orbs, green-glossed and vitreous, like those of a cat, but fiercer and more implacable than the eyes of any feline.

Over one malformed shoulder, as a miller might carry a sack of meal, the creature bore the body of a girl, a slight, frail slip of femininity with ivory face and curling hair of deepest black, her thin, frilly party dress ripped to tatters, one silver slipper fallen from her silk-sheathed foot, the silver-tissue bandeau which bound her hair dislodged so that it lay half across her face like the bandage over the eyes of a condemned felon.

"*Monsieur le Pirate*," de Grandin greeted in a low, even voice, "you do roam afield late, it seems. We have waited overlong for you."

The mask above the visitant's face fluttered outward with the pressure of breath behind it, and we could trace the movement of jaws beneath the silk, but no word of answer came to the Frenchman's challenge.

"Ah — so? You choose not to talk?" de Grandin queried sarcastically. "Is it perhaps that you prefer deeds to words? *C'est bien!*" With a quick, skipping step he advanced several paces toward the creature, raising his pistol as he moved."

A peal of sardonic, tittering laughter issued from beneath the mask. Callous as a devil, the masked thing dropped the girl's lovely body to the stone floor, snatched at the heavy hanger in his belt and leaped straight for de Grandin's throat.

The Frenchman fired even as his antagonist charged, and the effect of his shot was instantaneous. As though he had run against a barrier of iron, the masked pirate stopped in mid-stride and staggered back an uncertain step, but de Grandin pressed his advantage. "Ha, You did not expect this, *hein?*" he demanded with a smile which was more like a snarl. "You who defy the bullets of policemen and make mock of all human resistance thought you would add one more victim to your list, *n'est-ce-pas, Monsieur?* Perhaps, *Monsieur, le Mort-félon*, you had not thought of Jules de Grandin?"

As he spoke he fired another shot into the cowering wretch, another, and still another until eight silver balls had

pierced the cringing thing's breast.

As the final shot went home the fantastical, terrible shape began to change before our eyes. Like the cover of a punctured football the gaudy, archaic costume began to wrinkle and wilt, the golden-tasseled fez toppled forward above the masked face and the black-silk handkerchief itself dropped downward, revealing the unfleshed countenance of a grinning skull.

"Up with him, my friends," de Grandin shouted. "Pitch him into his coffin, clamp down the lid — here, lay the root of mandrake upon it! So! He is in again, and for all time.

"Now, one of you, take up poor *Mademoiselle* and pass her through the door to me.

"Very well, *Sergent*, we come and bring the young lady with us!" he cried as Costello's heavy boots sounded raspily on the stone steps outside. "Do not attempt to enter — it is death to put your head through the opening!"

A moment later, with the girl's body wrapped in the laprobe, we were driving toward my house, ignoring every speed regulation in the city ordinances.

5

Sergeant Costello looked askance at the rug-wrapped form occupying the rear seat of my car. "Say, Dr. de Grandin, sor," he ventured with another sidewise glance at the lovely body, "hadn't we best be notifyin' th' coroner, an'" — he gulped over the word — "an' gittin' a undertaker fer this here pore young lady?"

"Coroner — undertaker? *À bas les croque-morts!* Your wits are entirely absent harvesting the wool of sheep, *cher sergent*. The only undertaker of which she stands in need is the excellent Nora McGinnis, who shall give her a warm bath to overcome her chill after Friend Trowbridge and I have administered stimulants. Then, unless I mistake much, we shall listen to a most remarkable tale of adventure before we restore her to the arms of her family."

Half an hour later our fair prize, revived by liberal doses of aromatic ammonia and brandy, thoroughly warmed by a hot sponge and alcohol rub administered by the competent Nora, and with one of de Grandin's vivid flowered-silk dressing-gowns slipped over the sorry remnants of her tattered party costume, sat demurely before our library fire. As she entered the room, Eric Balderson, who had not seen her face before, because of the bandeau which obscured it in the cave, gave a noticeable start, then seemed to shrink back in his corner of the ingle-nook.

Not so Jules de Grandin. Swinging one well-tailored leg across the corner of the library table, he regarded the young lady with a level, unwinking stare till the sustained scrutiny

became embarrassing. Finally:

"*Mademoiselle*, you will have the kindness to tell us exactly what has happened to you this night, so far as you can remember," he ordered.

The girl eyed him with a tremulous smile a moment; then, taking a deep breath, launched on her recital like a child speaking a piece in school.

"I'm Marian Warner," she told us. "We live in Tunlaw Street — I think Dr. Trowbridge knows my father, Fabian Warner."

I nodded agreement, and she continued.

"Tonight I went to a Christmas Eve party at Mr. and Mrs. Partridge's. It was a masquerade affair, but I just wore a domino over my evening dress, since we were to unmask at midnight, anyway, and I thought I'd feel more comfortable in 'citizen's clothes' than I would dancing in some sort of elaborate costume.

"There wasn't anything unusual about the party, or about the first part of the evening, that I remember, except, of course, everyone was talking about the mysterious murder of those two poor women.

"They danced a German just before midnight, and I was pretty hot from the running around, so I stepped into the conservatory to slip out of my domino a moment and cool off.

"I'd just taken the gown off when I felt a touch on my arm, and turning round found a man staring into my face. I thought he must be one of the guests, of course, though I couldn't remember having seen him. He wore a jerkin of bright red leather with a wide black belt about his waist, a red fez with gold-and-black tassel, and loose trousers tucked into tall boots. His face was concealed with a black-silk handkerchief instead of a regular mask, and, somehow, there was something menacing and terrifying about him. I think it must have been his eyes, which glittered in the light like those of an animal at night.

"I started back from him, but he edged after me, extending his hand to stroke my arm, and almost fawning on me. He made queer, inarticulate sounds in his throat, too.

"'Go away,' I told him. 'I don't know you and I don't want to. Please leave me alone.' By that time he'd managed to crowd me into a corner, so that my retreat into the house was cut off, and I was getting really frightened.

"'If you don't let me go, I'll scream,' I threatened, and then, before I had a chance to say another word, out shot one of his hands — ugh, they were big and thin and long, like a gorilla's! — and grasped me by the throat.

"I tried to fight him off, and even as I did so there flashed, through my mind the description Miss Müller gave of her murderer. Then I knew. I was helpless in the grasp of the killer! That's all I remember till I regained consciousness with Dr. Trowbridge's housekeeper drying me after my bath

and you gentlemen standing outside the door, ready to help me downstairs.

“Did they catch him — the murderer?” she added with true feminine curiosity.

“But of course, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin assured her gravely. “I was on his trail. It was impossible he should escape.

“Attend me, my friends,” he ordered, slipping from his seat on the table and striding to the center of the room like a lecturer about to begin his discourse. “Last night, when we entered that accursed tomb, I had too many thoughts within my so small brain to give full attention to any one of them. In my hurry I did overlook many important matters. That root of mandrake, by example, I should have suspected its significance, but I did not. Instead, I tossed it away as an unconsidered trifle.

“Mandrake, or mandragora, my friends, was one of the most potent charm-drugs in the ancient pharmacopoeia. With it the barren might be rendered fecund; love forgotten might be reawakened; deep and lasting coma might be induced by it. Does not that Monsieur Shakespeare make Cleopatra say:

‘Give me to drink of mandragora,
That I might, sleep out this great gap of time
My Antony is away’?

Most certainly.

“Moreover, it had another, and less frequent use. Placed upon the grave of one guilty of manifold sins, *it would serve to keep his earthbound spirit from walking*. You perceive the connection.

“When we cast aside that root of mandragora, we did unseal a tomb which was much better left unopened, and did release upon the world a spirit capable of working monstrous evil. Yes. This ‘Black Master,’ I do know him, Friend Trowbridge.

“When we looked upon the poor relics of those slain women, I noticed at once the peculiarity of the bruises on their throats. ‘*Parbleu*,’ I say to me, ‘the skeleton which we saw last night, he had a hand so maimed as to leave a mark like this. Jules de Grandin, we must investigate.’

“‘Make it so,’ I reply to me in that mental conversation, and so, Friend Trowbridge, when I left you I did repair instantly to that cursed tomb and look about. There, in his coffin of stone, lay the skeleton of the ‘Black Master,’ but, as I have already been at pains to tell you, on his side, not as we left him lying the night before. ‘*Mordieu*, this are not good, this are most badly strange,’ I inform me. Then I look about and discover the bit of mandrake root, all shriveled and dried, and carelessly tossed to one side where we left it when Friend Trowbridge let fall his light. I—”

“By the way, de Grandin,” I put in. “Something hit me a

paralyzing blow on the knuckles before I let my flashlight fall; have you any idea what it was?”

He favored me with a momentary frown, then: “But certainly,” he responded. “It were a bit of stone from the ceiling. I saw it detach itself and cried a warning to you, even as it fell, but the loss of our light was of such importance that I talked no more about your injury. Now to resume:

“‘Can we not now seal him in the tomb with the mandrake once more?’ I ask me as I stand beside that coffin today, but better judgment tell me not to attempt it. This old-time sea-devil, he have been able to clothe his bony frame with seeming habiliments of the flesh. He are, to all intents and purposes, once more alive, and twice as wicked as before on account of his long sleep. I shall kill his fantasmal body for good and all before I lock him once and forever in the tomb again.

“‘But how shall we slay him so that he be really-truly dead?’ I ask me.

“Then, standing beside the coffin of that old, wicked pirate, I think and think deeply. ‘How were the were-wolves and witches, the wizards and the warlocks, the bugbears and goblins of ancient times slain in the olden days?’ I ask, and the answer comes back, ‘With bullets of silver.’ Attend me, my friends.”

Snatching a red leather volume from the near-by shelf he thumbed quickly through its pages. “Hear what your Monsieur Whittier say in one of his so lovely poems. In the olden times, the garrison of a New England fort was beset by

... a spectral host, defying stroke of
steel and aim of gun;
Never yet was ball to slay them in the
mold of mortals run!

Midnight came; from out the forest moved
a dusky mass that soon
Grew to warriors, plumed and painted,
grimly marching in the moon.

“Ghosts or witches,” said the captain, “thus
I foil the Evil One!”
And he rammed a silver button from his
doublet down his gun.

“Very good. I, too, will thus foil the Evil One and his servant who once more walks the earth. I have told you how I had the bullets made to my order this day. I have recounted how I baptized them for the work they were to do this night. Yourselves saw how the counter-charm worked against that servitor of Satan, how it surprised him when it pierced his phantom breast, how it made of him a true corpse, and how the seeming-flesh he had assumed to clothe his bare bones while he worked his evil was made to melt away before the

bullets of Jules de Grandin. Now, doubly dead, he lies sealed by the mandrake root within his tomb for evermore.

“Friend Balderson, you have been most courteously quiet this long time. Is there no question you would care to ask?”

“You told Dr. Trowbridge you knew the ‘Black Master,’” Eric replied. “Can you tell us something about him—?”

“Ah, *parbleu*, but I can!” de Grandin interrupted. “This afternoon, while the excellent jeweler was turning out my bullets, I repaired to the public library and discovered much of that old villain’s life and deeds. Who he was nobody seems to know. As to what he was, there is much fairly accurate conjecture.

“A Turk he was by birth, it is generally believed, and a most unsavory follower of the false Prophet. Even in sinful Stamboul his sins were so great that he was deprived of his tongue by way of punishment. Also, he was subjected to another operation not wholly unknown in Eastern countries. This latter, instead of rendering him docile, seemed to make a veritable demon of him. Never would he permit his crews to take prisoners, even for ransom. Sexless himself, he forbade the presence of women — even drabs from Maracaibo and Panama — aboard his ships, save for one purpose. That was torture. Whenever a ship was captured, he fetched the female prisoners aboard, and after compelling them to witness the slaughter of their men folk, with his own hands he put them to death, often crushing life from their throats with his maimed right hand. Does not his history fit squarely with the things we have observed these last two nights? The accounts declare, ‘The time and place of his death are uncertain, but it is thought he died somewhere near the present city of Newark and was buried somewhere in Jersey. A vast treasure disappeared with him, and speculation concerning its hiding-place rivals that of the famous buried hoard of Captain Kidd.’

“Now, it is entirely probable that we might add something of great interest to that chronicle, but I do not think we shall, for—”

Absorbed in the Frenchman’s animated narrative, Eric Balderson had moved from his shadowed corner into the zone of light cast by the reading-lamp, and as de Grandin was about to finish, Marian Warner interrupted him with a little cry of incredulous delight. “Eric,” she called. “Eric Balderson! Oh, my dear, I’ve wondered and worried so much about you!”

A moment later she had flown across the room, shedding de Grandin’s purple lizard-skin slippers as she ran, put both hands on the young man’s shoulders, and demanded, “Why did you go away, dear; didn’t you know—?”

“Marian!” Eric interrupted hoarsely. “I didn’t dare ask your father. I was so wretchedly poor, and there seemed no prospect of my ever getting anywhere — you’d been used to everything, and I thought it would be better for us both if I just faded out of the picture. But” — he laughed boyishly — “I’m rich, now, dear — one of the richest men in the country, and—”

“Rich or poor, Eric dear, I love you,” the girl interrupted as she slipped both arms about his neck and kissed him on the lips.

Jules de Grandin’s arms shot out like the blades of a pair of opening shears. With one hand he grasped Sergeant Costello’s arm; the other snatched me by the elbow. “Come away, foolish ones,” he hissed. “What have we, who left our loves in Avalon long years ago, to do with such as they? *Pardieu*, to them we are a curse, a pest, an abomination; we do incumber the earth!

“Await me here,” he ordered as we concluded our march to the consulting-room. “I go, but I return immediately.”

In a moment he came tripping down the stairs, a magnificent glowing ruby, nearly as large as a robin’s egg, held daintily between his thumb and forefinger. “For their betrothal ring,” he announced proudly. “See, it is the finest in my collection.”

“Howly Mither, Dr. de Grandin, sor, are ye, a jinny from th’ *Arabeen Nights*, to be passin’ out jools like that whenever a pair o’ young folks gits engaged?” demanded Sergeant Costello, his big blue eyes almost popping from his head in amazement.

“Ah, *mon sergent*,” the little Frenchman turned one of his quick, elfish smiles on the big Irishman, “you have as yet seen nothing. Before you leave this house tonight Friend Trowbridge and I shall fill every pocket of your clothes to overflowing with golden coin from old Spain; but e’er we do so, let us remember it is Christmas.”

With the certainty of one following a well-worn path, he marched to the medicine closet, extracted a bottle of peach brandy and three glasses, and filled them to the brim.

“To your very good and long-lasting health, my friend,” he pledged, raising his glass aloft. “*Joyeux Noël!*”

The Devil-People

A BLEAK northeast wind, sweeping down from the coast of New England and freighted with mingled rain and sleet, howled riotously through the streets as we emerged from Symphony Hall.

“*Cordieu*, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin exclaimed between chattering teeth as he turned the fur collar of his greatcoat up about his ears and sunk his head between his shoulders, “Monsieur Washington was undoubtedly a most admirable gentleman in every respect, but of a certainty he chose a most damnable, execrable day on which to be born! Name of a green duck, I am already famished with the cold; come, let us seek shelter, and that with quickness, or I shall expire completely and leave you nothing but the dead corpse of Jules de Grandin for company!”

Grinning at his vehemence, I bent my head to the blast as we buffeted our way against the howling gale, fighting a path over the sleet-swept sidewalks to the glass-and-iron porte cochère of La Pontoufle Dorée.

As we swept through the revolving plate-glass doors a sleek-looking gigolo with greased hair and beady eyes set too close together snatched at our hats and wraps with an avidity which betrayed his Levantine ancestry, and we marched down a narrow, mirror-lined hall lighted with red-shaded electric bulbs. From the dining-room beyond came the low, dolorous moaning of saxophones blended with the blurred monody of indiscriminate conversation and the shrill, piping overtones of women’s laughter. On the cleared dancing-floor in the center of the room a file of shapely young women in costumes consisting principally of beads and glittering rhinestones danced hectically, their bare, powdered arms, legs and torsos gleaming in the glare of the spotlight. The close, superheated air reeked with the odor of broken food and the effluvia from women’s perfumed gowns and bodies, while the savage, heathen snarl of the jazz band’s jungle music throbbed and palpitated like a fever patient’s pulses. Soft fronds of particolored silk, sweeping gracefully down from the center of the ceiling, formed a tentlike roof which billowed gracefully with each draft from the doors, and the varicolored lights of the great crystal chandelier gleamed dully through the drifting fog-whorls of tobacco smoke.

“U’m?” de Grandin surveyed the scene from the threshold. “These children of present-day America enjoy more luxury than did their country’s father on his birthday at Valley Forge a hundred and fifty-two years ago tonight, Friend Trowbridge,” he commented dryly.

“How many in the party, please?” demanded the head waiter. “Only two?” Disdain and hauteur seemed fighting for possession of his hard-shaven face as he eyed us frigidly.

“Two, most certainly,” de Grandin replied, then tapped the satin lapel of the functionary’s dress coat with an impressive forefinger, “but two with the appetites — and thirsts — of four, *mon garçon*.”

Something like a smile flickered across the cruel, arrogant lips of the servitor as he beckoned to a waiter-captain, who led us to a table near the wall.

“*Voleurs* — robbers, bandits!” the little Frenchman exclaimed as he surveyed the price list of the menu.

“However, it is *nécessaire* that one eats,” he added philosophically as he made his choice known to the hovering waiter.

A matronly-looking, buxom woman of uncertain age in a modestly cut evening gown circulated among the guests. Seemingly acquainted with everyone present, she stopped here and there, slapping a masculine back in frank friendship and camaraderie every once in a while, exchanging a quip or word of greeting with the women patrons.

“Hullo, boys,” she greeted cordially as she reached our table, “having a good time? Need anything more to brighten the corner where you are?”

“*Madame*,” de Grandin bent forward from the hips in a formal Continental bow, “if you possess the influence in this establishment, you can confer the priceless favor on us by procuring a *soupçon* of *eau-de-vie*. Consider: We are but just in from the outdoor cold and are frozen to the bone on all sides. If—”

“French!” From the delighted expression on the lady’s face it was apparent that the discovery of de Grandin’s nationality was the one thing needed to make her happiness complete. “I knew it the moment I laid eyes on you,” she assured him. “You boys from across the pond simply *must* have your little nip, mustn’t you? Fix it? I’ll tell the world I can. Leave it to Mamma; she’ll see you get a shot that’ll start your blood circulatin’. Back in a minute, Frenchy, and, by the way” — she paused, a genial smile on her broad, rather homely face — “how about a little playmate to liven things up? Someone to share the loneliness of a stranger in a strange land? I got just the little lady to do the trick. She’s from over the water, too.”

“*Mordieu*, my friend, it seems I have put my foot in it up to the elbow,” de Grandin deplored with a grimace of comic tragedy. “My request for a drink brings us not only the

liquor, but a partner to help consume it, it would seem. Two hundred francs at the least, this will cost us, I fear.”

I was about to voice a protest, for supping at a night club was one thing, while consorting with the paid entertainers was something very different; but my remonstrances died half uttered, for the hostess bore down upon us, her face wreathed in smiles, a waiter with a long-necked bottle preceding her and a young woman — dark, pretty and with an air of shy timidity — following docilely in her wake. The girl — she was little more — wore a rich, black fur coat over a black evening gown and swung a small black grosgrain slipper bag from her left wrist.

“Shake hands with Ma’m selle Mutina, Frenchy,” the hostess bade. “She’s just as lonesome and thirsty as you are. You’ll get along like mocha and java, you two.”

“*Enchanté, Mademoiselle,*” De Grandin assured her as he raised her slender white fingers to his lips and withdrew a chair for her. “You will have a bit of food, some champagne, perhaps, some—” he rattled on with a string of gallantries worthy of a professional boulevardier while I watched him in mingled fascination and disapproval. This was a facet of the many-sided little Frenchman I had never seen before, and I was not especially pleased with it.

Our table-mate seated herself, letting her opulent coat fall back over her chair and revealing a pair of white, rounded shoulders and arms of singular loveliness. Her eyes rested on the table in timid confusion. As de Grandin monopolized the conversation, I studied her attentively. There was no doubting her charm. Slim, youthful, vibrant, she was, yet restrained with a sort of patrician calm. Her skin was not the dead white of the powder-filmed performers of the cabaret, nor yet the pink of the athletic woman’s; rather it seemed to glow with a delicate undertone of tan, like the old ivory of ancient Chinese carvings or the richest of cream. Her face was heart-shaped rather than oval, with almost straight eyebrows of jetty blackness, a small, straight nose and a low, broad forehead, blue-black hair that lapped smoothly over her tiny ears like folded raven’s wings, and delicate, sensitive lips which, I knew instinctively, would have been lusciously red even without the aid of the rouge with which they were tinted. When she raised timid, troubled eyes to de Grandin’s face I saw the irises inside the silken frames of curling black lashes were purple as pansy petals. “Humph,” I commented mentally, “she’s beautiful — entirely too good-looking to be respectable!”

The waiter brought a chicken sandwich and — to my unbounded astonishment — a bottle of ginger ale for her, and as she was about to lift a morsel of food to her lips I saw her purple eyes suddenly widen with dread and her cheeks go ash-pale with fright.

“*M’sieu,*” she whispered, leaning impulsively across the table, “do not look at once, I implore you, but in a moment

glance casually at the table at the far corner of the room and tell me if you see anyone there!”

Restraining an impulse to wheel in my chair, I held myself steady a moment, then with elaborate unconcern surveyed the room slowly. At the table indicated by the girl sat four men in dinner clothes. Leanness — the cadaverous emaciation of dissecting-room material — was their outstanding characteristic. Their cheeks were gaunt and hollow, their lips so thin that the outline of the teeth could be marked through them, and every articulation of their skulls could be traced through the tightly stretched, saddle-brown skin of their faces. But a second’s study of their death’s-head countenances revealed a more sinister feature. Their eyes were obliquely set, like cats’, yellow-green and cruel, with long slits for pupils. Changeless in expression they were; set, fixed, inscrutable, pitiless as any panther’s — waiting, watching, seeing all, revealing nothing. I shuddered in spite of myself as I forced my gaze to travel casually over the remainder of the room.

De Grandin was speaking in a low, suppressed whisper, and in his little round blue eyes there snapped and sparkled the icy flashes which betrayed excitement. “*Mademoiselle,*” he said, “I see four monkey-faced heathen seated at that table. Hindus they are by their features, perhaps Berbers from Africa, but devil’s offspring by their eyes, which are like razors. Do they annoy you? I will order them away, I will pull their crooked noses — *pardieu,* I shall twist their flap-ears before I boot them from the place if you do but say the word!”

“Oh, no, no!” the girl breathed with a frightened shudder, and I could see it was as if a current of cold horror, something nameless and terrible, flowed from the strange men to her. “Do not appear to notice them, sir, but — Aristide!” she beckoned to a waiter hurrying past with a tray of glasses.

“Yes, *Ma’m selle?*” the man answered, pausing with a smile beside her chair.

“Those gentlemen in the corner by the orchestra” — she nodded ever so slightly toward the macabre group — “have you ever seen them here before?”

“Gentlemen, *Ma’m selle?*” the waiter replied with a puzzled frown as he surveyed the table intently. “Surely, you make the joke with Aristide. That table, she are vacant — the only vacant one in the place. It are specially reserved and paid for, but—”

“Never mind,” the girl interrupted with a smile, and the man hurried off on his errand.

“You see?” she asked simply.

“*Barbe d’une poule bleu,* but I do not!” de Grandin asserted. “But—”

“Hush!” she interrupted. “Oh, do not let them think we notice them; it would make them frenzied. When the lights

go out for the next number of the show, I shall ask a great favor of you, sir. You are a chivalrous gentleman and will not refuse. I shall take a package from my handbag — see, I trust you perfectly — and pass it to you beneath the table, and you will take it at once to 849 Algonquin Avenue and await me there. Please!” Her warm soft fingers curled themselves about his hand with an appealing pressure. “You will do this for me? You will not fail? — you are not afraid?”

“*Mademoiselle*,” he assured her solemnly, returning her handclasp with compound interest, “I shall do it, though forty thousand devils and devilkins bar the way.”

As the lights in the big central chandelier dimmed and the spotlight shot its effulgence over the dancing-floor, a petite blonde maiden arrayed in silver trunks, bandeau and slippers pranced out between the rows of tables and began singing in a rasping, nasal voice while she strutted and jiggled through the intricate movements of the Baltimore.

“Come, Friend Trowbridge,” ordered de Grandin abruptly, stowing something in his pocket at the same time. “We go, we leave; *allez-vous-en!*”

I followed stumblingly through the comparative darkness of the dining-room, but paused on the threshold for a final backward glance. The zone of spotlight on the dancing-floor made the remainder of the place inky black by contrast, and only the highlights of the table napery, the men’s shirt-fronts and the women’s arms and shoulders showed indistinctly through the gloom, but it seemed to me the oblique, unchanging eyes of the sinister quartet at the corner table followed us through the dark and shone with sardonic phosphorescence, as the questing eyes of hungry cats spy out the movements of mice among the shadows.

“This is the craziest thing you’ve ever done,” I scolded as our taxi gathered speed over the slippery street. “What do we know about that girl? Nothing, except she’s an habitu e of a none too reputable night club. She may be a dope peddler for all we know, and this may be just a scheme to have us carry her contraband stuff past the police; or it may be a plan for hold-up and robbery and those devilish-looking men her accomplices. I’d not put any sort of villainy past a gang like that, and—”

De Grandin’s slender, mocha-gloved fingers beat a devil’s tattoo on the silver knob of his ebony cane as he regarded me with a fixed, unwinking stare of disapproval. “All that you say may be true, my friend,” he admitted; “nevertheless, I have a mind to see this business through. Are you with me?”

“Of course, but—”

“There are no buts, *cher ami*. Unless I mistake rightly, we shall see remarkable things before we have done, and I would not miss the sight for half a dozen peaceful nights in

bed.”

As we rounded a corner and turned into the wide, tree-bordered roadway of Algonquin Avenue another car sped past us through the storm, whirling skid-chains snarling savagely against its mudguards.

2

A real estate agent’s sign announced that the substantial brownstone residence which was Algonquin Avenue was for sale or rent on long-term lease and would be altered to suit the tenant. Otherwise the place was as much like every other house in the block as one grain of rice is like the others in a bag.

Hastening up the short flagstone path leading from the sidewalk, de Grandin mounted the low brownstone stoop, felt uncertainly a moment, located the old-fashioned pull doorbell and gave the brass knob a vigorous yank.

Through the mosaic of brightly stained glass in the front door panel we could descry a light in the hall, but no footsteps came in answer to our summons. “*Morbleu*, this is villainous” the little Frenchman muttered as an especially vicious puff of wind hurled a barrage of sleet into his face. “Are we to stand here till death puts an end to our sufferings? I will not have it!” He struck a resounding blow on the door with the knob of his walking-stick.

As though waiting only the slightest pressure, the unlatched door swung back beneath the impact of his cane, and we found ourselves staring down a long, high-ceiled hall. Under the flickering light of an old-fashioned, prism-fringed gas chandelier we glimpsed the riotous colors of the Oriental rugs with which the place was carpeted, caught a flash of king-blue, rose, and rust-red from the sumptuous prayer cloth suspended tapestrywise on the wall, but gave no second glance to the draperies, for at the far end of the passage was that which brought an excited “*A-a-ah!*” from de Grandin and a gasp of horror from me.

The place was a shambles. Hunched forward like a doll with a broken back, an undersized, dark-skinned man in white drill jacket, batik sarong and yellow turban squatted in a low, blackwood chair and stared endlessly before him into infinity with the glazed, half-pleading, half-expressionless eyes of the newly dead. A smear of red, wider than the palm of a man’s hand, and still slowly spreading, disfigured the left breast of his white jacket and told the reason for his death.

Half-way up the stairway which curved from the farther end of the hall another man, similarly attired, had fallen backward, apparently in the act of flight, and lay against the stair-treads like a worn-out tailor’s dummy carelessly tossed upon the carpet. His bare brown feet, oddly bent on flaccid

ankles, pointed upward; head and hands, lolling downward with an awful awkwardness, were toward us, and I went sick with horror at sight of the open, gasping mouth and set, staring eyes in the reversed face. Under his back-bent chin a terrific wound gaped in his throat like the butcher's mark upon a slaughtered sheep.

"*Grand Dieu!*" de Grandin murmured, surveying the tragic relics a moment: "they were thorough, those assassins."

Darting down the corridor he paused beside the corpses, letting his hand rest on each a moment, then turned away with a shrug. "Dead *comme un mouton*," he observed almost indifferently, "but not long so, my friend. They are still soft and warm. If we could but — *Dieu de Dieu* — another? Oh, villainous! monstrous! infamous!"

Stepping through an arched doorway we had entered a large room to the left of the hall. A carved blackwood divan stood at the apartment's farther end, and a peacock screen immediately behind it. A red-shaded lamp threw its softly diffused light over the place, mellowing, to some extent, the dreadful tableau spread before us. Full length among the gaudy, heaped-up pillows of the divan a woman reclined indolently, one bare, brown arm extended toward us, wrist bent, hand drooping, a long, thin cheroot of black tobacco held listlessly between her red-stained fingers. Small, she was, almost childishly so, her skin golden as sun-ripened fruit, her lips red as though stained with fresh pomegranate juice, and on the loose robe of sheer yellow muslin which was her only garment glowed a redder stain beneath the gentle swell of her left bosom. Death had been kinder to her than to the men, for her large, black-fringed eyes were closed as though in natural sleep, and her lips were softly parted as if she had gently sighed her life away. The illusion of slumber was heightened by the fact that on the henna-stained toes of one slender foot was balanced a red-velvet slipper heavily embroidered with silver thread while its mate had fallen to the floor, as though listlessly kicked off by its wearer.

Treading softly as though passing the sanctuary of a church, the little Frenchman approached the dead woman, felt her soft, rounded arm a moment, then pinched daintily at the cheroot between her dead fingers. "*Parbleu*, yes!" he nodded vigorously. "It was recent, most recent, Friend Trowbridge. The vile miscreants who did this deed of shame had but just gone when we arrived; for see, her flesh still glows with the warmth of life, and the memory of its fire still lingers in this cigar's tobacco. Not more than ten, nor eight, nor scarcely six minutes can have passed since these poor ones were done to death.

"*Eh bien*" — he bent his left hand palm upward, consulting the tiny watch strapped to the under side of his wrist, and turned toward the door with a faint, shrug —

"anyone can deplore these deaths; it is for Jules de Grandin to avenge them. Come, we must notify the gendarmes and the coroner, then—"

"What about Mademoiselle Mutina?" I asked maliciously. "You promised to wait here for her, you know."

He paused a moment, regarding me intently with his fixed, level stare. "*Précisément*," he assented grimly, "what about her? It remains to be seen. As for my promise — *Mordieu*, when I was a little lad I promised myself I should one day be President of the *République*, but when I grew to a man's estate I found too many important things to do." He swung back the front door, thrust his collar up about his ears with a savage jerk and strode across the low porch into the howling storm.

What warned me to look up I shall never know, for the natural course to have followed would have been that taken by de Grandin and bend my head against the wind; but a subtle something, something so tangible that it was almost physical, seemed to jerk my chin up from my greatcoat collar just in time. From the areaway beneath the porch steps, staring at the retreating Frenchman with a malignancy utterly bestial, was a pair of oblique, yellow-green eyes.

"Look out, de Grandin!" I shrieked, and even as I called I realized the warning was too late, for an arm shot upward, poisoning a dully gleaming weapon — a dagger of some sort, I thought — for a throw.

Scarcely conscious of my act, I acted. Throwing both feet forward, I slipped on the glassy sleet with which the stone steps were veneered, and catapulted down them like a trunk sweeping down a baggage-chute. My feet landed squarely against the Frenchman's legs, knocking him sprawling, and something whizzed past my ear with a deadly, whirring sound and struck against the flagstone path beyond with a brittle, crackling clash.

Fighting to regain my footing like a cat essaying the ascent of a slate gable, I scrambled helplessly on the sleet-glazed walk, saw de Grandin right himself with an oath and dive head-foremost toward the area where his assailant lurked.

For an instant everything was chaos. I saw de Grandin miss his step and lurch drunkenly over the icy footwalk; saw his brown-skinned assailant spring upon him like a panther on its prey; realized dimly that someone had charged across the narrow yard and sprung to my little friend's aid; then was knocked flat once more by a vicious kick which missed my face only a hair's breadth and almost dislocated my shoulder.

"Catch him, Friend Trowbridge — he flies!" de Grandin shouted, disengaging himself from his rescuer's arms and rushing futilely after his fleeing opponent. Sure-footed as a lynx, the fellow ran over the slippery pavement, crossed the roadway and bolted down the connecting street,

disappearing from sight as though swallowed up by the enveloping storm.

"*Merci beaucoup, Monsieur,*" de Grandin acknowledged as he turned to his deliverer, "I have not the honor of knowing your name, but my obligation is as great as your help was timely. If you will be so good as to — Trowbridge, my friend, catch him, he swoons!"

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," the Frenchman ordered, "do you improvise some sort of bandage while I seek conveyance; we must hear him to the house and staunch his wound, else he will bleed to death."

While de Grandin sought frantically for a taxicab I opened the stranger's clothes and wadded my handkerchief against the ugly knife-wound in his upper arm. Crude and makeshift as the device was, it stopped the flow of blood to some extent, and, while still unconscious, the man did not appear measurably worse off when we arrived at my office some twenty minutes later. While I cut away his shirt sleeve and adjusted a proper pad and bandage, de Grandin was busily telephoning our gruesome discoveries to police headquarters.

A stiff drink of brandy and water forced between his lips brought a semblance of color. back to the fainting man's cheeks. He turned his head slowly on the pillow of the examination table and muttered something unintelligible; then, with a start, he rose to a sitting posture and cried: "Mutina, dear love: it is I — Richard! Wait, Mutina, wait a mo—"

As if a curtain had been lifted from before his eyes he saw us and turned from one to the other with an expression of blank bewilderment. "Where — how—" he began dazedly; then: "Oh, I remember, that devil was assaulting you and I rushed in to—"

"To save a total stranger from a most unpleasant predicament, *Monsieur*, for which the stranger greatly thanks you," de Grandin supplied. "And now, if you are feeling somewhat better, will you not be good enough to take another drink — somewhat larger this time, if you please — of this so excellent brandy, then tell us why you call on Mademoiselle Mutina? It so happens that we, too, have much interest in that young lady."

"Who are you?" the youth demanded with sharp suspicion.

"I am Jules de Grandin, doctor of medicine and of the faculty of the Sorbonne, and sometime special agent of the *Sûreté Général*, and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, my very good friend and host," the Frenchman returned with a formal bow. "While saving my life from the miserable, execrable rogue who would have assassinated me, you received an ugly wound, and we brought you here to dress it. And now that social amenities are completed, perhaps

you will have the goodness to answer my question concerning Mademoiselle Mutina. Who, may I ask, is she, and what is it you know of her? Believe me, young sir, it is not from idle curiosity, but in the interest of justice, that we ask."

"She is my wife," the young man answered after a moment's thoughtful silence in which he seemed to weigh the advisability of speaking. "I am Richard Starkweather — perhaps you know my father, Dr. Trowbridge" — he turned to me — "he was president of the old Harrisonville Street Railway before the Public Service took it over."

I nodded. "Yes, I remember him," I replied, "He was two classes ahead of me at Amherst, but we met at alumni gatherings; and—"

"Never mind the reminiscences, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin interrupted, his logical French mind refusing to be swerved from the matter in hand. "You were about to tell us, *Monsieur*—" He paused significantly, glancing at our patient with raised, quizzical eyebrows.

"I married Mutina in Sabuah Sulu, then again in Manila, but—"

"*Parbleu* — you did marry her twice?" de Grandin demanded incredulously. "How comes it?"

Starkweather took a deep breath, like a man about to dive into a cold stream, then:

"I met Mutina in Sabuah Sulu," he began. "Possibly you gentlemen have read my book, *Malay Pirates as I Knew Them*, and wondered how I became so intimately acquainted with the engaging scoundrels. The fact is, it was all a matter of luck. The Dutch tramp steamer, *Wilhelmina*, on which I was going from Batavia to Manila, put in at Lubuah, and that's how it began. We all went ashore to see the place, which was only a cluster of Chinese *godowns*, a dozen or so European business places and a couple of hotels of sorts. We saw all we wanted of the dried-mud-and-sand town in a couple of hours, but as the ship wasn't pushing out until sometime in the early morning, several of us looked in on a *honky-tonk* which was in full blast at one of the saloons. I don't know what it was they gave me to drink, but it was surely powerful medicine — probably a mixture of crude white rum and *n'gapi* — whatever it was, it affected me as no Western liquor ever did, and I was dead to the world in three drinks. The next thing I remember was waking up the following morning, well after sun-up, to find myself with empty pockets and a dreadful headache, floating out of sight of land in a Chinese *sampan*. I haven't the faintest idea how I got there, though I suspect the other members of the party were too drunk to miss me when they put back for the ship, and the proprietor of the dive, seeing me sprawled out there, improved his opportunity to go through my pockets, then lugged me to the waterfront, dumped me into the first empty boat he found and let me shift for myself. Maybe he cut me

adrift; maybe the boat's painter came untied by accident. At any rate, there I was, washed out to sea by the ebbing tide, with no water, no food, and not the slightest idea where I was or how far away the nearest land lay.

"I had barely sense and strength left to set the *sampan's* matting sail before I fell half-conscious into the bottom again, still so sick and weak with liquor that I didn't care particularly whether I ever made land again.

"Just how long I lay there asleep — drugged would be a better term, for that Eastern liquor acts more like opium than alcohol — I haven't the slightest idea. Certainly it was all day; perhaps I slept clear around the clock. When I awoke, the stars were out and the boat was drifting side-on toward a rocky, jagged shore as if she were in a mill-flume.

"I jumped up and snatched the steering paddle, striving with might and main to bring her head around, but I might as well have tried paddling a canoe with a teaspoon. She drove straight for those rocks as if some invisible hand were guiding her to destruction; then, just as I thought I was gone, a big wave caught her squarely under the poop, lifted her over a saw-toothed reef and deposited her on a narrow, sandy shingle almost as gently as if she'd been beached by professional sailors.

"I climbed out as quickly as I could and staggered up the beach, but fell before I'd traversed a quarter-mile. The next thing I knew, it was daylight again and a couple of ugly-looking Malays were standing over me, talking in some outlandish tongue, apparently arguing whether to kill me then or wait a while. I suppose the only thing which saved me was the fact that they'd already been through my pockets and decided that as I had nothing but the tattered clothes I lay in, my live body was more valuable than my wardrobe. Anyhow, they prodded me to my feet with a spear butt and drove me along the beach for almost an hour.

"We finally came to a little horseshoe-shaped cleft in the shore, and just where the sandy shingle met the jungle of *lalang* grass was a village of half a hundred or so white huts clustering about a much larger house. One of my captors pointed toward the bigger building and said something about 'Kapal Besar,' which I assumed to be the name of the village headman.

"He was more than that. He was really a sort of petty sultan, and ruled his little principality with a rod of iron, notwithstanding he was nearly ninety years old and a hopeless paralytic.

"When we got into the village I saw the big house was a sort of combined palace and fortress, for it was surrounded by a high wall of sun-dried brick loopholed for cannon and musketry, and with three or four pieces of ancient ordnance sticking their brass muzzles through the apertures. The wall was topped with an abatis of sharpened bamboo stakes, and a man armed with a Civil War model musket and bayonet

stood guard at the gateway through which my finders drove me like a pig on its way to market.

"Inside the encircling wall was a space of smooth sand perhaps ten or twelve feet broad; then a wide, brick-floored piazza roofed over with beams of teak as thick as railway ties laid close together on equally heavy stringers, and from the porch opened any number of doorways into the house.

"My guards led, or drove, me through one of these and down a tiled corridor, while a half-naked boy who popped up out of the darkness like a jack-in-the-box from his case ran on ahead yelling. 'Kapal Besar — *hai, Kapal Tuan!*' at the top of his shrill, nasal voice.

"I was surprised at the size of the room to which I was taken. It was roughly oval in shape, quite fifty feet long by twenty-five or thirty at its greatest width, and paved with alternate black and red tiles. The roof, which rose like a sugar-loaf in the center, was supported on A-beams resting on columns of skinned palm tree boles, and to these were nailed brackets from which swung red-glass bowls filled with coconut-oil with a floating wick burning in each. The result was the place was fairly well illuminated, and I had a good view of the thin, aged man sitting in a chair of carved blackwood at the farther end of the chamber.

"He was a cadaverous old fellow, seemingly almost bloodless, with skin the color of old parchment stretched tight as a drumhead over his skull; thin, pale lips, and a long, straggling white beard sweeping over his tight green jacket. When he looked at me I saw his eyes were light hazel, almost gray, and piercing and direct as those of a hawk. His thin, high-bridged nose reminded me of a hawk's beak, too, and the bony, almost transparent hands which clutched and fingered the silver-mounted bamboo cane in his lap were like a hawk's talons.

"My two guards made profound *salaams*, but I contented myself with the barest nod civility required.

"The old chap looked appraisingly at me while my discoverers harangued him at great length; then, with an impatient motion of his cane, he waved them to silence and began addressing me in Malayan. I didn't know a dozen words of the language, and made signs to him that I couldn't understand, whereupon he switched to an odd slurring sort of Spanish which I was able to make out with some difficulty.

"Before he'd spoken five minutes I understood my status, and was none too delighted to learn I was regarded as a legitimate piece of sea-salvage — a slave, in plain language. If I had any special talent, I was informed, I'd better be trotting it out for display right off; for, lacking something to recommend me for service in the palace, I would be forthwith shipped off to the yam fields or the groves where the copra was prepared.

“I was at a loss just how to answer the old duffer when I happened to see a sort of guitar lying on the pavement near the door leading to one of the passages which radiated from the audience chamber like wheel-spokes from a hub. Snatching up the instrument, I tuned it quickly, and picking some sort of accompaniment on it, began to sing. I’ve a pretty fair baritone, and I put more into it that day than I ever did with the college glee club.

“*Juanita, Massa’s in de Cold, Cold Ground, Just a Baby’s Prayer at Twilight, and Over There* went big with the old man, but the song that seemed to touch his heart was *John Brown’s Body*, and I had to sing the thing from beginning to end at least a dozen times.

“The upshot of it was that I found myself permanently retained as court minstrel, had my torn white duds replaced by a gorgeous red jacket and yellow turban and a brilliantly striped *sarong*, and was assigned one of the best rooms in the palace — which isn’t saying much from the standpoint of modern conveniences.”

The young man paused a moment, and despite his evident distress a boyish grin spread over his lean, brown countenance. “My big chance came when I’d been there about two months,” he continued.

“I prepped at St. John’s, and put in a full hitch with the infantry during the war, so the I.D.R. and the manuals of guard duty were as familiar to me as the Scriptures are to a circuit-riding preacher. One day when the disorganized mob old Kapal called his army were slouching through their idea of a guard mount, I snatched his musket from the fellow who acted as top sergeant and showed ’em how to do the thing in proper style. The captain of the guard was sore as a pup, but old Kapal was sitting in the piazza watching the drill, and made ’em take orders from me. In half an hour I had them presenting, porting, ordering and shouldering arms in pretty fair shape, and in two weeks they could do the whole manual, go right by squads and come on right into line as snappily as any outfit you ever saw.

“That settled it. I was made captain-general of the army, wore two swords and a brace of old-fashioned brass-mounted powder and ball revolvers in my waist shawl, and was officially known as Rick-kard Tuan. I taught the soldiers to salute, and the civil population took up the custom. In six months’ time I couldn’t go for a five-minute stroll without gathering more salutes to the yard than a newly commissioned shavetail in the National Army.

“I’d managed to pick up a working knowledge of the language, and was seeing the people at first-hand, living their lives and almost thinking their thoughts — that’s where I got the material for my book. That’s how I got Mutina, too.

“One morning after drill Kapal Besar called me into the audience chamber and waved me to a seat. I was the only

person on the island privileged to sit in his presence, by the way.

“‘My son,’ he said, ‘I have been thinking much of your future, of late. In you I have found a very pearl among men, and it is my wish that you rear strong sons to take your place in the years to come. Mine, too, mayhap, for I have no men-children to rule after me and there is none I would rather have govern in my stead when it shall have pleased Allah (praised be His glorious name!) to call me hence to Paradise. Therefore, you shall have the choice of my women forthwith.’ He clapped his thin old hands in signal as he spoke, and a file of tittering, giggling girls sidled through one of the doors and ranged themselves along the wall.

“Like all Oriental despots, Kapal Besar maintained the *droit du seigneur* rigidly — every woman who pleased him was taken into his seraglio, though the old chap, being close to ninety, and paralyzed from the waist down for nearly twenty years, could be nothing more than nominal husband to them, of course.

“Marriage is simple in Malaya, and divorce simpler. ‘Thou art divorced,’ is all the husband need say to free himself from an unwanted wife, and the whole thing is finished without courts, lawyers or fees.

“I passed down the line of simpering females, wondering how I was going to sidestep this latest honor royalty had thrust upon me, when I came to Mutina. Mutina signifies ‘the Pearl’ in Malayan, and this girl hadn’t been misnamed. Believe me or not, gentlemen, it was a case of love at first sight, as far as I was concerned.

“She was small, even for a Malay girl — not more than four feet ten, or five feet tall at the most — with smooth, glossy black hair and the tiniest feet and hands I’ve ever seen. Though she had gone unshod the greater part of her life her feet were slender and high-arched as those of a duchess of the Bourbon court, with long, straight toes and delicate, filbert-shaped nails; and her hands, though used to the heavy work all native women, royal or not, performed, were fine and tapering, and *clean*. She was light-skinned, too, really fairer than I, for her flesh was the color of ivory, while I was deeply sun-burned; and, what attracted me to her more than anything else, I think, her lips and teeth were unstained by betel-nut and there was no smudge or snuff about her nostrils. As she stood there in her prim, modest Malay costume, her eyes modestly cast down and a faint blush staining her face, she was simply ravishing. I felt my heart miss a beat as I paused before her.

“There was a sort of scandalized buzz-buzz of conversation among the women when I turned to Kapal to announce my choice, and the old fellow himself looked surprised for a moment. I thought he was going to renege on his offer, but it developed he thought I’d made an unworthy decision. I’d noticed without thinking of it that the other women kept

apart from Mutina, and old Kapal explained the reason in a few terse words. She was, it seemed, *anak gampang*; that is, no one knew who her father was, and such a condition is even more of a social handicap in Malaya than with us. Further, she was suspected of black magical practices, and Kapal went so far as to intimate she had secured the honor of admission to the *zenana* by the use of *guna-guna*, or love potions. Of course, if I wanted her after all he'd said, why, the misfortune was mine — but I was not to complain I hadn't been fairly warned.

"I told him I wanted her if she'd have me, at which he let out a shrill cackle of a laugh, called her to the foot of his throne and spoke so quickly for a minute or so that I couldn't follow him, then waved us all away, saying he wanted to take his siesta."

"I marched from the audience chamber to my quarters feeling pretty well satisfied. It really had been a case of love at first sight as far as I was concerned, and I'd made up my mind to pay real courtship to the lovely girl and try to induce her to marry me, for I was determined that, Kapal Besar or no Kapal Besar, I'd not have her as a gift from anyone but herself.

"As I entered my quarters and turned to lay my swords on the couch, I was startled to see a form dart across the threshold and drop crouching to the floor before me.

"It was Mutina. Her little, soft feet had followed me noiselessly down the corridor, and she must have been at my heels when I entered the room.

"*'Kakasih,'* she said as she knelt before me and drew aside her veil, revealing her blushing face, *'laki kakasih amba anghu memuji* — husband, beloved, I adore thee.'

"Gentlemen, did you ever take a drink of rich old sherry and feel its warming glow creep through every vein and nerve in your body? That was the way I felt when I realized what had happened. The rigmarole old Kapal reeled off in the throne-room was a combined divorce-and-marriage ceremony. Mutina was my wife, and — my heart raced like a coasting motor car's engine — with her own soft lips she had declared her love.

"Three weeks later they found Kapal Besar dead in his great carved chair, and fear that I would seize the government almost precipitated a riot, but when I told 'em I wouldn't have the throne as a gift and wanted nothing but a *prau* and crew to take Mutina and me to the Philippines, they darn near forced the crown on me in gratitude.

"Two members of the guard, Hussein and Batjan, with Jobita, Hussein's young wife, asked permission to accompany us, so there was a party of five which set out in the *prau* amid the cheers of the army and the booming of the one of Kapal's brass cannon which could be fired."

Young Starkweather paused in his narrative again, and a

sort of puzzled, questioning expression spread over his face. "The day before we left," he went on, "I came into the quarters to get some stuff for the ship and found Mutina backed into a corner, fending off with both hands the ugliest-looking customer I'd ever seen. He was a thin, cadaverous fellow, with slanting, yellow eyes and a face like a walking corpse. I saw in a moment Mutina was deathly afraid of him, and yelled, *'Hei badih iang chelaka!'* which may be freely translated as 'Get to hell out of here, you son of an ill-favored dog!'

"Instead of slinking away as any other native would have done if addressed that way by Rick-kard Tuan, the man just stood there and grinned unpleasantly, if you could call his ugly grimace a grin.

"Sabuah Sulu is a rough place, gentlemen, and rough methods are the rule there. I snatched one of the sabers from my cummerbund and cut at him. The fellow must have been extraordinarily agile; for though I don't see how it happened, I missed him completely, though I'd have sworn my blade cut into his neck. That couldn't have been so, though, for there was no resistance to the steel, and there the man stood, unharmed, after a slash which should have lopped the head clean off his shoulders.

"Mutina seemed more concerned about my safety than the circumstances seemed to warrant, for the intruder was unarmed, while I wore two swords and a pair of pistols, and after he'd slunk away with a final menacing look she threw herself into my arms and wept as if her heart would break. I comforted her as best I could, then ran out to ask the guard who the mysterious man was, but the sentry swore by the teeth and beard of Allah that he had seen no stranger enter or leave the compound that day."

"U'm — a-a-ah?" murmured Jules de Grandin, twisting furiously at the ends of his little golden mustache. "Say on, my friend, this is of the most decided interest."

"We got to Manila without much trouble," Starkweather continued as he shot a wondering look at the little Frenchman. "We passed through the Sulu Sea, landed on southern Luzon and completed the trip overland. We were married with Christian ceremonies by an army chaplain at Manila, and I cabled home for money, then arranged passage for our entire party.

"Coming back to the hotel after making some last minute sailing arrangements, I thought I noticed the shifty-eyed johnny who annoyed Mutina the day before we left Sabuah Sulu sneaking down the street, and it seemed to me he looked at me with a malicious grin as he ducked around the corner. It couldn't have been the same man, of course, but the resemblance was striking, and so was the coincidence.

"I felt a sort of premonition of evil as I rushed up to our suite, and I was in a perfect frenzy of apprehension when I opened the door and found the rooms empty. Mutina was

gone. So were Hussein, Batjan and Jobita. There was no clue to their whereabouts, nothing to tell why or where they'd gone; nothing at all but — this."

From an inside pocket he drew a leather case and extracted a folded sheet of note-paper from it. He passed it to de Grandin, who perused it quickly, nodded once, and handed it to me. A single line of odd, unintelligible characters scrawled across the sheet, but I could make nothing of them till Starkweather translated.

"It's Malayan," he explained. "The same words she first spoke to me: '*Laki kakasih amba anghau memuji* — husband, beloved, I adore thee.'

"I was like a crazy man for the next two months. The police did everything possible to find Mutina, and I hired a small army of private detectives, but we never got one trace of any of the three.

"Finally I came home, tried to reconstruct my life as best I could, and wrote my book on the pirates as I had known them.

"Just tonight I learned that Mutina, accompanied by Hussein and Jobita and Batjan, is living in Harrisonville, and that she's an entertainer at La Pantoufle Dorée. I got her address in Algonquin Avenue from one of the club attendants and rushed out there as fast as I could. Just as I entered the yard I saw you scuffling with someone and — believe it or not — I'm sure the man who assaulted you was the one I saw in Sabuah Sulu and later in Manila. I'd recognize those devilish eyes of his anywhere on earth.

"It was good of you gentlemen to bring me here and patch me up instead of sending me to the hospital," he concluded, "but I'm feeling pretty fit again, now, and I must be off. Men, you don't realize, Mutina's in that house, and that slant-eyed devil's hanging around. I've got to go to her right away. I must see Mutina!"

"Then ye'll be after goin' to th' jail, an' nowheres else, I'm thinkin, me boy," a heavy Irish voice announced truculently from the consulting-room door, and Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello strode across the threshold.

3

"Mutina — in jail?" the young man faltered unbelievably.

"Sure, good an' tight, an' where else should she be?" returned the detective with a nod to de Grandin and me. "'Tis sorry I am ter come sneakin' in on yez like this, gentlemen," he apologized, "but th' office sent me up to Algonquin Avenue hotfoot when yer message wuz received, an' after I'd made me arrest I thought I'd best be comin' here ter talk matters over wid yez. Th' bell didn't seem to ring when I pushed th' button, an' it's a cruel cold night

outside, so I let meself in, seein' as how yer light waz goin, an' I knew ye'd be up an' ready ter talk."

"Assuredly," de Grandin assented with a nod. "But how comes it that you put Mademoiselle — Madame Mutina under arrest, my friend?"

"Why" — the big Irishman looked wonderingly at the little Frenchman — "what else wuz there ter do, Dr. de Grandin, sor? 'Twas yerself as saw what a howly slaughterhouse they'd made o' her place, an' dead men — an' women — don't die widout help. So, when the young woman comes rushin' up ter th' place in a taxi all out o' breath, as ye might say, hot as fire ter be after gittin inside ter meet someone, why, sez I to meself, 'Ah-ho, me gur-rl, 'tis yerself, an' no one else, as knows sumpin more about these shenanigans than meets th' naked eye, else ye wouldn't be so anxious ter meet someone — wid never a livin' soul save th' pore dead creatures inside th' house ter meet at all, at all.'

"She started some cock-and-bull story about havin' a date wid a gent whose name she didn't know at the house — some foreign man, he were, she said. I'll be bettin' me Sunday boots he wuz a foreigner, too — 'twas no Christian American who did those bloody murders, an' ye can be sure o' that, too, savin' yer presence, Dr. de Grandin, sor."

The little Frenchman stroked his tiny wheaten mustache caressingly. "I agree with you, *mon cher*," he assented, "but the young lady's story was not entirely of the gentleman chicken and cow, for it was I whom she was to meet at her house. It was for the purpose of meeting her that Friend Trowbridge and I went there, and found what we discovered. Sergeant Costello, am I a fool?"

"Howly Mither, no!" denied the Irishman. "If they wuz more fools like you in th' wor-rld, Dr. de Grandin, sor, we'd be after havin' fewer funny houses ter keep th' nitwits in, I'm thinkin'."

"Precisely." de Grandin assented. "But I tell you, *mon brave*, Madame Mutina not only did not commit those killings; she suspected nothing of them. Consider: Is it likely she would have made an assignation with Friend Trowbridge and me had she thought we would find evidences of murder there?"

Costello shook his head.

"*Très bon*. Again: It was twenty-one minutes past eleven when Friend Trowbridge and I left her at La Pontoufle Dorée; it was not later than half-past when we arrived at her house, and the poor ones had not been long dead when we got there — their flesh was warm and there was still heat in the murdered woman's cigar; but they had been dead from ten to fifteen minutes, though not much longer. Nevertheless, if we were with Madame Mutina nine minutes before, she could not have been present at the killing."

"But she might 'a' known sumpin about it," the Irishman

persisted.

“I doubt it much. At the night club both Friend Trowbridge and I saw several most unbeautiful men who frightened her greatly. It was at sight of them she entrusted some object to me and begged I go to her home with all speed, there to await her coming. As we drove through the storm on our errand another car passed us with great swiftness. Whether the four unlovely ones rode in it or not, I can not say, but I believe they did. In any event, as we left the house after viewing the murdered bodies, a man closely resembling one of them attacked me from behind, and had it not been for good, brave Friend Trowbridge and this so excellent young man here, Jules de Grandin would now be happy in heaven — I hope.

“As it is” — he seized the pointed tips of his mustache in a sudden fierce grip and twisted them till I thought he would tear the hairs loose — “as it is, I still live, and there is earthly work to do. Come, let us go, let us hasten, let us repair immediately to the jail where I may interview the unfortunate, beautiful Madame Mutina.

“No, my friend,” he denied as Starkweather would have risen to accompany us, “it is better that you remain away for a time. Me, I shall undertake that no harm comes to your lady, but for the purposes I have in mind I think it best she sees you not for a time. Be assured, I shall give you leave to greet her at the earliest possible moment.”

His chin thrust moodily into the upturned *collar* of his greatcoat, the little Frenchman sat beside me in silence as I drove him and Costello toward police headquarters. As we rounded a corner, driving cautiously to avoid skidding over the sleety pavement, he seemed suddenly to arrive at a decision. “Through Tunlaw Street, if you please, good friend,” he ordered. “I would stop at the excellent Bacigalupo’s for a little minute.”

“At Bacigalupo’s?” I echoed in amazement. “Why, Mike has been in bed for hours!”

“Then he must arise,” was the uncompromising reply. “I would do the business with him.”

No light burned in the windows of the tiny flat where Mike Bacigalupo lived above his prosperous fruit stand, but repeated rings at the bell and poundings on the door finally brought a sleepy and none too amiable Italian head from one of the darkened openings, like an irate tortoise peeping from its shell.

“*Holà*, my friend,” de Grandin hailed, “we are come to buy limes. Have the goodness to put ten or a dozen in a bag for us at once.”

“*Limas?*” demanded the Italian in a shocked voice. “You wanta da *lima* at half-pas’ fourteen o’clock? You come to hell — I not come down to sell *limas* to Benito Mussolini deesa time o’ night. *Sapr-r-risti!* You mus’ t’inka me craze.”

For answer de Grandin broke into a flood of rapid, voluble Italian. What he said I do not know, but five minutes later the fruit merchant, shivering with cold inside the folds of a red-flannel bathrobe, appeared at the door and handed him a small paper parcel. More, as we turned away he waved his hand and called, “*Arrivederci, amico mio.*”

I was burning with curiosity as we drove toward headquarters, but long experience with the eccentric little Frenchman had taught me better than to attempt to force his confidence.

It was a frightened and pathetic little figure the police matron ushered into the headquarters room a few minutes later. “*M’sieu’*,” she exclaimed piteously at sight of de Grandin, running forward and holding out both slender ivory hands to him, “you have come to save me from this place?”

“More than that, *ma petit chère*; I have come to save you from those who persecute you, if it please heaven,” he replied soberly. “You know not why you are arrested, do you?”

“N-no,” she faltered. “I came from the club as quickly as I could, but this man and others seized me as I alighted from my taxi. They would not let me enter my own house or see my faithful friends. Oh, *M’sieu’*, make them let me see Hussein and Batjan and Jobita, please.”

“*Ma pauvre*,” de Grandin replied, resting his hands gently on her shoulders, “you can not see them ever again. Those of whom we wot — they arrived first.”

“D-dead?” the girl stammered half comprehendingly.

He nodded silently as he led her to a seat. Then: “We must see that others do not travel the same path,” he added. “You, yourself, may be their next target. You are guilty of no crime, but perhaps it would be safer were you to remain here until—”

As he spoke, never taking his eyes from hers, he rummaged about in his overcoat pocket and suddenly snatched his hand out, crushing one of the limes we had obtained from Bacigalupo between his long, deceptively slender fingers. The pale-gold rind broke beneath his pressure, and a stream of amber juice spurted through the rent, spattering on the girl’s bare arm.

“O-o-o-oh — *ai, ai!*” she screamed as the acid liquid touched her flesh, then writhed away from him as though the lime juice had been burning oil.

“*A-hee!*” she gave the shrill, piercing mourning cry of the East as her eyes fastened on the glistening spots of moisture on her forearm, and their round pupils suddenly drew in and shrank to slits like those of a cat coming suddenly out of a darkened room into the light.

“*Bien — très bon!*” de Grandin exclaimed, snatching a silk handkerchief from his cuff and drying her arm. “I am sorry, truly sorry, my poor one; believe me, sooner would

Jules de Grandin suffer torture than cause you pain, but it was necessary that I do it. See, it is all well, now.”

But it was not all well. Where the gushing lime juice had struck her tender flesh there was a cluster of ugly, red weals on the girl’s arm as though her white, soft skin were scalded.

4

For a moment they faced each other in silence, the alert, blond Frenchman and the magnolia-white Eastern girl, and mutual understanding shone in their eyes.

“How — how did you know?” she faltered.

“I did not know, my little one,” de Grandin confessed in a low voice, “but what I learned tonight caused me to suspect. *Hélas*, I was only too right in my surmise!”

He gazed thoughtfully at the prison floor, his narrow chin tightly gripped between his thumb and forefinger, then:

“Are you greatly attached to the Prophet, my child?” he asked. “Would you consent to Christian baptism?”

She looked at him in bewilderment as she replied: “Of course; is not the man of my heart of the Nazarenes? If it so be they go endlessly to be companions of hell-fire, as the Prophet (on whom be peace!) declares in the book of Imran’s family, then let Mutina’s face be blackened too at the last great day, and let her go to everlasting torment with the man she loves. I ask nothing better in the hereafter than to share his torture, if torture be his portion; but in this life it is written that I must keep far away, else I bring on him the vengeance of—”

“Enough!” de Grandin interrupted almost sternly. “Sergeant, we must release Madame Mutina instantly. Come, I am impatient to take her hence. Trowbridge, my friend, do you engage a clergyman at once and have him at the house without delay. It is of importance that we act with speed.”

Mutina had been booked for detention only as a material witness, and it was not difficult for Costello to procure her release. In five minutes they had left for my house in a taxicab while I drove toward Saint Luke’s rectory, intent on dragging the Reverend Leon Barley from his bed.

With the clergyman in tow I entered the study an hour later, finding de Grandin, Mutina and Costello talking earnestly, but Starkweather nowhere in sight. “Why, where is—” I began, but the Frenchman’s uplifted finger cut my question off half uttered.

“It is better that we name no names at present, Friend Trowbridge,” he warned, then to Dr. Barley:

“This young lady has the desire for baptism, *mon père*; you will officiate forthwith? Dr. Trowbridge and I will stand sponsors.”

“Why, it’s a little unusual,” the pastor began, but de Grandin interrupted with a vigorous nod of his head. “*Parbleu*, it is more unusual than you can suppose,” he agreed. “It is with the unusual we have to deal tonight my friend, and the ungodly, as well. Come, do us your office and do it quickly, for be assured we have not dragged you from the comfort of your bed for nothing this night.”

The Reverend Leon Barley, pious man of God and knowing man of the world, was not the sort of carping stickler for the purity of ecclesiastical rules who casts discredit on the clergy. Though uninformed concerning the ceremony, he realized haste was necessary, and adjusted his stole with the deft quickness learned from service with the A.E.F., and before that in the Philippine insurrection.

Swiftly the beautiful, dignified service proceeded:

“Wilt thou then obediently keep God’s holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of thy life?” asked Dr. Barley.

“I will, by God’s help,” murmured Mutina softly.

“Mutina” — Dr. Barley’s hand dipped into the Minton salad bowl of water standing on the table and sprinkled a few drops on the girl’s bowed head — “I baptize thee in the name of the—”

The solemn pronouncement was drowned in a terrible, blood-chilling scream, for as the sacramental water touched her head Mutina fell forward to the floor and lay there writhing as though in mortal agony.

“Gawd A’mighty!” cried Costello hoarsely. “’Tis th! divil’s wor-rk, fer sure!”

“*Sang de Dieu!*” cried Jules de Grandin, bending above the prostrate girl. “Look, Friend Trowbridge, for the love of good God, look!”

Face downward, clawing at the rugs and seemingly convulsed in unsupportable torture, lay Mutina, and the gleaming black hair sleekly parted on her small head *was turning snowy white before our eyes!*

“Great heavens, what is it?” asked the minister unsteadily.

The girl’s hysterical movements ceased as de Grandin held a glass of aromatic ammonia and water to her lips, and she whimpered softly as her head rolled weakly in the crook of his elbow.

For a moment he regarded her solicitously; then, as he helped her to a chair, he turned to the clergyman. “It would seem the devil makes much ado about being cheated of a victim,” he remarked almost casually. “This poor one was the inheritor of a curse with which she had no more to do than the unborn child with the color of his father’s hair. *Eh bien*, I have that upstairs which will do more to revive her body and spirit than all the *eau bénite* in all the world’s fonts.”

Tiptoeing to the stairs he called: “Richard — Richard, my friend, come down forthwith and see what we have

brought!”

There was a pounding of feet on the steps, a glad, wondering cry from the study door, and Richard Starkweather and Mutina, his wife, were locked in each other’s arms.

“Come away quickly, my friends,” de Grandin ordered in a sharp whisper as he motioned us from the room. “It is a profanation for our eyes to look on their reunion. Anon we must interrupt them, for there is much to be said and much more to be done, but this moment is theirs, and theirs alone.”

5

Five of us gathered in my drawing-room after dinner the following evening. Sergeant Costello, mellowed with the effects of an excellent meal, several glasses of fifteen-year-old *liqueur Chartreuse* and the fragrant fumes of an Hoyo de Monterey, lolled in the wing chair to the right of the crackling log fire. Richard and Mutina Starkweather, fingers entwined, occupied the lounge before the fireplace, while I sat opposite Costello. In the center, back to the blaze, small blue eyes flashing and dancing with excitement, tiny waxed mustache quivering like the whiskers of an irritable tom-cat, Jules de Grandin stood with his feet well apart, eyeing us in rapid succession. “Observe, my friends,” he commanded, thrusting his hand into the inside pocket of his dinner coat and fishing out a newspaper stone proof some four inches by eight inches in size; “is it not the grand surprise I have prepared for our evil-eyed friends?”

With a grandiloquent bow he handed me the paper, bidding me read it aloud. In boldface type the notice announced:

CHEZ LA PONTOUFLE DORÉE
ENGAGEMENT EXTRAORDINARY!
The Sensation of the Year!
La Belle Mutina, former High Priestess of
The Rakshasas
Will Positively Appear at this Club
During the Supper Hour
Tomorrow Night!
La Mutina, Far-famed Malayan Beauty,
Will Perform the Notorious
DANCE OF THE INDONG MUTINA
Disclosing for the First Time
in the Western Hemisphere
The Devilish Rites of the Rakshasas
(Reservations for this extraordinary attraction
will positively not be received
by mail or telephone.)

I glanced at Mutina, sitting demurely beside her husband, then at the exuberant little Frenchman. “All right, what does it mean?” I asked.

“Ah, my friends, what does it not mean?” he replied with

a wave of his hand. “Attend me — carefully, if you please:

“Last night at the club, when the good *Madame* took pity on us and lightened our darkness with the lovely presence of Madame Mutina, I was enchanted. When Madame Mutina invited our attention to the pussy-faced evil ones seated at the corner table I was enraged. When we proceeded to Madame Mutina’s house and beheld the new-dead stretched so quietly and pitifully there, the spilled blood crying aloud to heaven — and me — for vengeance, *parbleu*, I was greatly interested.

“My friends, the little feet of Jules de Grandin have covered much territory. Where the eternal snow of the northland fly forever before the ceaseless gales, I have been there. Where the sun burns and burns like the fire of the fundamentalists’ hell, there have I been. Nowhere, no land, is a stranger to me. And on my many travels I have kept my mind, my eyes and my ears widely open. Ah, I have heard the muted mumblings of the dwellers round Sierra Leone, while the frightened blacks crouch in their cabins and scarce breathe the name of the human leopards for fear of dreadful vengeance. In Haiti I have beheld the unclean rites of *voudois* and witnessed the power of *papaloi* and *mamaloi*. The djinns and efreets of Araby, the *dracus*, werewolves and vampires of Hungary, Russia and Rumania, the *bhuts* of India — I know them all. Also I have been in the Malay Archipelago, and know the *rakshasas*. Certainly.

“Consider, my friends: There is no wonder-tale which affrights mankind after the lights are lit which has not its foundation in present or past fact. The legends of the loves of Zeus with mortal women, his liaisons with Danaë, Io and Europa, they are but ancestral memories of the bad old days when wicked immortals — *incubi*, if you please — worked their evil will on humanity. In the Middle Ages, when faith burned more brightly than at present, men saw more clearly. Recall the story of *Robert le Diable*, scion of Bertha, a human woman, and Bertramo, a foul fiend disguised as a worthy knight. Remember how this misfortunate Robert was the battleground of his mother’s gentle nature and his sire’s fiendishness; then consider our poor Madame Mutina.

“In Malaya there exists a race of beings since the beginning of the ages, known variously as the people of Antu or Rakshasa. They are inferior fiends, possessing not much of potent magic, for they are heavily admixed with human half-breeds; but at their weakest they are terrible enough. They can in certain instances make themselves invisible, though only to some people. When visible, the Malays say they can be recognized because of their evil eyes, which are yellow-green and sharp as razors. It was such eyes I saw in the villainous faces of the ugly ones who frightened Madame Mutina at the club last night. Even so, I did not connect them with the wicked breed of Rakshasas until we had listened to young Starkweather’s story. When

he told us of the evil-eyed creatures who persecuted his so lovely wife, and how the sentry at the palace gate declared he had seen no stranger leave, though the scoundrel had fled but a moment before, I remembered how Aristide, the waiter, assured us no one sat at the table where we saw the unlovely four with our own eyes even as he spoke.

“Also, had not the young *Monsieur* told us his lovely lady was *anak gampang* — without known father? But of course. What more reasonable then to suppose her mother had been imposed on by a fiend, even as Bertha of the legend married the foul incubus and was then left without husband at the birth of her daughter? Such things have been.

“Nature, as your American slang has it, is truly grand. She is exceedingly grand, my friends. For every plague with which mankind is visited, good, kind nature provides a remedy, can we but find it. The vampire can not cross running water, and is affrighted of wild garlic blooms. The holy leaves of the holly tree and the young shoots of the ash are terrible to the werewolf. So with the Rakshasa. The fruit and blossom of the lime is to him as molten lead is to us. If he makes an unclean feast of human flesh — of which he is most fond — and disguises it as curried chicken or rice, a drop of lime juice sprinkled on it unmasks it for what it is. A smear of the same juice on his flesh causes him intense anguish, and, while ordinary weapons avail not at all against him — remember how Friend Richard struck one with his saber, yet harmed him not? — a sword or bullet dipped in lime juice kills him to death. Yes.

“Last night, as I thought of these things, I determine on an experiment. *Tiens*, though it worked perfectly, I could have struck myself for that I caused pain to Madame Mutina when I spilled the lime juice on her.

“Now, here we are: Madame Mutina, beautiful as the moon as she lies on the breast of the sea, was part human, part demon. In Mohammed’s false religion they have no cure for such as she. ‘What to do?’ I ask me.

“‘Baptize her with water and the spirit,’ I answer. ‘So doing we shall save her soul alive and separate that which is diabolic from that which is good in her so lovely body.’

“You all beheld what happened when the holy water of sacrament fell upon her head last night. But, *grâce à Dieu*, we have won thus far. She are now all woman. The demon in her departed when her lovely hair turned white.

“Ah, but there was more to the mystery than this. ‘Why were those three poor ones done to death? Why did she leave her husband almost at the threshold of the *lune de miel* — how do you say it? — honeymoon?’ Those questions I also ask me. There is but one sure way to find out. This morning I talk seriously with her.

“It are needless for me to say she is beautiful — we are men, we have all the excellent eyesight in our eyes. But it is necessary that I report that the he-creatures of the Rakshasas

had also found her exceedingly fair. When it was reported that she would be truly married to Friend Richard, not to be a wife in name only to a paralyzed old dodo of a sultan, they were furious. They sent an ambassador to her to say, ‘You shall not wed this man.’

“Greatly did she fear these devil-people, but greater than her fear was her love for the gallant gentleman who would take her to wife in the face of all the palace scandal.

“Now, sacred to these unclean Rakshasas is the coconut pearl, the pearl which is truly mother-of-pearl because it contains within an outer shell of lovely nacre an inner core of true pearl, as the coconut shell encloses the white meat. One of these — and they are very rare — our dear Madame Mutina stole from the Rakshasa temple to hold as hostage for the safety of her beloved. That is what she entrusted to me last night when she beheld the evil-eyed ones at the club.

“But though she held the talisman, she still feared the devil-people exceedingly, and when one of them followed her to Manila and threatened death to her beloved if she consorted with him, though it crushed her heart to do so, she fled from her husband, and hid herself securely.

“A woman’s love plumbs any depths, however, my friends. Just to be near her wedded lord brought ease to her mangled bosom, and so she followed him to America, and because she dances like a snowflake sporting with the wind and a moonbeam flitting on flowing water, she had no trouble in securing employment at La Pantoufle Dorée.

“The Rakshasas have also traveled overseas. Seeking their sacred token they traced Madame Mutina, and would, perchance, have slain her, even as they murdered her companions, had she not trusted us with the pearl and bidden us bear it away to her house. Knowing where she lived, suspecting, perhaps, that she hid the precious pearl there, the evil ones reached the house before us, slew her friends, and waited for us, but we — Friend Trowbridge and I — put one of them, at least, to flight, while the arrival of Sergeant Costello and his arrest of Madame Mutina prevented their working their will on her. Meantime, I hold the much-sought pearl.”

From his jacket pocket he took an object about the size and shape of a hen’s egg, a beautiful, opalescent thing which gave off myriad coruscating beams in the rays of the firelight.

“But where do the evil-eyed sons of Satan and his imps hide themselves? Can we find them?” he asked. “Perhaps yes; perhaps no. In any event, it will take much time, and we wish for speed. Therefore we shall resort to a *ruse de guerre*. This morning, after I talked with Madame Mutina I did rush to the office of *le Journal* with a celerity beautiful to behold, and, with the consent of the proprietor of La Pantoufle Dorée, who is an excellent fellow and sells most capital liquor, I inserted the advertisement which Friend

Trowbridge has just read.

“*Eh bien*, but the devil-people will surely flock to that cabaret in force tomorrow night. Will they not place reliance in their devilish ability to defy ordinary weapons and attempt to seize the pearl from Madame Mutina as she dances? I shall say they will. But” — he twisted the ends of his mustache savagely — “but they reckon without an unknown host, my friends. You, *cher sergent*, will be there. You, Friend Richard, and you, also, Friend Trowbridge, will be there. As for Jules de Grandin, by the horns, blood and tail of the Devil, he will be there with both feet!

“Ha, *Messieurs les Diables*, tomorrow night we shall show you such a party as you wot not of. Your black blood, which has defied the weapons of men for generations untold, shall flow like springtime freshets when the mounting sun unlocks the icy fetters from the streams!

“And those we do not spoil entirely in the taking, you shall have the pleasure of seating in the electric chair, *mon sergent*,” he concluded with a bow to Costello.

6

Every table at La Pontoufle Dorée was engaged for the supper show the following night. Here and there the bald head or closely-shaven face of some regular patron caught the soft lights from the central chandelier, but the vast majority of the tables were occupied by small, dark, sinister-looking foreigners, men with oblique eyes and an air of furtive evil which their stylishly cut dinner clothes and sleekly anointed hair could not disguise. Strategically placed, near every exit, were members of Sergeant Costello’s strong-arm squad, looking decidedly uncomfortable in their hired dinner clothes and consuming vast quantities of the free menu provided by Starkweather’s liberal arrangements with the management with an air of elaborate unconcern. Four patrolmen in plain clothes lounged near the checkroom counter, eyeing each incoming guest with shrewd, appraising glances.

Near the dancing-floor, facing each other across a small table, sat de Grandin and Starkweather, while Costello and I made ourselves as inconspicuous as possible in our places near the swinging doors which screened the main entrance to the club.

Not many couples whirled and glided on the dancing floor, for the preponderance of men among the patrons was noticeable, and the usual air of well-bred hilarity which characterized the place was almost entirely lacking.

It was almost half-past eleven when de Grandin gave the signal.

“Now, customers,” announced the hostess, advancing to the center of the floor, “we’re in for a real treat. You all

know Ma’mselle Mutina; she’s danced here before, but she never did anything like she’s going to show tonight. This is ab-so-lutely the cat’s meow, and I don’t mean perhaps, either. All set, boys and girls? Come on, then, give the little lady a big hand!”

Two attendants ran forward, spreading a rich Turkish carpet over the smoothly waxed boards of the dancing-floor, and as they retreated every light in the place winked out, leaving the great room in sudden absolute darkness. Then, like a thrusting sword-blade, a shaft of amethyst light stabbed through the gloom, centering on the purple velvet curtains beside the orchestra stand. No sound came from the musicians, and the place was so still I could hear Costello’s heavy breathing where he sat three feet away, and the faint flutter of a menu-card sounded like the scutter of a wind-blown leaf in a quiet forest clearing.

Gazing fascinated at the curtains, I saw them move ever so slightly, flutter a moment, then draw back. Mutina stood revealed.

One little hand on each curtain, she stood like a lovely picture in a frame, a priceless jewel against a background of opulent purple velvet.

Over her head, covering her snowy hair, was drawn a dark-blue veil, silver-fringed and studded with silver stars, and bound about her brows was a chaplet of gold coin which held the magically glowing, opalescent *indong mutina* against her forehead like the sacred asp on an Egyptian monarch’s crown. Her lovely shoulders and bosom were encased in a tight-fitting sleeveless zouave jacket of gold-embroidered cerise satin fringed with gilt hawk-bells. From hips to ankles hung a full, many-plaited skirt of sheerest white muslin which revealed the slim lines of her tapering legs with distracting frankness. About her wrists and ankles were garlands of cunningly fashioned metallic flowers, enameled in natural colors, which clashed their petals together like tiny cymbals, setting up a sweet, musical jingle-jangle each time she moved.

For a moment she poised on slim, henna-stained toes, bending her little head with its jewel of glowing pearl as if in response to an ovation; then, raising her arms full length, she laced her long, supple fingers above her head, pirouetted half-a-dozen times till the flower-bells on her ankles seemed to clap their petals for very joy and her sheer, diaphanous skirt stood stiffly out, whirling round her like a wheel of white. Next, with a quick, dodging motion, she advanced a step or two, retreated, and bent almost double in a profound *salaam* to the audience.

A second of tableau; then with a long, graceful bound she reached the center of the rug spread on the dance floor, turning to the orchestra and snapping her fingers imperatively. A flageolet burst into a strain of rippling, purling minors, a zither hummed and sang accompaniment, a tom-

tom seconded with a hollow, thumping rhythm.

“*Hai!*” she cried in gipsy abandon. “*Hai, hai, hai!*”

With a slow, gliding movement she began her dance, hands and feet moving subtly, in perfect harmony. Now she leaned forward till her cerise bodice seemed barely to clear the floor, now she bent back till it seemed she could not retain her balance. Again her little naked feet were motionless on the dark carpet as twin stars reflected in a still pool while her body swayed and rippled from ankle to chin like a cobra rearing upright, and her arms, seemingly boneless, described sinuous, serpentine patterns in the air, her hands bent backward till the fingers almost touched the wrists.

Now pipe and zither were stilled and only the *rhum, rhum, rhum*, — *rhum-rhum*, of the tom-tom spoke, and her torso throbbled and rippled in the *danse du ventre*.

The music rose suddenly to a shrill crescendo and she began to whirl on her painted toes with a wild fandango movement, her arms straight out from her shoulders as though nailed to an invisible cross, her skirt flickering horizontally about her like some great, white-petaled flower, her little, soft feet making little, soft hissing sounds against the purple carpet as she spun round and round.

Slowly, slowly, her speed decreased. She was like a beautiful top spun at greatest speed, gradually losing its momentum. The music died to a thin, plaintive wail, the pipe whimpering softly, the zither crooning sleepily and the tom-tom’s rumble growing fainter and fainter like receding summer thunder.

For a moment she paused, dead-still, only her slim breasts moving as they fought flutteringly for breath. Then, in a high, sweet soprano, she began an old Eastern love song, a languorous, beguiling tune of a people who have made a fine art of lovemaking for uncounted generations.

For thou, beloved, art to me
As a garden;
Even as a garden of rare and beauteous flowers.
Roses bloom upon thy lips,
And the mountain myrtle
In thy eyes.
Thy breasts are even as the lily,
Even as the moonflower
Who unveils her pale face nightly
To the passionate caresses of the moon.
Thy hair is as the tendril of the grape....

With slow, gliding steps she retreated toward the archway through which she had come, paused a moment, and held her hands out to the audience, her henna-tipped fingers curled into little, flowerlike cups.

As she halted in her recessional a great shout went up from one of the slant-eyed men nearest the dancing-floor.

In a moment the place was like an unroofed ant-hill.

“Lights!” shouted de Grandin, springing from his seat.

“Trowbridge — Costello, guard the door!”

In the sudden welter of bright illumination as every light in the place was snapped on, we saw a circle of the strange people forming and slowly closing on Mutina, more than one of the men stealthily drawing a wicked-looking Malay *kris* from beneath his coat.

Thrusting both hands beneath her star-sown veil the girl brought forth a pair of limes, broke their rinds with frantic haste and sprinkled a circle of the acid, amber juice about her on the floor.

An evil-eyed man who seemed to be the leader of the strangers started backward with a snarl of baffled rage as she completed the circle, and looked wonderingly about him.

“Ha, my ugly-faced friend, you did not expect that, *hein?*” asked Jules de Grandin in high good humor. “Me, I am responsible for it. As a half-breed of your cursed devil-tribe, Madame Mutina could no more have touched a lime than she could have handled a live coal, but with the aid of a Christian priest I have freed her from her curse, and now she does defy you. Meanwhile—”

He got no further. With a yell of fury like the scream of a blood-mad leopard, the razor-eyed creature leaped forward, and at his back pressed a half-score of others of his kind.

“Back to back, *mon brave*,” de Grandin commanded Starkweather as he thrust his hand inside his jacket and brought forth an eighteen-inch length of flexible, rubber-bound electric cable tipped with a ball of lead in which a dozen steel spikes had been embedded.

Similarly armed, young Starkweather whirled round, bracing his shoulders to the little Frenchman’s back.

Feet well apart, de Grandin and his ally swung their improvised maces, with the regularity of pendulums.

Screams and curses and cries of surprised dismay followed every down-stroke of the spiked clubs. The assailants, half their former number, drew back, mouthing obscenities at the pair, then rushed again to the attack.

Mutina was like a thing possessed. Gone was every vestige of Western culture she had picked up during her residence here. She was once more a woman of the never-changing East, an elemental female creature, stark bare of all conventions, glorying in the battle and the savage part her man played in it. Safe inside her barrier of lime juice, she danced up and down in wild elation as de Grandin and Starkweather, slowly advancing across the dance floor, beat a path toward her, smashing arms and ribs and skulls with the merciless flailing of their spiked clubs.

“Bravely struck, O defender of the fatherless!” she screamed. “*Billahi* — by the breath of God, well struck, O peerless warrior!”

“Up an’ at ’em boys!” bellowed Costello, seeming to

emerge suddenly from the trance of admiration with which he had watched de Grandin and Starkweather battle. "Give 'em th' wor-rks!"

Like terriers leaping on a pitful of rats, Costello's detectives boiled over the dancing-floor. Blackjacks, previously well soaked in lime juice, brass knuckles similarly treated, and here and there a big, raw fist, still wet with its baptism of acid liquid, struck and hammered against brown faces and dashed devastating blows into wicked, slanting yellow eyes.

"Be dad, Dr. de Grandin, sor," declared Costello twenty minutes later as he wrung the little Frenchman's slender white hand, "'tis th' broth of a boy ye are, an' no mistake. Never in all me bor-rn days have I seen a better lad wid th' old shillalah. Glory be to Gawd, but ye'd be th' pride o' all th' colleens an' th' despair o' all the boys if ye ever went ter Donnybrook Fair, so ye would, sir!"

"A vintage, *Madame*," de Grandin cried to the stout hostess who hovered near, uncertain whether to bewail the fight which had emptied her establishment or add her congratulations to Costello's, "a vintage of your rarest, and let it be not less than two quarts. Me, I have serious drinking to do, now that business is finished. Have no fear of the good Sergeant. Have I not heard him say more than once that legging of the boot is more a work of Christian charity than a crime? Certainly.

"To us, my friends," he pronounced when the champagne was brought and our glasses filled with bubbling, pale-yellow liquid. "To stout young Monsieur Starkweather, who fights like a very du Gueselin; to Trowbridge and Costello, than whom no man ever had better friends or better comrades; but most of all, beautiful Mutina, to you. To you,

who braved the sorrows of a broken heart and the wrath of the devil-people on earth and the tortures of the False Prophet's everlasting hell hereafter for love of him who is your husband. *Cordieu*, never was toast drunk to a nobler, gentler lady — he who says otherwise is a foul liar!"

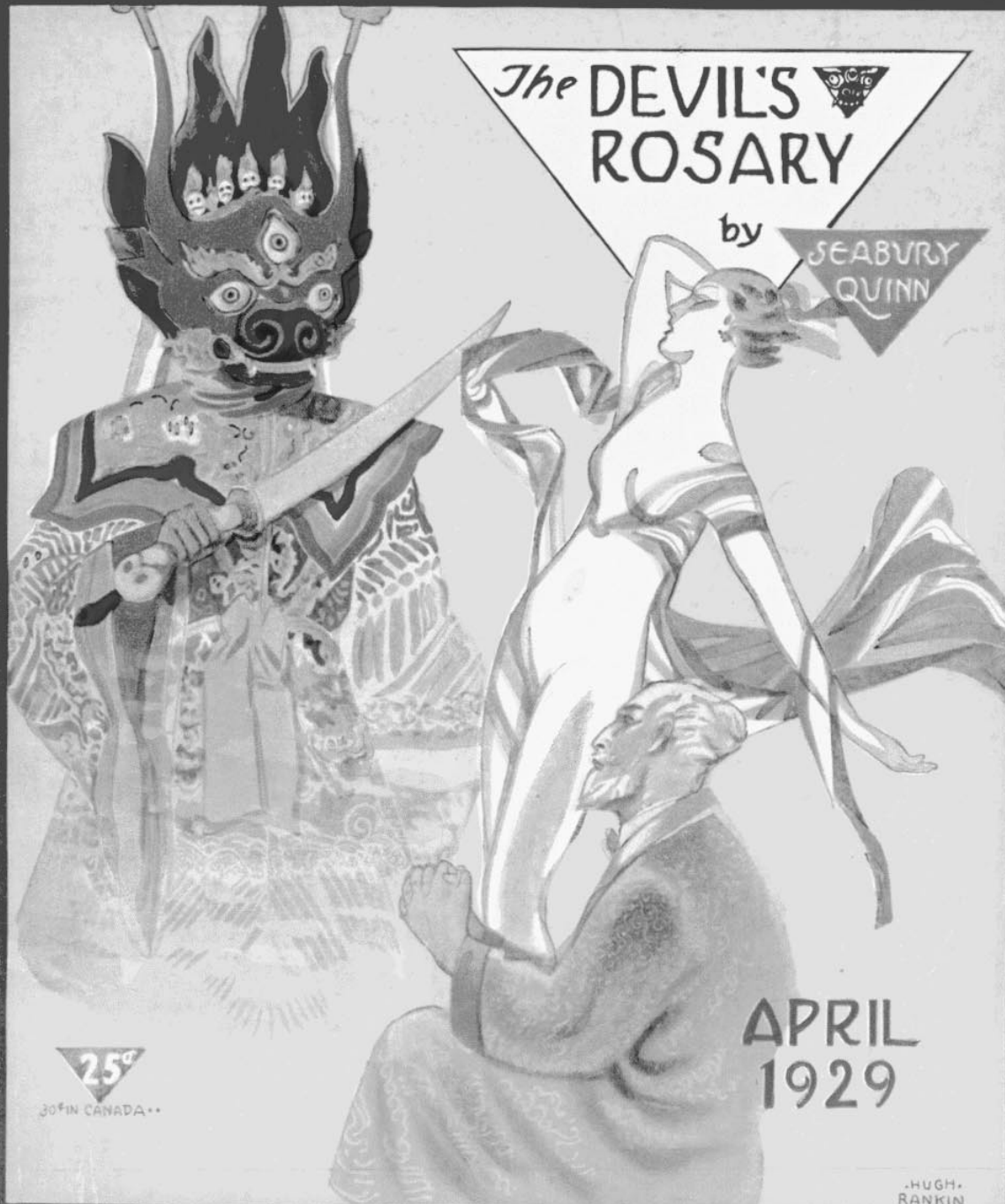
He sent the fragile goblet crashing to the floor as the pledge was finished, and turned again to the reunited couple. "Your troubles are like the shadows of him who walks westward in the evening, my friends," he assured them. "For ever and for always they lie behind you. As for the foul Rakshasas — pouf! as young Starkweather and I shattered their evil skulls, their power over you is shattered for all time, even as this—" Snatching the glowing *indong mutina* from the girl's diadem he struck it sharply against the table edge. The iridescent shell cracked, almost as though it had been an egg, and from it dropped the most magnificent pearl I had ever seen. Large as a small marble it was, with a pigeon's-neck luster and deep, opal-like fire-gleams in its depths which held the eyes in fascination as a magic crystal might hold a devotee enthralled. Ignorant as I was of such matters, I knew the thing must be worth at least thirty thousand dollars, perhaps twice that sum.

"To a pearl among women, a pearl among pearls," de Grandin announced, taking Mutina's little hand in his and kissing her painted finger tips, one after the other, then closing them about the lustrous gem. "Take you each other to yourselves, my friends," he bade, "and may the good God bless you and yours for ever and always."

Simply as a child, wholly unmindful of the rest of us, Mutina turned her lips for her husband's caress, and as she did so, I heard her murmur softly: "*Laki kakasih amba kau puji sampei kakol* — best beloved, husband and lover, forever and forever I adore thee!"

Weird Tales

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The Devil's Rosary

MY FRIEND Jules de Grandin was in a seasonably sentimental mood. "It is the springtime, Friend Trowbridge," he reminded as we walked down Tonawanda Avenue. "The horse-chestnuts are in bloom and the blackbirds whistle among the branches at St. Cloud; the tables are once more set before the cafés, and — *grand Dieu, la belle creature!*" He cut short his remarks to stare in undisguised admiration at a girl about to enter an old-fashioned horse-drawn victoria at the curb.

Embarrassed, I plucked him by the elbow, intent on drawing him onward, but he snatched his arm away and bounded forward with a cry, even as my fingers touched his sleeve. "Attend her, my friend," he called; "she faints!"

As she seated herself on the taupe cushions of her carriage, the girl reached inside her silver mesh bag, evidently in search of a handkerchief, fumbled a moment among the miscellany of feminine fripperies inside the reticule, then wilted forward as though bludgeoned.

"*Mademoiselle*, you are ill, you are in trouble, you must let us help you!" de Grandin exclaimed as he mounted the vehicle's step. "We are physicians," he added in belated explanation as the elderly coachman turned and favored us with a hostile stare.

The girl was plainly fighting hard for consciousness. Her face had gone death-gray beneath its film of delicate make-up, and her lips trembled and quavered like those of a child about to weep, but she made a brave effort at composure. "I — I'm — all — right — thank — you," she murmured disjointedly. "It's — just — the — heat—" Her protest died half uttered and her eyelids fluttered down as her head fell forward on de Grandin's ready shoulder.

"*Morbleu*, she has swooned!" the little Frenchman whispered. "To Dr. Trowbridge's house — 993 Susquehanna Avenue!" he called authoritatively to the coachman. "*Mademoiselle* is indisposed." Turning to the girl he busied himself making her as comfortable as possible as the rubber-tired vehicle rolled smoothly over the asphalt roadway.

She was, as de Grandin had said, a "belle créature." From the top of her velour hat to the pointed tips of her suede pumps she was all in gray, a platinum fox scarf complementing the soft, clinging stuff of her costume, a tiny bouquet of early-spring violets lending the sole touch of color to her ensemble. A single tendril of daffodil-yellow hair escaped from beneath the margin of her close-fitting hat lay across a cheek as creamy-smooth and delicate as a babe's.

"Gently, my friend," de Grandin bade as the carriage stopped before my door. "Take her arm — so. Now, we shall soon have her recovered."

In the surgery he assisted the girl to a chair and mixed a strong dose of aromatic ammonia, then held it to the patient's blanched lips.

"Ah — so, she revives," he commented in a satisfied voice as the delicate, violet-veined lids fluttered uncertainly a moment, then rose slowly, unveiling a pair of wide, frightened purple eyes.

"Oh—" the girl began in a sort of choked whisper, half rising from her seat, but de Grandin put a hand gently on her shoulder and forced her back.

"Make haste slowly, *ma belle petite*," he counseled. "You are still weak from shock and it is not well to tax your strength. If you will be so good as to drink this—" He extended the glass of ammonia toward her with a bow, but she seemed not to see it. Instead, she stared about the room with a dazed, panic-stricken look, her lips trembling, her whole body quaking in a perfect ague of unreasoning terror. Somehow, as I watched, I was reminded of a spectacle I had once witnessed at the zoo when Rajah, a thirty-foot Indian python, had refused food, and the curators, rather than lose a valuable reptile by starvation, overrode their compunctions, and thrust a poor, helpless white rabbit into the monster's glass-walled den.

"I've seen it; I've seen it; *I've seen it!*" She chanted the litany of terror, each repetition higher, more intense, nearer the boundary of hysteria than the one before.

"*Mademoiselle!*" de Grandin's peremptory tone cut her terrified iteration short. "You will please not repeat meaningless nothings to yourself while we stand here like a pair of stone monkeys. What is it you have seen, if you please?"

The unemotional, icy monotone in which he spoke brought the girl from her near-hysteria as a sudden dash of cold water in the face might have done. "This!" she cried in a sort of frenzied desperation as she thrust her hand into the mesh bag pendent from her wrist. For a moment she ransacked its interior with groping fingers; then, gingerly, as though she held something live and venomous, brought forth a tiny object and extended it to him.

"U'm?" he murmured non-committally, taking the thing from her and holding it up to the light as though it were an oddity of nature.

It was somewhat smaller than a hazel-nut, smooth as

ivory, and stained a brilliant red. Through its axis was bored a hole, evidently for the purpose of accommodating a cord. Obviously, it was one of a strand of inexpensive beads, though I was at a loss to say of what material it was made. In any event, I could see nothing about the commonplace little trinket to warrant such evident terror as our patient displayed.

Jules de Grandin was apparently struck by the incongruity of cause and effect, too, for he glanced from the little red globule to the girl, then back again, and his narrow, dark eyebrows raised interrogatively. At length: "I do not think I apprehend the connection," he confessed. "This" — he tapped the tiny ball with a well manicured forefinger — "may have deep significance to you, *Mademoiselle*, but to me it appears—"

"Significance?" the girl echoed. "It has! When my mother was drowned in Paris, a ball like this was found clutched in her hand. When my brother died in London, we found one on the counterpane of his bed. Last summer my sister was drowned while swimming at Atlantic Highlands. When they recovered her body, they found one of these terrible beads hidden in her bathing-cap!" She broke off with a retching sob and rested her arm on the surgery table, pillowing her face on it and surrendering herself to a paroxysm of weeping.

"Oh, I'm doomed," she wailed between blanching lips. "There's no help for me, and — I'm too young; I don't want to die!"

"Few people do, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin remarked dryly. "However, I see no cause of immediate despair. Over an hour has passed since you discovered this evil talisman, and you still live. So much for the past. For the future you may trust in the mercy of heaven and the cleverness of Jules de Grandin. Meantime, if you are sufficiently recovered, we shall do ourselves the honor of escorting you home."

Under de Grandin's adroit questioning we learned much of the girl's story during our homeward drive. She was Haroldine Arkright, daughter of James Arkright, a wealthy widower who had lately moved to Harrisonville and leased the Broussard mansion in the fashionable west end. Though only nineteen years old, she had spent so much time abroad that America was more foreign to her than France, Spain or England.

Born in Waterbury, Connecticut, she had lived there during her first twelve years, and her family had been somewhat less than moderately well-to-do. Her father was an engineer, and spent much time abroad. Occasionally, when his remittances were delayed, the family felt the pinch of undisguised poverty. One day her father returned home unexpectedly, apparently in a state of great agitation. There had been mysterious whisperings, much furtive going and coming; then the family entrained for Boston, going

immediately to the Hoosac Tunnel Docks and taking ship for Europe.

She and her sister were put to school in a convent at Rheims, and though they had frequent and affectionate letters from their parents, the communications came from different places each time; so she had the impression her elders led a Bedouin existence.

At the outbreak of the war the girls were taken to a Spanish seminary, where they remained until two years before, when they joined their parents in Paris.

"We'd lived there only a little while," she continued, "when two gendarmes came to our apartment one afternoon and asked for Daddy. One of them whispered something to him and he turned white as a sheet; then, when the other took something from his pocket and showed it, Daddy fell over in a dead faint. It wasn't till several hours later that we children were told. Mother's body had been found floating in the Seine, and one of those horrible little red balls was in her hand. That was the first we ever heard of them.

"Though Daddy was terribly affected by the tragedy, there was something we couldn't understand about his actions. As soon as the *Pompes Funèbres* (the municipal undertakers) had conducted the services, he made arrangements with a solicitor to sell all our furniture, and we moved to London without stopping to pack anything but a few clothes and toilet articles.

"In London we took a little cottage out by Garden City, and we lived — it seemed to me — almost in hiding; but before we'd lived there a year my brother Philip died, and — they found the second of these red beads lying on the cover of his bed.

"Father seemed almost beside himself when Phil died. We left — fled would be a better word — just as we had gone from Paris, without stopping to pack a thing but our clothes. When we arrived in America we lived in a little hotel in downtown New York for a while, then moved to Harrisonville and rented this house furnished.

"Last summer Charlotte went down to the Highlands with a party of friends, and—" she paused again, and de Grandin nodded understandingly.

"Has *Monsieur* your father ever taken you into his confidence?" he asked at length. "Has he, by any chance, told you the origin of these so mysterious little red pellets and—"

"Not till Charlotte drowned," she cut in. "After that he told me that if I ever saw such a ball anywhere — whether worn as an ornament by some person, or among my things, or even lying in the street — I was to come to him at once."

"U'm?" he nodded gravely. "And have you, perhaps, some idea how this might have come into your purse?"

"No. I'm sure it wasn't there when I left home this morning, and it wasn't there when I opened my bag to put my change in after making my purchases at Braunstein's,

either. The first I saw of it was when I felt for a handkerchief after getting into the carriage, and — oh, I'm terribly afraid, Dr. de Grandin. I'm too young to die! It's not fair; I'm only nineteen, and I was to have been married this June and—"

"Softly, *ma chère*," he soothed. "Do not distress yourself unnecessarily. Remember, I am with you."

"But what can you do?" she demanded. "I tell you, when one of these beads appears anywhere about a member of our family, it's too late for—"

"*Mademoiselle*," he interrupted, "it is never too late for Jules de Grandin — if he be called in time. In your case we have—" His words were drowned by a sudden angry roar as a sheet of vivid lightning tore across the sky, followed by the bellow of a deafening crash of thunder.

"*Parbleu*, we shall be drenched!" de Grandin cried, eyeing the cloud-hung heavens apprehensively. "Quick, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, assist *Mademoiselle* Haroldine to alight. I think we would better hail a taxi and permit the coachman to return alone with the carriage.

"One moment, if you please, *Mademoiselle*," he ordered as the girl took my outstretched hand; "that little red ball which you did so unaccountably find in your purse, you will let me have it — a little wetting will make it none the less interesting to your father." Without so much as a word of apology, he opened the girl's bag, extracted the sinister red globule and deposited it between the cushions of the carriage seat, then, with the coachman's aid, proceeded to raise the vehicle's collache top.

As the covered carriage rolled rapidly away, he raised his hand, halting a taxicab, and calling sharply to the chauffeur: "Make haste, my friend. Should you arrive at our destination before the storm breaks, there is in my pocket an extra dollar for you."

The driver earned his fee with compound interest, for it seemed to me we transgressed every traffic ordinance on the books in the course of our ride, cutting corners on two wheels, racing madly in the wrong direction through one-way streets, taking more than one chance of fatal collision with passing vehicles.

The floodgates of the clouds were just opening, and great torrents of water were cataracting down when we drew up beneath the Arkright porte-cochère, and de Grandin handed Haroldine from the cab with a ceremonious bow, then turned to pay the taxi-man his well-earned bonus.

"*Mordieu*, our luck holds excellently well—" he began as we turned toward the door, but a blaze of lightning more savage than any we had seen thus far and the roaring detonation of a thunderclap which seemed fairly to split the heavens blotted out the remainder of his sentence.

The girl shrank against me with a frightened little cry as the lightning seared our eyes, and I sympathized with her terror, for it seemed to me the flash must have struck almost

at our feet, so nearly simultaneous were fire and thunder, but a wild, half-hysterical laugh from de Grandin brought me round with an astonished exclamation.

The little Frenchman had rushed from the shelter of the mansion's porch and pointed dramatically toward the big stone pillars flanking the entrance to the grounds. There, toppled on its side as though struck fairly by a high-explosive shell, lay the victoria we had ordered to follow us, the horses kicking wildly at their shattered harness, the coachman thrown a clear dozen feet from his vehicle, and the carriage itself reduced to splinters scarcely larger than match-staves.

Heedless of the drenching rain, we raced across the lawn and halted by the prostrate postilion. Miraculously, the man was not only living, but regaining consciousness as we reached him. "Glory be to God!" he exclaimed piously as we helped him to his feet. "'Tis only by th' mercy o' heaven I'm still a livin' man!"

"*Eh bien*, my friend" — de Grandin gave his little blond mustache a sharp twist as he surveyed the ruined carriage — "perhaps the stupidity of hell may have something to do with it. Look to your horses; they seem scarcely worse off than yourself, but they may be up to mischief if they remain unchaperoned."

Once more beneath the shelter of the porte-cochère, as calmly as though discussing the probability of the storm's abatement, he proposed: "Let us go in, my friends. The horses and coachman will soon be all right. As for the carriage" — he raised his narrow shoulders in a fatalistic shrug — "*Mademoiselle*, I hope *Monsieur* your father carried adequate insurance on it."

2

The little Frenchman laid his hand on the polished brass handle of the big oak door, but the portal held its place unyieldingly, and it was not till the girl had pressed the bell button several times that a butler who looked as if his early training had been acquired while serving as guard in a penitentiary appeared and paid us the compliment of a searching inspection before standing aside to admit us.

"Your father's in the living-room, Miss Haroldine," he answered the girl's quick question, then followed us half-way down the hall, as though reluctant to let us out of sight.

Heavy draperies of mulberry and gold brocade were drawn across the living-room windows, shutting out the lightning flashes and muffling the rumble of the thunder. A fire of resined logs burned cheerfully in the marble-arched fireplace, taking the edge from the early-spring chill; electric lamps under painted shades spilled pools of light on Turkey carpets, mahogany shelves loaded with ranks of morocco-bound volumes and the blurred blues, reds and purples of Oriental porcelains. On the walls the dwarfed perfection of

several beautifully executed miniatures showed, and in the far corner of the apartment loomed the magnificence of a massive grand piano.

James Arkright leaped from the overstuffed armchair in which he had been lounging before the fire and whirled to face us as we entered the room, almost, it seemed to me, as though he were expecting an attack. He was a middle-aged man, slender almost to the point of emaciation, with an oddly parchmentlike skin and a long, gaunt face rendered longer by the iron-gray imperial pendant from his chin. His nose was thin and high-bridged, like the beak of a predatory bird, and his ears queer, Panesque appendages, giving his face an odd, impish look. But it was his eyes which riveted our attention most of all. They were of an indeterminate color, neither gray nor hazel, but somewhere between, and darted continually here and there, keeping us constantly in view, yet seeming to watch every corner of the room at the same time. For a moment, as we trooped into the room, he surveyed us in turn with that strange, roving glance, a light of inquiring uncertainty in his eyes fading to a temporary relief as his daughter presented us.

As he resumed his seat before the fire the skirt of his jacket flicked back and I caught a fleeting glimpse of the corrugated stock of a heavy revolver holstered to his belt.

The customary courtesies having been exchanged we lapsed into a silence which stretched and lengthened until I began to feel like a bashful lad seeking an excuse for bidding his sweetheart adieu. I cleared my throat, preparatory to making some inane remark concerning the sudden storm, but de Grandin forestalled me.

"*Monsieur*," he asked as his direct, unwinking stare bored straight into Arkright's oddly watchful eyes, "when was it you were in Tibet, if you please?"

The effect was electric. Our host bounded from his chair as though propelled by an uncoiled spring, and for once his eyes ceased to rove as he regarded the little Frenchman with a gaze of mixed incredulity and horror. His hand slipped beneath his jacket to the butt of the concealed weapon, but:

"Violence is unnecessary, my friend," de Grandin assured him coolly. "We are come to help you, if possible, and besides, I have you covered" — he glanced momentarily at the bulge in his jacket pocket where the muzzle of his tiny Ortgies automatic pressed against the cloth — "and it would be but an instant's work to kill you several times before you could reach your pistol. Very good" — he gave one of his quick, elfish smiles as the other subsided into his chair — "we do make progress.

"You wonder, perhaps, how comes it I ask that question? Very well. A half-hour or so ago, when *Mademoiselle* your lovely daughter was recovered from her fainting-spell in Dr. Trowbridge's office, she tells us of the sinister red bead she has found in her purse, and of the evil fortune such little balls have been connected with in the

past.

"I, *Monsieur*, have traveled a very great much. In darkest Africa, in innermost Asia, where few white men have gone and lived to boast of it, I have been there. Among the head-hunters of Papua, beside the upper, banks of the Amazon, Jules de Grandin has been. *Alors*, is it so strange that I recognize this so mysterious ball for what it is? *Parbleu*, in disguise I have fingered many such in the lamaseries of Tibet!

"*Mademoiselle's* story, it tells me much; but there is much more I would learn from you if I am to be of service. You were once poor. That is no disgrace. You suddenly became rich; that also is no disgrace, nor is the fact that you traveled up and down the world almost constantly after the acquisition of your fortune necessarily confession of wrongdoing. But" — he fixed his eyes challengingly on our host — "but what of the other occurrences? How comes it that *Madame* your wife (God rest her spirit!) was found floating in the Seine with such a red ball clutched in her poor, dead hand?"

"Me, I have recognized this ball. It is a bead from the rosary of a Buddhist lama of that devil-ridden gable of the world we call Tibet. How came *Madame* to be grasping it? Who knows?"

"When next we see one of these red beads, it is on the occasion of the sudden sad death of the young *Monsieur*, your son.

"Later, when you have fled like one pursued to America and settled in this small city which nestles in the shadow of the great New York, comes the death of your daughter, *Mademoiselle* Charlotte — and once more the red ball appears.

"This afternoon *Mademoiselle* Haroldine finds the talisman of impending doom in her purse and forthwith swoons in terror. Dr. Trowbridge and I succor her and are conveying her to you when a storm arises out of a clear sky. We change vehicles and I leave the red bead behind. All goes well until — *pouf!* — a bolt of lightning strikes the carriage in which the holder of this devil's rosary seems to ride, and demolishes it. But horses and coachman are spared. *Cordieu*, it is more than merely strange; it is surprising, it is amazing, it is astonishing! One who does not know what Jules de Grandin knows would think it incomprehensible.

"It is not so. I know what I have seen. In Tibet I have seen those masked devil-dancers cause the rain to fall and the winds to blow and the lightning bolts to strike where they willed. They are worshipers of the demons of the air, my friends, and it was not for nothing the wise old Hebrews named Satan, the rejected of God, the Prince of the Powers of the Air. No.

"Very well. We have here so many elements that we need scarcely guess to know what the answer is. *Monsieur*

Arkrigh, as the roast follows the fish and coffee and cognac follow both, it follows that you once wrested from the lamas of Tibet some secret they wished kept; that by that secret you did obtain much wealth; and that in revenge those old heathen monks of the mountains follow you and yours with implacable hatred. Each time they strike, it would appear, they leave one of these beads from the red rosary of vengeance as sign and seal of their accomplished purpose. Am I not right?" He looked expectantly at our host a moment; then, with a gestured application for permission from Haroldine, produced a French cigarette, set it alight and inhaled its acrid, ill-flavored smoke with gusto.

James Arkright regarded the little Frenchman as a respectable matron might look at the blackmailer threatening to disclose an indiscretion of her youth. With a deep, shuddering sigh he slumped forward in his chair like a man from whom all the resistance has been squeezed with a single titanic pressure. "You're right, Dr. de Grandin," he admitted in a toneless voice, and his eyes no longer seemed to take inventory of everything about him. "I *was* in Tibet; it was there I stole the *Pi Yü* Stone — would God I'd never seen the damned thing!"

"Ah?" murmured de Grandin, emitting a twin column of mordant smoke from his narrow nostrils. "We make progress. Say on, *Monsieur*; I listen with ears like the rabbit's. This *Pi Yü* Stone, it is what?"

Something like diffidence showed in Arkright's face as he replied, "You won't believe me, when I've told you."

De Grandin emitted a final puff of smoke and ground the fire from his cigarette against the bottom of a cloisonné bowl. "*Eh bien, Monsieur*," he answered with an impatient shrug, "it is not the wondrous things men refuse to credit. Tell the ordinary citizen that Mars is sixty million miles from the earth, and he believes you without question. Hang up a sign informing him that a fence is newly painted, and he must needs smear his finger to prove your veracity. Proceed, if you please."

"I was born in Waterbury," Arkright began in a sort of half-fearful, half-stubborn monotone, "and educated as an engineer. My father was a Congregational clergyman, and money was none too plentiful with us; so, when I completed my course at Sheff, I took the first job that offered. They don't pay any too princely salaries to cubs just out of school, you know, and the very necessity of my finding employment right away kept me from making a decent bargain for myself.

"For ten years I sweated for the N.Y., N.H.&H., watching most of my classmates pass me by as though I stood stone-still. Finally I was fed up. I had a wife and three children, and hardly enough money to feed them, let alone give them the things my classmates' families had. So, when I got an offer from a British house to do some work in the

Himalayas it looked about as gorgeous to me as the fairy godmother's gifts did to Cinderella. It would get me away from America and the constant reminders of my failure, at any rate.

"The job took me into upper Nepal and I worked at it for close to three years, earning the customary vacation at last. Instead of going down into India, as most of the men did, I pushed up into Tibet with another chap who was keen on research, and a party of six Bhotia bearers. We had no particular goal in mind, but we'd been so fed up on stories of the weird happenings in those mountain lamaseries, we thought we'd go up and have a look — see on our own.

"There was some good shooting on the way, and what few natives we ran into were harmless enough if you kept 'em far enough away to prevent their cooties from climbing aboard you; so we really didn't get much excitement out of the trip, and had about decided it was a bust when we came on a little lamasery perched like an eagle's nest on the edge of an enormous cliff.

"We managed to scramble up the zigzag path to the place, and had some difficulty getting in, but at last the ta-lama agreed we might spend the night there.

"They didn't seem to take any particular notice of us after we'd unslung our packs in the courtyard, and we had the run of the place pretty much to ourselves. Clendenning, my English companion, had knocked about Central Asia for upward of twenty years, and spoke several Chinese dialects as well as Tibetan, but for some reason he'd played dumb when we knocked at the gates and let our head man interpret for us.

"About four o'clock in the afternoon he came to me in a perfect fever of excitement. 'Arkrigh, old boy,' he whispered, 'this blighted place is simply filthy with gold — raw, virgin gold!'

"'You're spoofing,' I told him; 'these poor old duffers are so God-awful poor they'd crawl a mile on their bare knees and elbows for a handful of copper *cash*.'

"'Cash my hat!' he returned. 'I tell you, they've got great heaps and stacks of gold here; gold enough to make our perishing fortunes ten times over if we could shift to get the blighted stuff away. Come along, I'll show you.'

"He fairly dragged me across the courtyard where our duffle was stored, through a low doorway, and down a passage cut in the solid rock. There wasn't a lama or servant in sight as we made our way through one tunnel after another; I suppose they were so sure we couldn't understand their lingo that they thought it a waste of time to watch us. At any rate, no one offered us any interruption while we clambered down three or four flights of stairs to a sort of cavern which had been artificially enlarged to make a big, vaulted cellar.

"Gentlemen" — Arkright looked from de Grandin to me and back again — "I don't know what it is, but something

seems to get into a white man's blood when he goes to the far corners of the world. Men who wouldn't think of stealing a canceled postage stamp at home will loot a Chinese or Indian treasure house clean and never stop to give the moral aspects of their actions a second thought. That's the way it was with Clendenning and me. When we saw those stacks of golden ingots piled up in that cave like firewood around the sides of a New England woodshed, we just went off our heads. Nothing but the fact that the two of us couldn't so much as lift, much less carry, a single one of the bars kept us from making off with the treasure that minute.

"When we saw we couldn't carry any of it off we were almost wild. Scheme after scheme for getting away with the stuff was broached, only to be discarded. Stealth was no go, for we'd be sure to be seen if we tried to lead our bearers down the tunnels; force was out of the question, for the lamas outnumbered us ten to one, and the ugly-looking knives they wore were sufficient warning to us not to get them roused.

"Finally, when we were almost insane with futile planning, Clendenning suggested, 'Come on, let's get out of this cursed place. If we look around a little we may find a cache of jewels — we wouldn't need a derrick to carry off a couple of Imperial quarts of them, at any rate.'

"The underground passages were like a Cretan labyrinth, and we lost our way more than once while we stumbled around with no light but the flicker of Clendenning's electric torch, but after an hour or more of floundering over the damp, slippery stones of the tunnels, we came to a door stopped with a curtain of yak's hide. A fat, shaven-headed lama was sitting beside it, but he was sound asleep and we didn't trouble to waken him.

"Inside was a fair-sized room, partly hollowed out of the living rock, partly natural grotto. Multicolored flags draped from the low ceiling, each emblazoned with prayers or mottoes in Chinese ideographs or painted with effigies of holy saints or gods and goddesses. Big bands of silk cloth festooned down the walls. On each side of the doorway were prayer wheels ready to be spun, and a plate of beaten gold with the signs of the Chinese zodiac was above the lintel. On both sides of the approach to the altar were low, red-lacquered benches for the lamas and the choir. Small lamps with tiny, flickering flames threw their rays on the gold and silver vessels and candlesticks. At the extreme end of the room, veiling the sanctuary, hung a heavy curtain of yellow silk painted with Tibetan inscriptions.

"While we were standing there, wondering what our next move would be, the shuffle of feet and the faint tinkle of bells came to us. 'Quick,' Clendenning ordered, 'we mustn't be caught here!' He ran to the door, but it was too late, for the monk on guard was already awake, and we could see the faint gleam of light from candles borne in procession at the

farther end of the corridor.

"What happened next was the turning-point in our lives, gentlemen. Without stopping to think, apparently, Clendenning acted. Snatching the heavy Browning from his belt he hit the guardian monk a terrific blow over the head, dragged him through the doorway and ripped off his robe. 'Here, Arkright, put this on!' he commanded as he lugged the unconscious man's body into a dark corner of the room and concealed himself behind one of the wall draperies.

"I slipped the yellow gown over my clothes and squatted in front of the nearest prayer wheel, spinning the thing like mad.

"I suppose you've already noticed I've a rather Mongolian cast of features?" he asked with a bleak smile.

"*Nom d'un fusil, Monsieur*, let us not discuss personal pulchritude or its lack, if you please!" de Grandin exclaimed testily. "Be so good as to advance with your narrative!"

"It wasn't vanity which prompted the question," Arkright replied. "Even with my beard, I'm sometimes taken for a Chinaman or a half-caste. In those days I was clean-shaven, and both Clendenning and I had had our heads shaved for sanitary reasons before setting out on our trip; so, with the lama's robe pulled up about my neck, in the dim light of the sanctuary I passed very well for one of the brotherhood, and not one of the monks in the procession gave me so much as a second glance.

"The ta-lama — I suppose you'd call him the abbot of the community — led the procession into the temple and halted before the sanctuary curtain. Two subordinate lamas pulled the veil aside, and out of the dim light from the flickering lamps there gradually appeared the great golden statue of Buddha seated in the Golden Lotus. The face of the image was indifferent and calm with only the softest gleam of light animating it, yet despite the repose of the bloated features it seemed to me there was something malignant about the countenance.

"Glancing up under my brows as I turned the prayer wheel, I could see the main idol was flanked on each side by dozens of smaller statues, each, apparently, of solid gold.

The ta-lama struck a great bronze gong with a padded drumstick to attract the Buddha's attention to his prayer; then closed his eyes, placed his hands together before his face and prayed. As his sleeve fell away, I noticed a rosary of red beads, like those I was later to know with such horror, looped about his left wrist.

"The subordinate lamas all bent their foreheads to the floor while their master prayed standing before the face of Buddha. Finally, the abbot lowered his hands, and his followers rose and gathered at the foot of the altar. He opened a small, ovenlike receptacle beneath the calyx of the Golden Lotus and took from it a little golden image which one of his subordinates placed among the ranks of

subsidiary Buddhas to the right of the great idol. Then he replaced the golden statuette with another exactly like it, except fashioned of lead, closed the sliding door to the little cavity and turned from the altar. Then, followed by his company, he marched from the chapel, leaving Clendenning and me in possession.

“It didn’t take us more than a minute to rush up those altar steps, swing back the curtain and open the door under the Golden Lotus, you may be sure.

“Inside the door was a compartment about the size of a moderately large gas stove’s oven, and in it were the little image we had seen the ta-lama put in and half a dozen bars of lead, iron and copper, each the exact dimensions of the golden ingots we’d seen in the treasure chamber.

“I said the bars were lead, copper and iron, but that’s a misstatement. All of them *had* been composed of those metals, *but every one was from a quarter to three-fourths solid gold*. Slowly, as a loaf of bread browns by degrees in a bake-oven, these bars of base metal were being transmuted into solid, virgin gold.

“Clendenning and I looked at each other in dumfounded amazement. We knew it couldn’t be possible, yet there it was, before our eyes.

“For a moment Clendenning peered into the alchemist’s cabinet, then suddenly gave a low whistle. At the extreme back of the ‘oven’ was a piece of odd-looking substance about the size of a child’s fist; something like jade, something like amber, yet differing subtly from each. As Clendenning reached his hand into the compartment to indicate it with his finger the diamond setting of a ring he wore suddenly glowed and sparkled as though lit from within by living fire.

“‘For Gawd’s sake!’ he exclaimed. ‘D’ye see what it is, Arkright? It’s the Philosopher’s Stone, or I’m a Dutchman!’”

“The Philosopher’s Stone?” I queried puzzled.

De Grandin made a gesture of impatience, but Arkright’s queer, haunted eyes were on me, and he failed to notice the Frenchman’s annoyance.

“Yes, Dr. Trowbridge,” he replied. “The ancient alchemists thought there was a substance which would convert all base metals into gold by the power of its magical emanations, you know. Nearly all noted magi believed in it, and most of them attempted to make it synthetically. Many of the things we use in everyday life were discovered as by-products while the ancient were seeking to perfect the magic formula. Bötticher stumbled on the method of making Dresden porcelain while searching for the treasure; Roger Bacon evolved the composition of gunpowder in the same way; Gerber discovered the properties of acids, Van Helmont secured the first accurate data on the nature of gases and the famous Dr. Glauber discovered the medicinal salts which bear his name in the course of experiments in

search of the Stone.

“Oddly enough, the ancients were on the right track all the while, though, of course, they could not know it; for they were wont to refer to the Stone as a substratum — from the Latin *sub* and *stratus*, of course, signifying something spread under — and hundreds of years later scientists actually discovered the uranium oxide we know as pitchblende, the chief source of radium.

“Clendenning must have realized the queer substance in the altar was possessed of remarkable radioactive properties, for instead of attempting to grasp it in his fingers, as I should have done, he seized two of the altar candlesticks, and holding them like a pair of pincers, lifted the thing bodily from its setting; then, taking great care not to touch it, wrapped and rewrapped it in thin sheets of gold stripped from the altar ornaments. His data were incomplete, of course, but his reasoning, or perhaps his scientifically trained instinct, was accurate. You see, he inferred that since the ‘stone’ had the property of transmuting base metals with which it came in near contact into gold, gold would in all probability be the one element impervious to its radioactive rays, and consequently the only effective form of insulation. We had seen the ta-lama and his assistants grasp the little image of Buddha so recently transformed from lead to gold with their bare hands, so felt reasonably sure there would be no danger of radium burns from gold recently in contact with the substance, while there might be grave danger if we used anything but gold as wrappings for it.

“Clendenning was for strangling the lama we had stunned when we saw the procession headed toward the chapel, but I persuaded him to tie and gag the fellow and leave him hidden in the shrine; so when we had finished this we crept through the underground passages to the courtyard where our Bhotias were squatting beside the luggage and ordered them to break camp at once.

“The old ta-lama came to bid us a courteous good-bye and refused our offered payment for our entertainment, and we set off on the trail toward Nepal as if the devil were on our heels. He was, though we didn’t know it then.

“Our way was mostly downhill, and everything seemed in our favor. We pushed on long after the sun had set, and by ten o’clock were well past the third *tach-davan*, or pass, from the lamasery. When we finally made camp Clendenning could hardly wait for our tent to be pitched before experimenting with our loot.

“Unwrapping the strange substance, we noticed that it glowed in the half-light of the tent with a sort of greenish phosphorescence, which made Clendenning christen it *Pi Yü*, which is Chinese for jade, and by that name we knew it thereafter. We put a pair of pistol bullets inside the wrappings, and lay down for a few hours’ sleep with the *Pi Yü* between us. At five the next morning when we routed

out the bearers and prepared to get under way, the entire leaden portions of the cartridges had been transmuted to gold and the copper powder-jackets were beginning to take on a decided golden glint. Forcing the shells off, we found the powder with which the cartridges were charged had become pure gold dust. This afforded us some valuable data. Lead was transmuted more quickly than copper, and semi-metallic substances like gunpowder were apparently even more susceptible than pure metals, though the powder's granular form might have sped its transmutation.

"We drove the bearers like slave-masters that day, and they were on the point of open mutiny when evening came. Poor devils, if they'd known what lay behind there'd have been little enough need to urge them on.

"Camp had been made and we had all settled down to a sleep of utter exhaustion when I first heard it. Very faint and far away it was, so faint as to be scarcely recognizable, but growing louder each second — the rumbling whistle of a wind of hurricane velocity shrieking and tearing down the passes.

"I kicked Clendenning awake, and together we made for a cleft in the rocks, yelling to our Bhotias to take cover at the same time. The poor devils were too waterlogged with sleep to realize what we shouted, and before we could give a second warning the thing was among them. Demonical blasts of wind so fierce we could almost see them shrieked and screamed and howled through the camp, each gust seeming to be aimed with dreadful accuracy. They whirled and twisted and tore about, scattering blazing logs like sparks from bursting firecrackers, literally tearing our tents into scraps no larger than a man's hand, picking up beasts and men bodily and hurling them against the cliff-walls till they were battered out of all semblance of their original form. Within five minutes our camp was reduced to such hopeless wreckage as may be seen only in the wake of a tornado, and Clendenning and I were the only living things within a radius of five miles.

"We were about to crawl from our hiding-place when something warned me the danger was not yet past and I grabbed at Clendenning's arm. He pulled away, but left the musette bag in which the *Pi Yü* was packed in my hand. Next moment he walked to the center of the shambles which had been our camp and began looking around in a dazed sort of way. Almost as he came to a halt, a terrific roar sounded and the entire air seemed to burn with the fury of a bursting lightning-bolt. Clendenning was wiped out as though he had never been — torn literally to dust by the unspeakable force of the lightning, and even the rock where he had stood was scarred and blackened as though water-blasted. But the terrible performance didn't stop there. Bolt after bolt of frightful lightning was hurled down like an accurately aimed barrage till every shred of our men, our yaks, our tents and our camp paraphernalia had not only been milled to dust,

but completely obliterated.

"How long the artillery-fire from the sky lasted I do not know. To me, as I crouched in the little cave between the rocks, it seemed hours, years, centuries. Actually, I suppose, it kept up for something like five minutes. I think I must have fainted with the horror of it at the last, for the next thing I knew the sun was shining and the air was clear and icy-cold. No one passing could have told from the keenest observation that anything living had occupied our campsite in years. There was no sign or trace — absolutely none — of human or animal occupancy to be found. Only the cracked and lightning-blackened rocks bore witness to the terrible bombardment which had been laid down.

"I wasted precious hours in searching, but not a shred of cloth or flesh, not a lock of hair or a congealed drop of blood remained of my companions.

"The following days were like a nightmare — one of those awful dreams in which the sleeper is forever fleeing and forever pursued by something unnamably horrible. A dozen times a day I'd hear the skirling tempests rushing down the passes behind and scuttle to the nearest hole in the rocks like a panic-stricken rabbit when the falcon's shadow suddenly appears across its path. Sometimes I'd be storm-bound for hours while the wind howled like a troop of demons outside my retreat and the lightning-strokes rattled almost like hailstones on the rubble outside. Sometimes the vengeful tempest would last only a few minutes and I'd be released to fly like a mouse seeking sanctuary from the cat for a few miles before I was driven to cover once more.

"There were several packs of emergency rations in the musette bag, and I made out for drink by chipping off bits of ice from the frozen mountain springs and melting them in my tin cup, but I was a mere rack of bones and tattered hide encased in still more tattered clothes when I finally staggered into an outpost settlement in Nepal and fell babbling like an imbecile into the arms of a *sowar* sentry.

"The lamas' vengeance seemed confined to the territorial limits of Tibet, for I was unmolested during the entire period of my illness and convalescence in the Nepalese village.

"When I was strong enough to travel I was passed down country to my outfit, but I was still so ill and nervous that the company doctor gave me a certificate of physical disability and I was furnished with transportation home.

"I'd procured some scrap metal before embarking on the P. and O. boat, and in the privacy of my cabin I amused myself by testing the powers of the *Pi Yü*. Travel had not altered them, and in three days I had about ten pounds of gold where I'd had half that weight of iron.

"I was bursting with the wonderful news when I reached Waterbury, and could scarcely wait to tell my wife, but as I walked up the street toward my house an ugly, Mongolian-faced man suddenly stepped out from behind a roadside tree

and barred my way. He did not utter a syllable but stood immovable in the path before me, regarding me with such a look of concentrated malice and hatred that my breath caught fast in my throat. For perhaps half a minute he glared at me, then raised his left hand and pointed directly at my face. As his sleeve fell back, I caught the gleam of a string of small, red beads looped round his wrist. Next instant he turned away and seemed to walk through an invisible door in the air — one moment I saw him, the next he had disappeared. As I stood staring stupidly at the spot where he had vanished, I felt a terrific blast of ice-cold wind blowing about me, tearing off my hat and sending me staggering against the nearest front-yard fence.

“The wind subsided in a moment, but it had blown away my peace of mind forever. From that instant I knew myself to be a marked man, a man whose only safety lay in flight and concealment.

“My daughter has told you the remainder of the story, how my wife was first to go, and how they found that accursed red bead which is the trade mark of the lamas’ blood-vengeance clasped in her hand; how my son was the next victim of those Tibetan devils’ revenge, then my daughter Charlotte; now she, too, is marked for destruction. Oh, gentlemen” — his eyes once more roved restlessly about — “if you only knew the inferno of terror and uncertainty I’ve been through during these terrible years, you’d realize I’ve paid my debt to those mountain fiends ten times over with compound interest compounded tenfold!”

Our host ended his narrative almost in a shriek, then settled forward in his chair, chin sunk on breast, hands lying flaccidly in his lap, almost as if the death of which he lived in dread had overtaken him at last.

In the silence of the dimly lit drawing-room the logs burned with a softly hissing crackle; the little ormolu clock on the marble mantel beat off the seconds with hushed, hurrying strokes as though it held its breath and went on tiptoe in fear of something lurking in the shadows. Outside the curtained windows the subsiding storm moaned dismally, like an animal in pain.

Jules de Grandin darted his quick, birdlike glance from the dejected Arkright to his white-lipped daughter, then at me, then back again at Arkright. “*Tiens, Monsieur,*” he remarked, “it would appear you find yourself in what the Americans call one damn-bad fix. *Sacré bleu,* those ape-faced men of the mountains know how to hate well, and they have the powers of the tempest at their command, while you have nothing but Jules de Grandin.

“No matter; it is enough. I do not think you will be attacked again today. Make yourselves as happy as may be, keep careful watch for more of those damnation red beads, and notify me immediately one of them reappears. Meantime I go to dinner and to consult a friend whose counsel will assuredly show us a way out of our troubles.

Mademoiselle, Monsieur, I wish you a very good evening.” Bending formally from the hips, he turned on his heel and strode from the drawing-room.

“Do you think there was anything in that cock-and-bull story of Arkright’s?” I asked as we walked home through the clear, rain-washed April evening.

“Assuredly,” he responded with a nod. “It has altogether the ring of truth, my friend. From what he tells us, the *Pi Yü* Stone which he and his friend stole from the men of the mountain is merely some little-known form of radium, and what do we know of radium, when all is said and done? *Barbe d’un pou,* nothing or less!

“True, we know the terrific and incessant discharge of etheric waves consequent on the disintegration of the radium atoms is so powerful that even such known and powerful forces as electrical energy are completely destroyed by it. In the presence of radium, we know, non-conductors of electricity become conductors, differences of potential cease to exist and electroscopes and Leyden jars fail to retain their charges. But all this is but the barest fraction of the possibilities.

“Consider: Not long ago we believed the atom to be the ultimate particle of matter, and thought all atoms had individuality. An atom of iron, for instance, was to us the smallest particle of iron possible, and differed distinctly from an atom of hydrogen. But with even such little knowledge as we already have of radioactive substances we have learned that all matter is composed of varying charges of electricity. The atom, we now believe, consists of a proton composed of a charge of positive electricity surrounded by a number of electrons, or negative charges, and the number of these electrons determines the nature of the atom. Radium itself, if left to itself, disintegrated into helium, finally into lead. Suppose, however, the process be reversed. Suppose the radioactive emanations of this *Pi Yü* which Monsieur Arkright thieved away from the lamas, so affect the balance of protons and electrons of metals brought close to it as to change their atoms from atoms of zinc, lead or iron to atoms of pure gold. All that would be needed to do it would be a rearrangement of protons and electrons. The hypothesis is simple and believable, though not to be easily explained. You see?”

“No, I don’t,” I confessed, “but I’m willing to take your word for it. Meantime—”

“Meantime we have the important matter of dinner to consider,” he interrupted with a smile as we turned into my front yard. “*Pipe d’un chameau,* I am hungry like a family of famished wolves with all this talk.”

3

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, they are at their devil's work again — have you seen the evening papers?" de Grandin exclaimed as he burst into the office several days later.

"Eh — what?" I demanded, putting aside the copy of Corwin's monograph on Multiple Neuritis and staring at him. "Who are 'they,' and what have 'they' been up to?"

"Who? Name of a little green man, those devils of the mountains, those Tibetan priests, those servants of the *Pi Yu* Stone!" he responded. "Peruse *le journal*, if you please." He thrust a copy of the afternoon paper into my hand, seated himself on the corner of the desk and regarded his brightly polished nails with an air of deep solicitude. I read:

GANGLAND SUSPECTED IN BEAUTY'S DEATH

Police believe it was to put the seal of eternal silence on her rouged lips that pretty Lillian Conover was "taken for a ride" late last night or early this morning. The young woman's body, terribly beaten and almost denuded of clothing, was found lying in one of the bunkers of the Sedgemoor Country Club's golf course near the Albemarle Pike shortly after six o'clock this morning by an employee of the club. From the fact that no blood was found near the body, despite the terrible mauling it had received, police believe the young woman had been "put on the spot" somewhere else, then brought to the deserted links and left there by the slayers or their accomplices.

The Conover girl was known to have been intimate with a number of questionable characters, and had been arrested several times for shoplifting and petty thefts. It is thought she might have learned something of the secrets of a gang of bootleggers or hijackers and threatened to betray them to rival gangsters, necessitating her silencing by the approved methods of gangland.

The body, when found, was clothed in the remnants of a gray ensemble with a gray fox neck-piece and a silver mesh bag was still looped about one of her wrists. In the purse were four ten-dollar bills and some silver, showing conclusively that robbery was not the motive for the crime.

The authorities are checking up the girl's movements on the day before her death, and an arrest is promised within twenty-four hours.

"U'm?" I remarked, laying down the paper.

"U'm?" he mocked. "May the devil's choicest imps fly away with your 'u'ms', Friend Trowbridge. Come, get the car; we must be off."

"Off where?"

"Beard of a small blue pig, where, indeed, but to the spot where this so unfortunate girl's dead corpse was discovered?" Delay not, we must utilize what little light remains!"

The bunker where poor Lillian Conover's broken body had been found was a banked sand-trap in the golf course about twenty-five yards from the highway. Throngs of

morbidly curious sightseers had trampled the smoothly kept fairways all day, brazenly defying the "Private Property — No Trespassing" signs with which the links were posted.

To my surprise, de Grandin showed little annoyance at the multitude of footprints about, but turned at once to the business of surveying the terrain. After half an hour's crawling back and forth across the turf, he rose and dusted his trouser knees with a satisfied sigh.

"*Succès!*" he exclaimed, raising his hand, thumb and forefinger clasped together on something which reflected the last rays of the sinking sun with an ominous red glow. "Behold, *mon ami*, I have found it; it is even as I suspected."

Looking closely, I saw he held a red bead, about the size of a small hazelnut, the exact duplicate of the little globule Haroldine Arkright had discovered in her reticule.

"Well?" I asked.

"*Barbe d'un lièvre*, yes; it is very well, indeed," he assented with a vigorous nod. "I was certain I should find it here, but had I not, I should have been greatly worried. Let us return, good friend; our quest is done."

I knew better than to question him as we drove slowly home; but my ears were open wide for any chance remark he might drop. However, he vouchsafed no comment till we reached home; then he hurried to the study and put an urgent call through to the Arkright mansion. Five minutes later he joined me in the library, a smile of satisfaction on his lips. "It is as I thought," he announced. "Mademoiselle Haroldine went shopping yesterday afternoon and the unfortunate Conover girl picked her pocket in the store. Forty dollars was stolen — forty dollars *and a red bead!*"

"She told you this?" I asked. "Why—"

"*Non, non*," he shook his head. "She did tell me of the forty dollars, yes; the red bead's loss I already knew. Recall, my friend, how was it the poor dead one was dressed, according to the paper?"

"Er—"

"*Précisément*. Her costume was a cheap copy, a caricature, if you please, of the smart ensemble affected by Mademoiselle Haroldine. Poor creature, she plied her pitiful trade of pocket-picking once too often, removed the contents of Haroldine's purse, including the sign of vengeance which had been put there, *le bon Dieu* knows how, and walked forth to her doom. Those who watched for a gray-clad woman with the fatal red ball seized upon her and called down their winds of destruction, even as they did upon the camp of Monsieur Arkright in the mountains of Tibet long years ago. Yes, it is undoubtedly so."

"Do you think they'll try again?" I asked. "They've already muffed things twice, and—"

"And, as your proverb has it, the third time is the charm," he cut in. "Yes, my friend, they will doubtlessly try again, and again, until they have worked their will, or been diverted. We must bend our energies toward the latter

consummation.

“But that’s impossible!” I returned. “If those lamas are powerful enough to seek their victims out in France, England and this country and kill them, there’s not much chance for the Arkrights in flight, and it’s hardly likely we’ll be able to argue them out of their determination to exact payment for the theft of their—”

“Zut!” he interrupted with a smile. “You do talk much but say little, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I think it highly probable we shall convince the fish-faced gentlemen from Tibet they have more to gain by foregoing their vengeance than by collecting their debt.”

4

Harrisonville’s newest citizen had delayed her debut with truly feminine capriciousness, and my vigil at City Hospital had been long and nerve-racking. Half an hour before I had resorted to the Weigand-Martin method of ending the performance, and, shaking with nervous reaction, took the red, wrinkled and astonishingly vocal morsel of humanity from the nurse’s hands and laid it in its mother’s arms; then, nearer exhaustion than I cared to admit, set out for home and bed.

A rivulet of light trickled under the study door and the murmur of voices mingled with the acrid aroma of de Grandin’s cigarette came to me as I let myself in the front door. “*Eh bien*, my friend,” the little Frenchman was asserting, “I damn realize that he who sups with the devil must have a long spoon; therefore I have requested your so invaluable advice.

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*,” his uncannily sharp ears recognized my tread as I stepped softly into the hall, “may we trespass on your time a moment? It is of interest.”

With a sigh of regret for my lost sleep I put my obstetrical kit on a chair and pushed open the study door.

Opposite de Grandin was seated a figure which might have been the original of the queer little manikins with which Chinese ivory-carvers love to ornament their work. Hardly more than five feet tall, his girth was so great that he seemed to overflow the confines of the armchair in which he lounged. His head, almost totally void of hair, was nearly globular in shape, and the smooth, hairless skin seemed stretched drum-tight over the fat with which his skull was generously upholstered. Cheeks plump to the point of puffiness almost forced his oblique eyes shut; yet, though his eyes could scarcely be seen, it required no deep intuition to know that they always saw. Between his broad, flat nose and a succession of chins was set, incongruously a small, sensitive mouth, full-lipped but mobile, and drooping at the corners in a sort of perpetual sad smile.

“Dr. Feng,” de Grandin introduced, “this is my very good friend, Dr. Trowbridge. Trowbridge, my friend, this is Dr.

Feng Yuin-han, whose wisdom is about to enable us to foil the machinations of those wicked ones who threaten Made-moiselle Haroldine. Proceed, if you please, *cher ami*,” he motioned the fat little Chinaman to continue the remark he had cut short to acknowledge the introduction.

“It is rather difficult to explain,” the visitor returned in a soft, unaccented voice, “but if we stop to remember that the bird stands midway between the reptile and the mammal we may perhaps understand why it is that the cock’s blood is most acceptable to those elemental forces which my unfortunate superstitious countrymen seek to propitiate in their temples. These malignant influences were undoubtedly potent in the days we refer to as the age of reptiles, and it may be the cock’s lineal descent from the pterodactyl gives his blood the quality of possessing certain emanations soothing to the tempest spirits. In any event, I think you would be well advised to employ such blood in your protective experiments.

“And the ashes?” de Grandin put in eagerly.

“Those I can procure for you by noon tomorrow. Camphor wood is something of a rarity here, but I can obtain enough for your purpose, I am sure.”

“*Bon, très bon!*” the Frenchman exclaimed delightedly. “If those camel-faces will but have the consideration to wait our preparations, I damn think we shall tender them the party of surprise. Yes. *Parbleu*, we shall astonish them!

Shortly after noon the following day an asthmatic Ford delivery wagon bearing the picture of a crowing cockerel and the legend

P. GRASSO
Vendita di Pollame Vivi

on its weatherworn leatherette sides drew up before the house, and an Italian youth in badly soiled corduroys and with a permanent expression indicative of some secret sorrow climbed lugubriously from the driver’s seat, took a covered two-gallon can, obviously originally intended as a container for Quick’s Grade A Lard, from the interior of the vehicle and advanced toward the front porch.

“Docta de Grandin ’ere?” he demanded as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, answered his ring.

“No, he ain’t,” the indignant Nora informed him, “an’ if he wuz, ’tis at th’ back door th’ likes o’ you should be inquirin’ fer ’im!”

The descendant of the Cæsars was in no mood for argument. “You taka dissa bucket an’ tella heem I breeg it — Pete Grasso,” he returned, thrusting the lard tin into the scandalized housekeeper’s hands. “You tella heem I sella da han, I sella da roosta, too, an’ I keela heem w’an my customers ask for it; but I no lika for sella da blood. No, *santissimo Dio*, not me! *Perchè il sangue è la vita* — how you say? Da blood, he are da life; I not lika for carry heem aroun’.”

"Howly Mither, is it blood ye're afther givin' me ter hold onto?" exclaimed Nora in rising horror. "Ye murtherin' dago, come back 'ere an' take yer divilish—"

But P. Grasso, dealer in live poultry, had cranked his decrepit flivver into a state of agitated life and set off down the street, oblivious of the choice insults which Mrs. McGinnis sent in pursuit of him.

"Sure, Dr. Trowbridge, sor," she confided as she entered the consulting-room, the lard tin held at arm's length, "'tis th' fine gentleman Dr. de Grandin is entirely; but he do be afther doin' some crazy things at times. Wud ye be afther takin' charge o' this mess o' blood fer him? 'Tis meself as wouldn't touch it wid a fifty-foot pole, so I wouldn't, once I've got it out o' me hands!"

"Well," I laughed as I espied a trim little figure turning into my front yard, "here he comes now. You can tell him your opinion of his practises if you want."

"Ah, Docthor, darlin', ye know I'd niver have th' heart to scold 'im," she confessed with a shamefaced grin. "Sure, he's th'—"

The sudden hysterical cachinnation of the office telephone bell cut through her words, and I turned to the shrilling instrument.

For a moment there was no response to my rather impatient "Hello?"; then dimly, as one entering a darkened room slowly begins to descry objects about him, I made out the hoarse, rale-like rasp of deep-drawn, irregular breathing.

"Hello?" I repeated, more sharply.

"Dr. Trowbridge," a low, almost breathless feminine voice whispered over the wire, "this is Haroldine Arkright. Can you come right over with Dr. de Grandin? Right away? Please. It — it's *here!*"

"Right away!" I called back, and wheeled about, almost colliding with the little Frenchman, who had been listening over my shoulder.

"Quick, speed, haste!" he cried, as I related her message. "We must rush, we must hurry, we must fly, my friend! There is not a second to lose!"

As I charged down the hall and across the porch to my waiting car he stopped long enough to seize the lard tin from beside my desk and two bulky paper parcels from a hall chair, then almost trod on my heels, in his haste to enter the motor.

5

"Not here, *Monsieur*, if you please," de Grandin ordered as he surveyed the living-room where Arkright and his daughter awaited us. "Is there no room without furniture, where we can meet the foeman face to face? I would fight over a flat terrain, if possible."

"There's a vacant bedroom on the next floor," Arkright replied, "but—"

"No buts, if you please; let us ascend at once,

immediately, right away!" the Frenchman interrupted. "Oh, make haste, my friends! Your lives depend upon it, I do assure you!"

About the floor of the empty room de Grandin traced a circle of chicken's blood, painting a two-inch-wide ruddy border on the bare boards, and inside the outer circle he drew another, forcing Haroldine and her father within it. Then, with a bit of rag, he wiped a break in the outside line, and opening one of his paper parcels proceeded to scatter a thin layer of soft, white wood-ashes over the boards between the two circles.

"Now, *mon vieux*, if you will assist," he turned to me, ripping open the second package and bringing to light a tin squirt-gun of the sort used to spray insecticide about a room infested with mosquitoes.

Dipping the nozzle of the syringe into the blood-filled lard tin, he worked the plunger back and forth a moment, then handed the contrivance to me. "Do you stand at my left," he commanded, "and should you see footprints in the ashes, spray the fowl's blood through the air above them. Remember, my friend, it is most important that you act with speed."

"Footprints in the ashes—" I began incredulously, wondering if he had lost his senses, but a sudden current of glacial air sweeping through the room chilled me into silence.

"Ah! of the beautiful form is *Mademoiselle*, and who was I to know that cold wind of Tibetan devils would display it even more than this exquisite *robe d'Orient*?" said de Grandin.

Clad in a wondrous something, she explained fright had so numbed her that dressing had been impossible.

"When did you first know they were here?" de Grandin whispered, turning his head momentarily toward the trembling couple inside the inner circle, then darting a watchful glance about the room as though he looked for an invisible enemy to materialize from the air.

"I found the horrible red ball in my bath," Haroldine replied in a low, trembling whisper. "I screamed when I saw it, and Daddy got up to come to me, and there was one of them under his ash-tray; so I telephoned your house right away, and—"

"*S-s-st!*" the Frenchman's sibilant warning cut her short. "*Garde à vous*, Friend Trowbridge! *Fixe!*" As though drawing a saber from its scabbard he whipped the keen steel sword blade from his walking-stick and swished it whiplike through the air. "The cry is still '*On ne passe pas!*' my friends!"

There was the fluttering of the tiny breeze along the bedroom floor, not like a breeze from outside, but an eery, tentative sort of wind, a wind which trickled lightly over the doorsill, rose to a blast, paused a moment in reconnaissance, then crept forward experimentally, as though testing the

strength of our defenses.

A light, pit-pattering noise, as though an invisible mouse were circling the room, sounded from the shadows; then, to my horrified amazement, there appeared the print of a broad, naked foot in the film of ashes de Grandin had spread upon the floor!

Wave on wave of goose-flesh rose on my arms and along my neck as I watched the first print followed by a second, for there was no body above them, no sign nor trace of any alien presence in the place; only, as the keys of a mechanical piano are depressed as the strings respond to the notes of the reeling record, the smooth coating of ashes gave token of the onward march of some invisible thing.

“Quick, my friend, shoot where you see the prints!” de Grandin cried in a shrill, excited voice, and I thrust the plunger of my pump home, sending out a shower of ruddy spray.

As invisible ink takes form when the paper is held before a flame, there was suddenly outlined in the empty air before us the visage of—

“*Sapristi!* ’Tis Yama himself, King of Hell! God of Death! *Holà, mon brave,*” de Grandin called almost jocularly as the vision took form wherever the rain of fowl’s blood struck, “it seems we meet face to face, though you expected it not. *Nom d’un porc,* is this the courtesy of your country? You seem not overjoyed to meet me.

“Lower, Friend Trowbridge,” he called from the corner of his mouth, keeping wary eyes fixed upon the visitant, “aim for his legs; there is a trick I wish to show him.”

Obediently, I aimed the syringe at the footless footprints in the ashes, and a pair of broad, naked feet sprang suddenly into view.

“*Bien,*” the Frenchman commended, then with a sudden forward thrust of his foot engaged the masked Mongolian’s ankle in a grapevine twist and sent the fellow sprawling to the floor. The blue and gold horror that was the face of Yama came off, disclosing a leering, slant-eyed lama.

“Now, *Monsieur,*” de Grandin remarked, placing his sword-point against the other’s throat directly above the palpitating jugular vein, “I damn think perhaps you will listen to reason, *hein?*”

The felled man gazed malignantly into his conqueror’s face, but neither terror nor surrender showed in his sullen eyes.

“*Morbleu,* he is a brave savage, this one,” de Grandin muttered, then lapsed into a wailing, singsong speech the like of which I had never heard.

A look of incredulous disbelief, then of interest, finally of amazed delight, spread over the copper-colored features of the fallen man as the little Frenchman progressed. Finally he answered with one or two coughing ejaculations, and at a sign from de Grandin rose to his feet and stood with his hands lifted above his head.

“Monsieur Arkright,” the Frenchman called without taking his eyes from his captive, “have the goodness to fetch the *Pi Yü* Stone without delay. I have made a treaty with this emissary of the lamas. If you return his treasure to him at once he will repair forthwith to his lamasery and trouble you and yours no more.”

“But what about my wife, and my children these fiends killed?” Arkright expostulated. “Are they to go scot-free? How do I know they’ll keep their word? I’m damned if I’ll return the *Pi Yü!*”

“You will most certainly be killed if you do not,” de Grandin returned coolly. “As to your damnation, I am a sinful man, and do not presume to pronounce judgment on you, though I fear the worst unless you mend your morals. Come, will you return this man his property, or do I release him and bid him do his worst?”

Muttering imprecations, Arkright stepped across the barrier of blood, left the room and returned in a few minutes with a small parcel wrapped in what appeared to be thin plates of gold.

De Grandin took it from his hand and presented it to the Tibetan with a ceremonious bow.

“*Ki lao yeh hsieh ti to lo,*” the yellow man pressed his clasped hands to his breast and bowed nearly double to the Frenchman.

“*Parbleu,* yes, and Dr. Trowbridge, too,” my little friend returned, indicating me with a wave of his hand.

The Tibetan bent ceremoniously toward me as de Grandin added, “*Ch’i kan.*”

“What did he say?” I demanded, returning the Asiatic’s salute.

“He says, ‘The honorable, illustrious sir has my heartfelt thanks,’ or words to that effect, and I insist that he say the same of you, my friend,” de Grandin returned. “Name of a small green pig, I do desire that he understand there are two honorable men in the room besides himself.

“*En avant, mon brave,*” he motioned the Tibetan toward the door with his sword, then lowered his point with a flourish, saluting the Arkrights with military punctilio.

“*Mademoiselle Haroldine,*” he said, “it is a great pleasure to have served you. May your approaching marriage be a most happy one.

“Monsieur Arkright, I have saved your life, and, though against your will, restored your honor. It is true you have lost your gold, but self-respect is a more precious thing. Next time you desire to steal, permit that I suggest you select a less vengeful victim than a Tibetan brotherhood. *Parbleu,* those savages they have no sense of humor at all! When a man robs them, they take it with the worst possible grace.”

“*Pipe d’un chameau*” — Jules de Grandin brushed an imaginary fleck of dust from the sleeve of his dinner jacket

and refilled his liqueur glass — “it has been a most satisfactory day, Friend Trowbridge. Our experiment was one grand, unqualified success; we have restored stolen property to its rightful owners, and I have told that Monsieur Arkright what I think of him.”

“U’ m,” I murmured. “I suppose it’s all perfectly clear to you, but I’m still in the dark about it all.”

“Perfectly,” he agreed with one of his quick, elfin smiles. “Howeverly, that can be remedied. Attend me, if you please:

“When first we interviewed Mademoiselle Haroldine and her father, I smelt the odor of Tibet in this so strange business. Those red beads, they could have come from but one bit of jewelry, and that was the rosary of a Buddhist monk of Tibet. Yes. Now, in the course of my travels in that devil-infested land, I had seen those old lamas do their devil-dances and command the elements to obey their summons and wreak vengeance on their enemies. ‘Very well,’ I tell me, ‘if this be a case of lamas’ magic, we must devise magic which will counteract it.’

“‘Of course,’ I agree with me. ‘For every ill there is a remedy. Men living in the lowlands know cures for malaria; those who inhabit the peaks know the cure for mountain fever. They must do so, or they die. Very well, is it not highly probable that the Mongolian people have their own safeguards against these mountain devils? If it were not so, would not Tibet completely dominate all China?’

“‘You have right,’ I compliment me, ‘but whom shall we call on for aid?’

“Thereupon I remember that my old friend, Dr. Feng Yuin-han, whom I have known at the Sorbonne, is at present residing in New York, and it is to him I send my message for assistance. *Parbleu*, when he comes he is as full of wisdom as a college professor attempts to appear! He tells me much in our nighttime interview before you arrive from your work of increasing the population. I learn from him, for instance, that when these old magicians of the mountains practise their devil’s art, they automatically limit their powers. Invisible they may become, yes; but while invisible, they may not overstep a pool, puddle or drop of chicken blood. For some strange reason, such blood makes a barrier which they can not pass and across which they can not hurl a missile nor send their destroying winds or devastating lightning-flashes. Further, if chicken blood be cast upon them their invisibility at once melts away, and while they are in the process of becoming visible in such circumstances their physical strength is greatly reduced. One man of normal lustiness would be a match for fifty of them half

visible, half unseen because of fresh fowl’s blood splashed on them.

“*Voilà* I have my grand strategy of defense already mapped out for me. From the excellent Pierre Grasso I buy much fresh chicken blood, and from Dr. Feng I obtain the ashes of the mystic camphor tree. The blood I spread around in an almost-circle, that our enemy may attack us from one side only, and inside the outer stockade of gore I scatter camphor wood ashes that his footprints may become visible and betray his position to us. Then, inside our outer ramparts, I draw a second complete circle of blood which the enemy can not penetrate at all, so that Monsieur Arkright, but most of all his so charming daughter, may be safe. Then I wait.

“Presently comes the foe. He circles our first line of defense, finds the break I have purposely left, and walks into our trap. In the camphor wood ashes his all-invisible feet leave visible footprints to warn of his approach.

“With your aid, then, I do spray him with the blood as soon as his footprints betray him, and make him visible so that I may slay him at my good convenience. But he are no match for me. *Non*, Jules de Grandin would not call it the sport to kill such as he; it would not be fair. Besides, is there not much to be said on his side? I think so.

“It was the cupidity of Monsieur Arkright and no other thing which brought death upon his wife and children. We have no way of telling that the identical man whom I have overthrown murdered those unfortunate ones, and it is not just to take his life for his fellows’ crimes. As for legal justice, what court would listen believingly to our story? *Cordieu*, to relate what we have seen these last few days to the ordinary lawyer would be little better than confessing ourselves mad or infatuated with too much of the so execrable liquor which your prosperous bootleggers supply. Me, I have no wish to be thought a fool.

“Therefore, I say to me, ‘It is best that we call this battle a draw. Let us give back to the men of the mountains that which is theirs and take their promise that they will no longer pursue Monsieur Arkright and Mademoiselle Haroldine. Let there be no more beads from the Devil’s rosary scattered across their path.’

“Very good. I make the equal bargain with the Tibetan; his property is returned to him and—

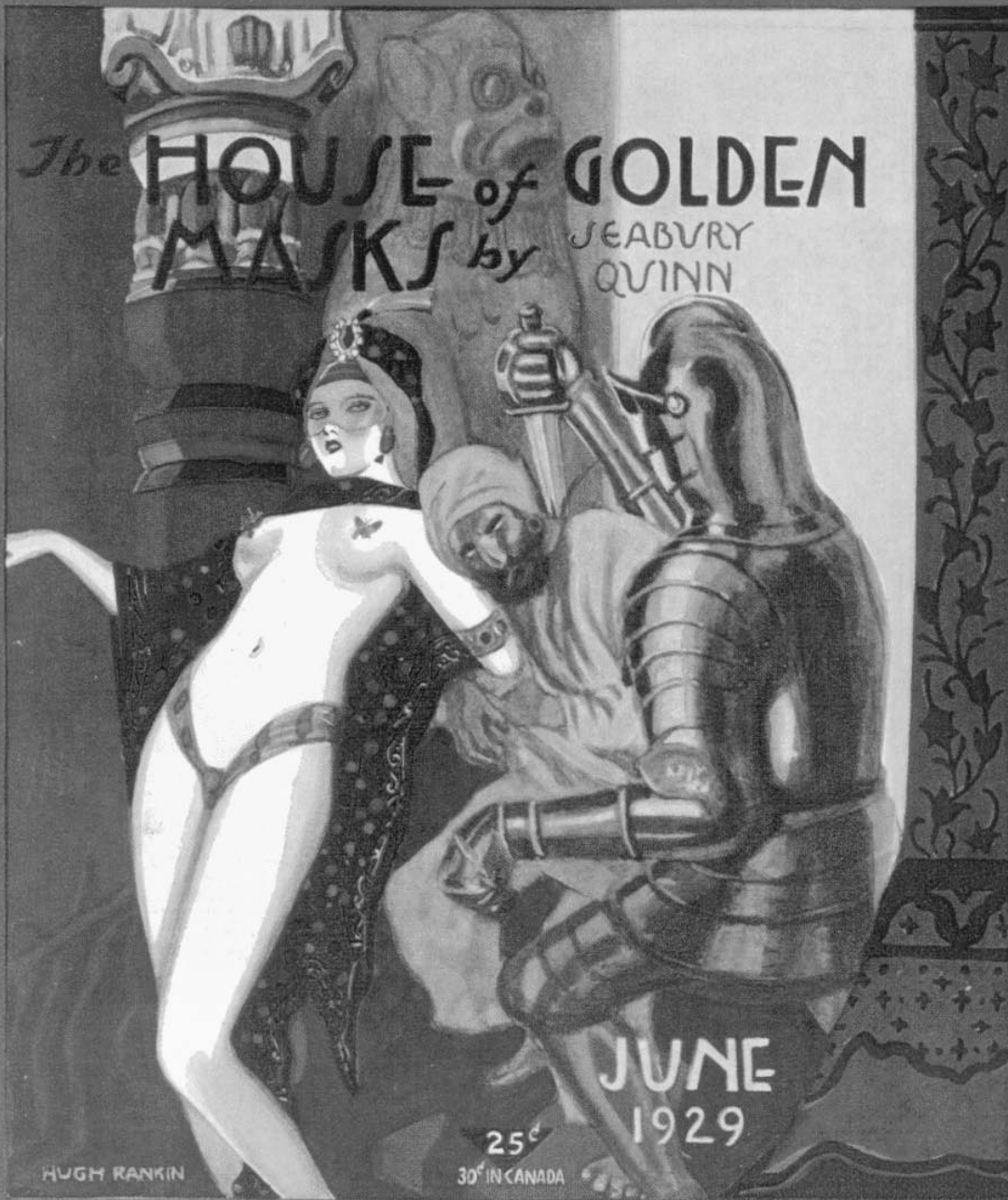
“My friend, I suffer!”

“Eh?” I exclaimed, shocked at the tragic face he turned to me.

“*Nom d’un canon*, yes; my glass is empty again!”

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



The **HOUSE of GOLDEN MASKS** by *JEABURY QUINN*

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HUGH RANKIN

The House of Golden Masks

“AN’ SO, Dr. de Grandin, sor,” Detective Sergeant Costello concluded with a pitying sidelong glance at his companion, “if there’s annything ye can do for th’ pore lad, — ’tis meself that’ll be grateful to ye for doin’ it. Faith, if sumpin like this had happened to me whilst I was a-courtin’ Maggie, I’d ’a’ been a dead corpse from worry in less time than this pore felley’s been sufferin’.

“Th’ chief won’t raise his hand in th’ matter wid th’ coroner’s verdict starin’ us in th’ face, an’ much as I’d like to do sumpin for th’ boy, me hands is tied tighter’n th’ neck of a sack. But with you, now, ’tis a different matter entirely. Meself, I’m inclined to agree with th’ chief an’ think th’ pore gur-rl’s dead as a herring, but if there’s sumpin in th’ case th’ rest of us can’t see, sure, ’tis Dr. Jools de Grandin can spot it quicker than a hungry tom-cat smells a rat!”

Jules de Grandin turned his quick, birdlike glance from the big, red-headed Irishman to the slender, white-faced young man seated beside him. What makes you assume your beloved survives, *Monsieur*?” he asked. “If the jury of the coroner returned a verdict of suicide—”

“But, I tell you, sir, the jury didn’t know what they were talking about!”

Young Everett Wilberding rose from his chair and faced the little Frenchman, his knuckles showing white with the intensity of his grip on the table edge. “My Ewell *didn’t* commit suicide. She didn’t kill herself, neither did Mazie. You *must* believe that, sir!”

Resuming his seat, he fought back to comparative calm as he laced his fingers together nervously. “Last Thursday night Ewell and I were going to a dance out at the country club. My friend, Bill Stimpson, was to take Mazie, Ewell’s twin sister. The girls had been out visiting an aunt and uncle at Reynoldstown, and were to meet us at Monmouth Junction, then drive out to the club in Ewell’s flivver.

“The girls took their party clothes out to Reynoldstown with them, and were to dress before leaving to meet us. They were due at the Junction at nine o’clock, but Ewell was hardly ever on time, so I thought nothing of it when they failed to show up at half-past. But when ten o’clock came, with no sign of the girls, we began to think they must have had a blow-out or engine trouble. At half-past ten I went to the drug store and ‘phoned the girls’ uncle at Reynoldstown, only to be told they had left at a quarter past eight — in plenty of time to reach the junction by nine, even if they had bad going. When I heard that I began to worry sure enough. By eleven o’clock I was fit to be tied.

“Bill was getting worried, too, but thought that one of

’em might have been taken ill and that they’d rushed right to Harrisonville without coming through the Junction, so we ‘phoned their house here. Their folks didn’t know any more than we did.

“We caught the next bus to Harrisonville, and went right up to the Eatons’. When nothing was heard of the girls by four the next morning, Mr. Eaton notified the police.”

“U’m?” de Grandin nodded, slowly. “Proceed, if you please, young *Monsieur*.”

“The searching parties didn’t find a trace of the girls till next day about noon,” young Wilberding answered; “then a State Trooper came on Ewell’s Ford smashed almost out of shape against a tree half a mile or more from the river, but no sign of blood anywhere around. A little later a couple of hunters found Ewell’s party dress, stockings and slippers on the rocks above Shaminee Falls. Mazie—”

“They found th’ pore child’s body up agin th’ grilles leadin’ to th’ turbine intakes o’ Pierce’s Mills next day sor,” Costello put in softly.

“Yes, they did,” Wilberding agreed, “and Mazie was *wearing* her dance frock — what was left of it. Why didn’t Ewell jump in the falls with hers on, too, if Mazie did? But *Mazie didn’t!*”

Sergeant Costello shook his head sadly. “Th’ coroner’s jury—” he began, as though reasoning with a stubborn child, but the boy interrupted angrily:

“Oh, damn the coroners jury! See here, sir” — he turned to de Grandin as if for confirmation — “you’re a physician and know all about such things. What d’y say to this? Mazie’s body was washed through the rapids above Shaminee Falls and was terribly mauled against the rocks as it came down, so badly disfigured that only the remnants of her clothes made identification possible. No one could say definitely whether she’d been wounded before she went into the water or not; but *she wasn’t drowned!*”

“Eh, what is it you say?” de Grandin straightened in his chair, his level, unwinking stare boring into the young man’s troubled eyes. “Continue, if you please, *Monsieur*; I am interested.”

“I mean just what I say,” the other returned. “They didn’t find a half-teacupful of water in her lungs at the autopsy; besides, this is March, and the water’s almost ice-cold — yet they found her *floating* next morning; if—”

“*Barbe d’un chauve canard, yes!*” de Grandin exclaimed. “*Tu parles, mon garçon!* In temperature such as this it would be days — weeks, perhaps — before putrefaction had advanced enough to form sufficient gas to force the body to

the surface. But of course, it was the air in her lungs which buoyed her up. *Morbleu*, I think you have right, my friend; undoubtedly the poor one was dead before she touched the water!"

"Aw, Doc, ye don't mean to say *you're* fallin' for that theory?" Costello protested. "It's true she mightn't 'a' been drowned, but th' coroner said death was due to shock induced by—"

De Grandin waved him aside impatiently, keeping his gaze fixed intently on Everett. "Do you know any reason she might have had for self-destruction, *mon vieux*?" he demanded.

"No, sir — none whatever. She and Bill were secretly married at Hacketstown last Christmas Eve. They'd been keeping it dark till Bill got his promotion — it came through last week, and they were going to tell the world last Sunday. You see, they couldn't have concealed it much longer."

"Ah?" de Grandin's narrow brows elevated slightly. "And they were happy together?"

"Yes, sir! You never saw a spoonier couple in your life. Can you imagine—"

"*Tiens*, my friend," the Frenchman interrupted with one of his quick, elfish grins, "you would be surprised at that which I can imagine. Howeverly, let us consider facts, not imaginings." Rising, he began pacing the floor, ticking off his data on his fingers as he marched. "Let us make a *précis*:

"Here we have two young women, one in love, though married — the other in love and affianced. They fail to keep an appointment; it is not till the day following that their car is discovered, and it is found in such position as to indicate a wreck, yet nowhere near it is sign of injury to its passengers. *Alors*, what do we find? The frock of one of the young ladies, neatly folded beside her shoes, and stockings upon a rock near the Shaminee Falls. In the river, some miles below, next day is found the floating corpse of the other girl — and the circumstances point conclusively that she did not drown. What now? The mishap to the car occurred a half-mile from the river, yet the young women were able to walk to the stream where one of them cast herself in fully clothed; the other is supposed to have disrobed before immersing herself.

"*Non, non*, my friends, the facts, they do not make sense. Women kill themselves for good reasons, for bad reasons, and for no reasons at all, but they do it characteristically. Me, I have seen ropes wherewith despondent females have strangled themselves, and they have wrapped silken scarves about the rough hemp that it might not bruise their tender necks. *Tiens*, would a delicately nurtured girl strip herself to the rude March winds before plunging into the water? I think not."

"So do I," rumbled Costello's heavy voice in agreement. "Th' way you put it, Dr. de Grandin, sor, makes th' case

crazier than ever. Faith, there's no sense to it from beginin' to end. I think we'd better be callin' it a day an' acceptin' th' coroner's decision."

"*Zut!*" de Grandin returned with a smile. "Are you then so poor a poker player, *mon sergent*? Have you not learned the game is never over until the play is done? Me, I shall give this matter my personal attention. I am interested, I am fascinated, I am intrigued.

"To your home, Monsieur Wilberding," he ordered. "When I have some word for you, you will hear from me. Meantime do not despair."

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," de Grandin greeted next morning when I joined him in the dining-groom, "I am perplexed; but yes, I am greatly puzzled; I am mystified. Something has occurred since last night which may put a different face upon all. Consider, if you please: Half an hour ago I received a telephone call from the good Costello. He tells me three more young women have disappeared in a manner so similar to that of Monsieur Wilberding's sweetheart as to make it more than mere coincident. At the residence of one *Monsieur Mason*, who resides in West Fells, there was held a meeting of the sorority to which his daughter belongs. Many young women attended. Three, *Mesdemoiselles* Weaver, Damroche and Hornbury, drove out in the car of *Mademoiselle* Weaver. They left the Mason house sometime after midnight. At six o'clock this morning they had not returned home. Their alarmed parents notified the police, and" — he paused in his restless pacing, halting directly before me as he continued — "a state dragoon discovered the motor in which they rode lying on its side, mired in the swamps beside the Albemarle Road, but of the young women no trace could be found. Figure to yourself, my friend. What do you make of it?"

"Why—" I began, but the shrill stutter of the office 'phone cut my reply in two.

"*Allo?*" de Grandin called into the transmitter. "Yes, Sergeant, it is I — *grand Diable!* Another? You do not tell me so!"

To me be almost shouted as he slammed the receiver back into its hook: "Do you hear, my friend? It is another! Sarah Thompford, an employee of *Braunstein frères'* department store, left her work at half-past five last evening, and has been seen no more. But her hat and cloak were found upon the piers at the waterfront ten little minutes ago. *Nom d'un choufleur*, I am vexed! These disappearances are becoming epidemic. Either the young women of this city have developed a sudden mania for doing away with themselves or some evil person attempts to make a monkey of Jules de Grandin. In either case, my friend, I am aroused. *Mordieu*, we shall see who shall laugh in whose face before this business of the fool is concluded!"

“What are you going to do?” I asked, striving to keep a straight face.

“Do?” he echoed. “Do? *Parbleu*, I shall investigate, I shall examine every clue, I shall leave no stone unturned, but” — he sobered into sudden practicality as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, entered the dining-room with a tray of golden-brown waffles — “first I shall eat breakfast. One can accomplish little on an empty stomach.”

A widespread, though fortunately mild, epidemic of influenza kept me busy in office and on my rounds all day. Rainy, fog-bound darkness was approaching as I turned toward home and dinner with a profound sigh of thankfulness that the day’s work was done, only to encounter fresh disappointment.

“Trowbridge, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*,” an excited voice hailed as I was waiting for the crosstown traffic lights to change and let me pursue my homeward way, “draw to the curb; come with me — I have important matters to communicate!” Swathed from knees to neck in a waterproof leather jacket, his Homburg hat pulled rakishly down over his right eye and a cigarette glowing between his lips, Jules de Grandin stood at the curb, his little blue eyes dancing with excited elation.

“Name of a little blue man!” he swore delightedly as I parked my motor and joined him on the sidewalk; “it is a fortunate chance, this meeting; I was about to telephone the office in hopes you had returned. Attend me, my friend, I have twisted my hand in the tail of something of importance!”

Seizing my elbow with a proprietary grip, he guided me toward the illuminated entrance of a café noted for the excellence of its food and its contempt of the XVIIIth Amendment, chuckling with suppressed delight at every step.

“The young Monsieur Wilberding was undoubtedly right in his surmises,” he confided as we found places at one of the small tables and he gave an order to the waiter. “*Parbleu*, what he lacked in opportunity of observation he made up by the prescience of affection,” he continued, “for there can be no doubt that Madame Mazie was the victim of murder. *Regardez-vous*: At the police laboratories, kindly placed at my disposal through the offices of the excellent Sergeant Costello, I examined the tattered remnants of the frock they took from the poor girl’s body when they fished her from the river, and I did discover what the coroner, cocksure of his suicide theory, had completely overlooked — a small, so tiny stain. Hardly darker than the original pink of the fabric it was, but sufficient to rouse my suspicions. *Alors*, I proceeded to shred the chiffon and make the benzidine test. You know it? No?”

“Very good. A few threads from the stained area of the

dress I placed upon a piece of white filter paper; thereafter I compounded a ten percent solution of benzidine in glacial acetic acid and mixed one part of this with ten parts of hydrogen peroxide. Next, with a pipette I proceeded to apply one little, so tiny drop of the solution to the threads of silk, and behold! a faint blue color manifested itself in the stained silken threads and spread out on the white filter paper. *Voilà*, that the stain of my suspicion had been caused by blood was no longer to be doubted!”

“But mightn’t this bloodstain have been caused by an injury to Mazie’s body as it washed over the falls?” I objected.

“*Ah bah*,” he returned. “*You* ask that, Friend Trowbridge? *Pardieu*, I had looked for better sense in your head. Consider the facts: Should you cut your finger, then immediately submerge it in a basin of water, would any trace of blood adhere to it? But no. Conversely, should you incise the skin and permit even one little drop of blood to gather at the wound and to dry there to any extent, the subsequent immersion of the finger in water would not suffice to remove the partly clotted blood altogether. Is it not so?”

“*Très bon*. Had a sharp stone cut poor Madame Mazie, it would undoubtedly have done so after she was dead, in which case there would have been no resultant hemorrhage; but even if a wound had been inflicted while she lived, bethink you of her position — in the rushing water, whirled round and round and over and over, any blood which flowed would instantly have been washed away, leaving no slightest stain on her dress. *Non*, my friend there is but one explanation, and I have found it. Her gown was stained by blood before she was cast into the river. Recall: Did not poor young Monsieur Wilberding inform us the car in which she rode was found a half-mile or more from the river? But certainly. Suppose, then, these girls were waylaid at or near the spot where their car was found, and one or both were done to death. Suppose, again, Madame Mazie’s life-blood flowed from her wound and stained her dress while she was in transit toward the river. In that case her dress would have been so stained that even though the foul miscreants who slew her cast her poor, broken body into the water, there would remain stains for Jules de Grandin to find today. Yes, it is so.

“But wait, my friend, there is more to come. Me, I have been most busy this day. I have run up and down and hither and yon like Satan seeking for lost souls. Out on the Albemarle Road, where the unfortunate Mademoiselle Weaver’s car was discovered this morning, I repaired when I had completed my researches in the city. Many feet had trampled the earth into the semblance of a pig-coop’s floor before I arrived, but *grâce à Dieu*, there still remained that which confirmed my worst suspicions.

“Finding nothing near the spot where the mired car lay, I examined the earth on the other side of the road. There I discovered that which made my hair to rise on end. *Pardieu*, my friend, there is the business of the Fiend himself being done here!

“Leading from the road were three distinct sets of footprints — girl’s footprints, made by small, high-heeled shoes. Far apart they were, showing they had been made by running feet, and all stopped abruptly at the same place.

“Back from the roadway, as you doubtless remember, stands a line of trees. It was at these the foot tracks halted, in each instance ending in two little pointed depressions, set quite close together. They were the marks of girls’ slippers, my friend, and appeared to have been made as the young women stood on tiptoe.

“Now, I ask me, ‘why should three young women leave the motor in which they ride, run from the road, halt on their toes beneath these trees, *and leave no footprints thereafter?*’

“It seems they must have been driven from the road like game in a European preserve at hunting time, then seized by those lying in wait for them among the tree-boughs as they passed beneath,’ I reply. ‘And you are undoubtedly correct’ I answer me.

“Nevertheless, to make my assurance sure, I examined all those trees and all the surrounding land with great injury to my dignity and clothing, but my search was not fruitless; for clinging to a tree-bough above one of the girls’ toe-prints I did find this.” From his pocket he produced a tiny skein of light-brown fiber and passed it across the table to me.

“U’m?” I commented as I examined his find. “What is it?”

“Burlap,” he returned. “You look puzzled, my friend. So did I when first I found it, but subsequent discoveries explained it — explained it all too well. As I have said, there were no footprints to be found around the trees, save those made by the fleeing girls, but, after much examination on my knees, I found three strange trails leading toward the road, away from those trees. Most carefully, with my nose fairly buried in the earth, I did examine those so queer depressions in the moist ground. Too large for human feet they were, yet not deep enough for an animal large enough to make them. At last I was rewarded by finding a bit of cloth-weave pattern in one of them, and then I knew. They were made by men whose feet had been wrapped in many thicknesses of burlap, like the feet of choleric old gentlemen suffering from gout.

“*Nom d’un renard*, but it was clever, almost clever enough to fool Jules de Grandin, but not quite.

“Feet so wrapped make no sound; they leave little or no track, and what track they do leave is not easily recognized as of human origin by the average Western policeman; furthermore, they leave no scent which may be followed by

hounds. However, the miscreants failed in one respect: They forgot Jules de Grandin has traveled the world over on the trail of wickedness, and knows the ways of the East no less than those of the West. In India I have seen such trails left by robbers; today, in this so peaceful State of New Jersey, I recognized the spoor when I saw it. Friend Trowbridge, we are upon the path of villains, assassins, *apaches* who steal women for profit. Yes” — he nodded solemnly — “it is undoubtedly so.”

“But how—” I began, when his suddenly upraised hand cut me short.

Seated in the next booth to that we occupied was a pair of young men who had dined with greater liberality than wisdom. As I started to speak they were joined by a third, scarcely more temperate, who began descanting on the sensational features of a current burlesque show.

“Aw, shut up, how d’ye get that way?” one of the youths demanded scornfully. “Boy, till you’ve been where Harry and I were last night you ain’t been nowhere and you ain’t seen nothin’. Say, d’je ever see the *chonkina?*”

“*Dieu de Dieu!*” de Grandin murmured excitedly even as the other young man replied:

“*Chonkina?* What dye mean, *chonkina?*”

“You’d be surprised,” his friend assured him. “There’s a place out in the country — mighty exclusive place, too — where they’ll let you see something to write home about — if you’re willing to pay the price.”

“I’m game,” the other replied. “What say we go there tonight? If they can show me something I never saw before, I’ll blow the crowd to the best dinner in town.”

“You’re on,” his companions accepted with a laugh, but:

“Quick, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin whispered, “do you go straightway to the desk and settle our bill. I follow.”

In a moment we stood before the cashier’s desk and as I tendered the young woman a bill, the Frenchman suddenly reeled as though in the last stages of drunkenness and began staggering across the room toward the booth where the three sportively inclined youths sat. As he drew abreast of them he gave a drunken lurch and half fell across their table, regaining his balance with the greatest difficulty and pouring forth a flood of profuse apologies.

A few moments later he joined me on the street, all traces of intoxication vanished, but feverish excitement shining in his small blue eyes.

“*C’est glorieux!*” he assured me with a chuckle. “Those three empty-headed young rakes will lead us to our quarry, or I am more mistaken than I think. In my pretended drunkenness, I fell among them and took time to memorize their faces. Also, I heard them make a definite appointment for their trip tonight. Trowbridge, my friend, we shall be there. Do you return home with all speed, bring the pistols, the flashlight and the horn-handled knife which you will

find in my dressing-case, and meet me at police headquarters at precisely a quarter of midnight. I should be glad to accompany you, but there is a very great much for me to accomplish between now and then, and I fear there will be little sleep for Jules de Grandin this night. *Allez*, my friend, we have no time to waste!”

De Grandin had evidently perfected his arrangements by the time I reached headquarters; for a police car was waiting, and we drove in silence, with dimmed lights, through the chill March rain to a lonely point not far from the country club’s golf links, where, at a signal from the little Frenchman, we came to a halt.

“Now, Friend Trowbridge,” he admonished, “we must trust to our own heels, for I have no desire to let our quarry know we approach. Softly, if you please, and say anything you have to say in the lowest of whispers.”

Quietly as an Indian stalking a deer he led the way across the rolling turf of the links, pausing now and again to listen attentively, at length bringing up under a clump of mournful weeping willows bordering the Albemarle Road. “Here we rest till they arrive,” he announced softly, seating himself on the comparatively dry ground beneath a tree and leaning his back against its trunk. “Name of a name, but I should enjoy a cigarette; but” — he raised a shoulder in a resigned shrug — “we must have the self-restraint, even as in the days when we faced the *sale boche* in the trenches. Yes.”

Time passed slowly while we maintained our silent vigil, and I was on the point of open rebellion when a warning ejaculation in my ear and the quick clasp of de Grandin’s hand on my elbow told me something was toward.

Looking through the branches of our shelter, I beheld a long, black motor slipping noiselessly as a shadow down the road, saw it come to a momentary halt beside a copse of laurels some twenty yards away, saw three stealthy figures emerge from the bushes and parley a moment with the chauffeur, then enter the tonneau.

“Ha, they are cautious, these birds of evil,” the Frenchman muttered as he leaped from the shadows of the willows and raised an imperative hand beckoningly.

It was with difficulty I repressed an exclamation of surprise and dismay as a dozen shadowy figures emerged, phantomlike, from the shrubbery bordering the highway.

“Are you there, *mon lieutenant*?” de Grandin called, and I was relieved as an answering hail responded and I realized we were surrounded by a cordon of State Troopers in command of a young but exceedingly businesslike-looking lieutenant.

Motorcycles — two of them equipped with sidecars — were wheeled from their covert in the bushes, and in another moment we were proceeding swiftly and silently in the wake of the vanishing limousine, de Grandin and I

occupying the none too commodious “bathtubs” attached to the troopers’ cycles.

It was a long chase our quarry led us and had our machines been less powerful and less expertly managed we should have been distanced more than once, but the automobile which can throw dust in the faces of the racing-cycles on which New Jersey mounts its highway patrols has not been built, and we were within easy hail of our game as they drew up before the gateway of a high-walled, deserted-looking country estate.

“Now, my lieutenant,” de Grandin asked, “you thoroughly understand the plans?”

“I think so, sir,” the young officer returned as he gathered his force about him with a wave of his hand.

Briefly, as the Frenchman checked off our proposed campaign, the lieutenant outlined the work to his men. “Surround the place,” he ordered, “and lie low. Don’t let anyone see you, and don’t challenge anyone going in, but — nobody comes out without permission. Get me?”

As the troopers assented, he asked, “All set?”

There was a rattle of locks as the constables swung their vicious little carbines up to “speciation arms,” and each man felt the butt of the service revolver and the riot stick swinging at his belt.

“All right, take cover. If you get a signal from the house, rush it. If no signal comes, close in anyhow at the end of two hours. I’ve got a search warrant here” — he patted his blouse pocket — “and we won’t stand any monkey business from the folks inside. Dr. de Grandin’s going in to reconnoiter; he’ll give the signal to charge with his flashlight, or by firing his pistol when he’s ready, but—”

“But you will advance, even though my signal fails,” de Grandin interrupted grimly.

“Right-o,” the other agreed. “Two hours from now — three o’clock — is zero. Here, men, compare your watches with mine; we don’t want to go into action in ragged formation.”

Two husky young troopers bent their backs and boosted de Grandin and me to the rim of the eight-foot brick wall surrounding the grounds. In a moment we had dropped silently to the yard beyond and de Grandin sent back a whispered signal.

Flattening ourselves to the ground we proceeded on hands and knees toward the house, taking advantage of every shrub and bush dotting the grounds, stealing forward in little rushes, then pausing beneath some friendly evergreen to glance cautiously about, listening for any sign or sound of activity from the big, darkened house.

“I’m afraid you’ve brought us out on a fool’s errand, old chap,” I whispered. “If we find anything more heinous than bootlegging here I’ll be surprised but—”

“S-s-sh!” his hissing admonition silenced me. “To the right, my friend, look to the right and tell me what it is you see.”

Obediently, I glanced away from the house, searching the deserted park for some sign of life. There, close to the ground, shone a faint glimmer of light. The glow was stationary, for we watched it for upward of ten minutes before the Frenchman ordered, “Let us investigate, Friend Trowbridge. It may betoken something we should know.”

Swerving our course toward the dim beacon, we moved cautiously forward, and as we approached I grew more and more puzzled. The illumination appeared to rise from the ground, and, as we drew near, it was intercepted for an instant by something which passed between it and us. Again and yet again the glow was obscured with methodical regularity. For a moment I thought it might be some signal system warning the inmate’s of the house of our approach, but as we crawled still nearer my heart began to beat more rapidly, for I realized the light shone from an old-fashioned oil lantern standing on the ground and the momentary interruptions were due to shovelfuls of earth being thrown up from a fairly deep excavation. Presently there was a pause in the digging operations and two objects appeared above the surface about three feet apart — the hands of a man in the act of stretching himself. Assuming he were of average height, the trench in which he stood would be some five feet deep, judging by the distance his hands protruded above its lip.

Circling warily about the workman and his work we were able to get a fairly clear view. The hole was some two feet wide by six feet long, and, as I had already estimated, something like five feet deep.

“What sort of trench usually has those dimensions?” The question crashed through my mind like an unexpected bolt of thunder, and the answer sent tiny ripples of chills through my cheeks and up my arms.

De Grandin’s thought had paralleled mine, for he whispered, “It seems, Friend Trowbridge, that they prepare sepulture for someone. For us, by example? *Cordieu*, if it be so, I can promise them we shall go to it like kings of old, with more than one of them to bear us company in the land of shadows!”

Our course brought the grave-digger into view as we crept about him, and a fiercer, more bloodthirsty scoundrel I had never before had the misfortune to encounter. Taller than the average man by several inches he was, with enormously wide shoulders and long, dangling arms like those of a gorilla. His face was almost black, though plainly not that of a Negro, and his cheeks and chin were adorned by a bristling black beard which glistened in the lantern light with some sort of greasy dressing. Upon his head was a turban of tightly twisted woolen cloth.

“U’ m?” de Grandin murmured quizzically. “A Patan, by the looks of him, Friend Trowbridge, and I think no more of him for it. In upper India they have a saying, ‘Trust a serpent or a tiger, but trust a Patan never,’ and the maxim is approved by centuries of unfortunate experience with gentlemen like the one we see yonder.

“Come, let us make haste for the house. It may be we shall arrive in time to cheat this almost-finished grave of its intended tenant.”

Wriggling snakelike through the rain-drenched grounds, our progress rendered silent by the soft turf, we made a wide detour round the dark-faced gravedigger and approached the big, forbidding mansion through whose close-barred windows no ray of light appeared.

The place seemed in condition to defy a siege as we circled it warily, vainly seeking some means of ingress. At length, when we were on the point of owning defeat and rejoining the troopers, de Grandin came to a halt before an unbarred window letting into a cellar. Unbuttoning his leather topcoat, he produced a folded sheet of flypaper and applied the sticky stuff to the grimy windowpane, smoothed it flat, then struck sharply with his elbow. The window shattered beneath the impact, but the adhesive paper held the pieces firm, and there was no telltale clatter of broken glass as the pane smashed. “One learns more tricks than one when he associates with *les apaches*,” he explained with a grin as he withdrew the flypaper and glass together, laid them on the grass and inserted his hand through the opening, undoing the window-catch. A moment later we had dropped to the cellar and de Grandin was flashing his electric torch inquiringly about.

It was a sort of lumber room into which we had dropped. Bits of discarded furniture, an old rug or two and a pile of miscellaneous junk occupied the place. The stout door at the farther end was secured by an old-fashioned lock, and the first twist of de Grandin’s skeleton key sprung the bolt.

Beyond lay a long, dusty corridor from which a number of doors opened, but from which no stairway ascended. “U’ m?” muttered the Frenchman. “There seems no way of telling where the stairs lie save by looking for them, Friend Trowbridge.” Advancing at random, he inserted his key in the nearest lock and, after a moment’s tentative twisting, was rewarded by the sound of a sharp click as the keeper shot back.

No ray of moonlight filtered through the windows, for they were stopped with heavy wooden shutters. As we paused irresolute, wondering if we had walked into a *cul-de-sac*, a faint, whimpering cry attracted our attention. “*Un petit chat!*” Grandin exclaimed softly. “A poor little pussy-cat; he has been locked in by mistake, no doubt, and ha! *Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu, regardez, mon ami!* Do you,

too, behold it?"

The beam of his questing flashlight swept through the darkness, searching for the feline, but it was no cat the ray flashed on. It was a girl.

She lay on a rough, bedlike contrivance with a net of heavily knotted, coarse rope stretched across its frame where the mattress should have been, and was drawn to fullest compass in the form of a St. Andrew's cross; for leathern thongs knotted to each finger and toe strained tautly, holding hands and feet immovably toward the posts which stood at the four corners of the bed of torment. The knots were cruelly drawn, and even in the momentary flash of the light we saw the thongs were of rawhide, tied and stretched wet, but now dry and pulling the tortured girl's toes and fingers with a fury like that of a rack. Already the flesh about fingers and toe-nails was puffy and impurpled with engorged blood cut off by the vicious cinctures of the tightening strings.

The torment of the constantly shortening thongs and the cruel pressure of the rope-knots on which she lay were enough to drive the girl to madness, but an ultimate refinement had been added to her agony; for the bed on which she stretched was a full eight inches shorter than her height, so that her head hung over the end without support, and she was obliged to hold it up by continued flexion of the neck muscles or let it hang downward, either posture being unendurable for more than a fraction of a minute.

"O Lord," she moaned weakly between swollen lips which had been gashed and bitten till the blood showed on them in ruddy froth, "O dear Lord, take me — take me quickly — I can't stand this; I can't — oh, oh, — o-o-oh!" The prayerful exclamation ended in a half-whispered sob and her anguished head fell limply back and swung pendulously from side to side as consciousness left her.

"*Ohé; la pauvre créature!*" De Grandin leaped forward, unsheathing his knife as he sprang. Thrusting the flashlight into my hand, he slashed the cords from her hands and feet, cutting through each group of five strings with a single slash of his razor-sharp knife, and the thongs hummed and sang like broken banjo strings as they came apart beneath his steel.

As de Grandin worked I took note of the swooning girl. She was slight, almost to the point of emaciation, her ribs and the processes of her wrists and ankles showing whitely against the flesh. For costume she wore a wisp of printed cotton twisted bandeauwise about her bosom, a pair of soiled and torn white-cotton bloomers which terminated in tattered ruffles at her ankles and were held in place at the waist by a gayly dyed cotton scarf secured by a sort of four-in-hand knot in front. A close-wrapped bandanna kerchief swathed her head from brow to nape, covering hair and ears alike, and from the handkerchief's rim almost to the pink of

her upper lip a gilded metal mask obscured her features, leaving only mouth, nose-tip and chin visible.

As de Grandin lifted her from the bed-frame and rested her lolling head against his shoulder, he tugged at the mask, but so firmly was it bound that it resisted his effort.

Again he pulled, more sharply this time, and, as he did so, we noticed a movement at the side of her head beneath the handkerchief-turban. Snatching off the headgear, the Frenchman fumbled for the mask cords, then started back with a low cry of horror and dismay. The mask was not tied, but *wired to her flesh*, two punctures having been made in each ear, one in the lobe, the other in the pinna, and through the raw wounds fine golden wires had been thrust and twisted into loops, so that removal of the mask would necessitate clipping the wire or tearing the tender, doubly pierced ears.

"Oh, the villains, the assassins, the ninety-thousand-times-damned beasts!" de Grandin gritted through his teeth, desisting in his effort to take off the metallic mask. "If ever Satan walked the earth in human guise, I think he lodges within this accursed kennel of hellhounds, Friend Trowbridge, and, *cordieu*, though the monster have as many gullets as the fabled hydra, I shall slit them all for this night's business!"

What more he would have said I do not know, for the fainting girl rolled her head and moaned feebly as she lay in his arms, and he was instantly all solicitude. "Drink this, *ma pauvre*," he commanded, drawing a silver flask from his pocket and pressing it to her pale lips.

She swallowed a bit of the fiery brandy, choked and gasped a little, then lay back against his arm with a weak sigh.

Again he applied the restorative; then: "Who are you, *ma petite*?" he asked gently. "Speak bravely; we are friends."

She shuddered convulsively and whimpered weakly again; then, so faint we could scarcely catch the syllables, "Ewell Eaton," she whispered.

"*Cordieu*, I did know it!" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "*Gloire à Dieu*, we have found you, *ma petite*!"

"The door, Friend Trowbridge — do you stand guard at the portal lest we be surprised. Here' — he snatched a pistol from his pocket and thrust it into my hand — "hesitate not to use it, should occasion arise!"

I took station at the entrance of the torture chamber while de Grandin set about making the half-conscious girl as comfortable as possible. I could hear the murmur of their voices in soft conversation as he worked frantically at her swollen feet and hands, rubbing them with brandy from his flask and massaging her wrists and ankles in an effort to restore circulation, but what they said I could not understand.

I was on the point of leaving my post to join them, for the

likelihood of our being interrupted seemed remote, when it happened. Without so much as a warning creak from without, the door smashed suddenly back on its hinges, flooring me as the kick of a mule might have done, and three men rushed pell-mell into the room. I saw de Grandin snatch frantically at his pistol, heard Ewell Eaton scream despairingly, and half-rose to my feet, weak and giddy with the devastating blow I had received, but determined to use my pistol to best advantage. One of the intruders turned savagely on me, brought the staff of a long, spearlike weapon he carried down upon my head, and caught me a smashing kick on the side of the head as I fell.

“Trowbridge, my friend, are you living — do you survive?” Jules de Grandin’s anxious whisper cut through the darkness surrounding me.

I was lying on my back, wrists and ankles firmly bound, a bump like a goose-egg on my head where the spear-butt had hit me. Through the grimy window of our cellar prison a star or two winked mockingly; otherwise the place was dark as a cave. How long we had lain there I had no way of telling. For all I knew the troopers might have raided the place, arrested the inmates and gone, leaving us in our dungeon. A dozen questions blazed through my mind like lightning-flashes across a summer night as I strove to roll over and ease the pressure of the knots on my crossed wrists.

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, do you live, are you awake, can you hear?” the Frenchman’s murmured query came through the darkness again.

“De Grandin — where are you?” I asked, raising my head, the better to locate his voice.

“*Parbleu*, here I lie, trussed like a capon ready for the spit!” he returned. “They are prodigal with their rope, those assassins. Nevertheless, I think we shall make apes of them all. Roll toward me if you can, my friend, and lie with your hands toward me. *Grâce à Dieu*, neither age nor overeating has dulled my teeth. Come, make haste!”

Followed a slow, dragging sound, punctuated with muttered profanities in mingled French and English as he hitched himself laboriously across the rough cement floor in my direction.

In a few moments I felt the stiffly waxed hairs of his mustache against my wrists and the tightening of my bonds as his small, sharp teeth sank into the cords, severing strand after strand.

Sooner than I had hoped, my hands were free, and after a few seconds, during which I wrung my fingers to restore circulation, I unfastened the ropes binding my feet, then released de Grandin.

“*Morbleu*, at any rate we can move about, even if those *sacré* rogues deprived us of our weapons,” the Frenchman

muttered as he strode up and down our prison. “At least one thing is accomplished — Mademoiselle Ewell is relieved of her torture. Before they beat me unconscious I heard her told tomorrow she would be strangled, but as the Spaniards so sagely remark, ‘tomorrow is another day,’ and I trust we shall have increased hell’s population by that time.

“Have you a match, by any kind of chance?” he added, turning to me.

Searching my pockets, I found a packet of paper matches and passed them over. Striking one, he held it torchwise above his head, surveying our prison. It was a small, cement-floored room, its single window heavily barred and its only article of furniture a large, sheet-iron-sheathed furnace, evidently the building’s auxiliary heating-plant. The door was of stout pine planks, nailed and doweled together so strongly as to defy anything less than a battering-ram; and secured with a modern burglar-proof lock. Plainly, there was no chance of escape that way.

“U’ m?” murmured de Grandin, surveying the old hot-air furnace speculatively. “U’ m-m-m? It may be we shall find use for this, if my boyhood’s agility has not failed me, Friend Trowbridge.”

“Use for that furnace?” I asked incredulously.

“*Mais oui*, why not?” he returned. “Let us see.”

He jerked the heater’s cast-iron door open, thrusting a match inside and looking carefully up the wide, galvanized flues leading to the upper floors. “It is a chance,” he announced, “but the good God knows we take an equal one waiting here. *Au revoir*, my friend, either I return to liberate us or we say good morning in heaven.”

Next instant he had turned his back to the furnace, grasped the iron door-frame at each side, thrust his head and shoulders through the opening and begun worming himself upward toward the flue-mouth.

A faint scraping sounded inside the heater’s interior, then silence broken only by the occasional soft thud of a bit of dislodged soot.

I paced the dungeon in a perfect fever of apprehension. Though de Grandin was slight as a girl, and almost as supple as an eel, I was certain I had seen the last of him, for he would surely be hopelessly caught in the great, dusty pipes, or, if not that, discovered by some of the villainous inmates of the place when he attempted to force himself through a register. His plan of escape was suicide, nothing less.

Click! The strong, jimmy-proof lock snapped back. I braced myself for the reappearance of our jailers, but the Frenchman’s delighted chuckle reassured me.

“*Mordieu*, it was not even so difficult as I had feared,” he announced. “The pipes were large enough to permit my passage without great trouble, and the registers — God be thanked! — were not screwed to the floor. I had but to lift the first I came to from its frame and emerge like a jack-in-

the-box from his case. Yes. Come, let us ascend. There is rheumatism, and other unpleasant things, to be contracted in this cursed cellar.”

Stepping as softly as possible, we traversed a long, unlighted corridor, ascended two flights of winding stairs and came to an upper hallway letting into a large room furnished in a garish East Indian manner and decorated with a number of mediæval sets of mail and a stand of antique arms.

The Frenchman looked about, seeking covert, but there was nothing behind which an underfed cat could hide, much less a man. Finally: “I have it!” he declared, “*Parbleu, c’est joli!*”

Striding across the room he examined the nearest suit of armor and turned to me with a chuckle. “Into it, *mon ami*,” he commanded. “Quick!”

With de Grandin’s help I donned the beavered helmet and adjusted the gorget, cuirass, brassards, cuisses and jamba, finding them a rather snug fit. In five minutes I was completely garbed, and the Frenchman, laughing softly and cursing delightedly; was clambering into another set of mail. When we stood erect against the wall no one who had not seen us put on the armor could have told us from the empty suits of mail which stood at regular intervals about the wall.

From the stand of arms de Grandin selected a keen, long-bladed misericorde, and gazed upon it lovingly. Nor had he armed himself a moment too soon, for even as he straightened back against the wall and lowered the visor of his helmet there came the scuffle of feet from the corridor outside and a bearded, muscular man in Oriental garb dragged a half-fainting girl into the room. She was scantily clad in a Hindu version of a Parisian night club costume.

“By Vishnu, you shall!” the man snarled, grasping the girl’s slender throat between his blunt fingers and squeezing until she gasped for breath. “Dance you must and dance you shall — as the Master has ordered — or I choke the breath from your nostrils! Shame? What have *you* to do with shame, O creature? Daughter of a thousand iniquities, tomorrow there shall be *two* stretched upon the ‘bed of roses’ in the cellar!”

“*Eh bien*, my friend, you may be right,” de Grandin remarked, “but I damn think you shall not be present to see it.”

The fellow toppled over without so much as a groan as the Frenchman, with the precise skill of a practised surgeon, drove his dagger home where skull and spine met.

“Silence, little orange-pip!” the Frenchman ordered as the girl opened her lips to scream. “Go below to your appointed place and do as you are bidden. The time comes quickly when you shall be liberated and we shall drag such of these sow-suckled sons of pigs as remain alive to prison. Quick, none must suspect that help approaches!”

The girl ran quickly from the room, her soft, bare feet making no sound on the thick carpets of the hall, and de Grandin walked slowly to the door. In a moment he returned, lugging a suit of armor in his arms. Standing it in the place against the wall he had vacated, he repeated the trip, filling my space with a second empty suit, then motioning me to follow.

“Those sets of mail I did bring were from the balcony at the stairhead,” he explained softly. “In their places we shall stand and see what passes below. Perhaps it is that we shall have occasion to take parts in the play before all is done.”

Stiff and still as the lifeless ornaments we impersonated, we stood at attention at the stairway’s top. Below us lay the main drawing-room of the house, a sort of low stage or dais erected at its farther end, a crescent formation of folding-chairs, each occupied by a man in evening clothes, standing in the main body of the room.

“Ah, it seems all is ready for the play,” the Frenchman murmured softly through the visor-bars of his helmet. “Did you overhear the tale the little Mademoiselle Ewell told me in the torture chamber, my friend?”

“No.”

“*Mordieu*, it was a story to make a man’s hair erect itself! This is a house of evil, the abode of *esclavage*, no less, Friend Trowbridge. Here stolen girls are brought and broken for a life of degradation, even as wild animals from the jungle are trained for a career in the arena. The master of this odious cesspool is a Hindu, as are his ten retainers, and well they know their beastly trade, for he was a dealer in women in India before the British *Raj* put him in prison, and his underlings have all been *corah-bundars* — punishment-servants — in Indian harems before he hired them for this service. *Parbleu*, from what we saw of the poor one in the cellars, I should say their technique has improved since they left their native land!

“The headquarters of this organization is in Spain — I have heard of it before — but there are branches in almost every country. These evil ones work on commission, and when the girls they steal have been sufficiently broken in spirit they are delivered, like so many cattle, and their price paid by dive-keepers in South America, Africa or China — wherever women command high prices and no questions are asked.

“Hitherto the slavers have taken their victims where they found them — poor shop-girls, friendless waifs, or those already on the road to living death. This is a new scheme. Only well-favored girls of good breeding are stolen and brought here for breaking, and every luckless victim is cruelly beaten, stripped and reclothed in the degrading uniform of the place within half an hour of her arrival.

“*Mordieu*, but their tactics are clever! All faces obscured

by masks which can not be removed, all hair covered by exactly similar turbans, all clothing exactly alike — twin sisters might be here together, yet never recognize each other, for the poor ones are forbidden to address so much as a word to each other — Mademoiselle Ewell was stretched on the bed of torture for no greater fault than breaking this rule.”

“But this is horrible!” I interrupted. “This is unbelievable—”

“Who says it?” he demanded fiercely. “Have we not seen with our own eyes? Have we not Mademoiselle Ewell’s story for testimony? Do I not know how her sister, poor Madame Mazie, came in the river? Assuredly! Attend me: The fiends who took her prisoner quickly discovered the poor child’s condition, and they thereupon deliberately beat out her brains and cast her murdered body into the water, thinking the river would wash away the evidence of their crime.

“Did not that execrable slave-master whom I slew command the other girl to dance — what did it mean?” He paused a moment, then continued in a sibilant whisper:

“This, *pardieu!* Even as we send the young conscripts to Algeria to toughen them for military service, so these poor ones are given their baptism into a life of infamy by being forced to dance before half-drunken brutes to the music of the whip’s crack. *Nom d’une pipe*, I damn think we shall see some dancing of the sort they little suspect before we are done — no more, the master comes!”

As de Grandin broke off, I noticed a sudden focusing of attention by the company below.

Stepping daintily as a tango dancer, a man emerged through the arch behind the dais at the drawing-room’s farther end. He was in full Indian court dress a purple satin tunic, high at the neck and reaching half-way to his knees, fastened at the front with a row of sapphire buttons and heavily fringed with silver at the bottom; trousers of white satin, baggy at the knee, skin-tight at the ankle, slippers of red Morocco on his feet. An enormous turban of peach-bloom silk, studded with brilliants and surmounted by a vivid green aigrette was on his head, while round his neck dangled a triple row of pearls, its lowest loop hanging almost to the bright yellow sash which bound his waist as tightly as a corset. One long, brown hand toyed negligently with the necklace, while the other stroked his black, sweeping mustache caressingly.

“Gentlemen,” he announced in a languid Oxonian drawl, “if you are ready, we shall proceed to make whoopee, as you so quaintly express it in your vernacular.” He turned and beckoned through the archway, and as the light struck his profile I recognized him as the leader of the party which had surprised us in the torture chamber.

De Grandin identified him at the same time, for I heard

him muttering through the bars of his visor: “Ha, toad, viper, worm! Strut while you may; comes soon the time when Jules de Grandin shall show you the posture you will not change in a hurry!”

Through the archway stepped a tall, angular woman, her face masked by a black cloth domino, a small round samisen, or Japanese banjo, in her hand. Saluting the company with a profound obeisance, she dropped to her knees and picked a short, jerky note or two on her crude instrument.

The master of ceremonies clapped his hands sharply, and four girls came running out on the stage. They wore brilliant kimonos, red and blue and white, beautifully embroidered with birds and flowers, and on their feet were white-cotton *tabi* or foot-mittens with a separate “thumb” to accommodate the great toe, and *zori*, or light straw sandals. Golden masks covered the upper part of their faces, and their hair was hidden by voluminous glossy-black wigs arranged in elaborate Japanese coiffures and thickly studded with ornamental hairpins. On their brightly rouged lips were fixed, unnatural smiles.

Running to the very edge of the platform, with exaggeratedly short steps, they slipped their sandals off and dropped to their knees, lowering their foreheads to the floor in greeting to the guests; then, rising, drew up in rank before the musician, tittering with a loud, forced affectation of coy gayety and hiding their faces behind the flowing sleeves of their kimonos, as though in mock-modesty.

Again the master clapped his hands, the musician began a titillating tune on her banjo, and the dance was on. More like a series of postures than a dance it was, ritualistically slow and accompanied by much waving of hands and fluttering of fans.

The master of ceremonies began crooning a low, singsong tune in time with the plink-plink of the banjo. “*Chonkina-chonkina*,” he chanted; then with a slapping clap of his hands:

“*Hoi!*”

Dance and music came to a frozen stop. The four girls held the posture they had when the call came, assuming the strained, unreal appearance of a motion picture when the film catches in the projecting reel.

For a moment there was a breathless silence, then a delighted roar from the audience; for the fourth girl, caught with one foot and hand upraised, could not maintain the pose. Vainly she strove to remain stone still, but despite her efforts her lifted foot descended ever so slightly.

A guttural command from the show-master, and she paid the forfeit, unfastening her girdle and dropping it to the floor.

A wave of red mantled her throat and face to the very rim of her golden mask as she submitted, but the forced,

unnatural smile never left her painted lips as the music and dance began afresh at the master's signal.

"*Hoi!*" Again the strident call, again the frozen dance, again a girl lost and discarded a garment.

On and on the bestial performance went, interminably, it seemed to me, but actually only a few minutes were required for the poor, bewildered girls, half fainting with shame and fear of torture, to lose call after call until at last they danced only in their cotton *tabi*, and even these were discarded before the audience would cry enough and the master release them from their ordeal.

Gathering up their fallen clothes, sobbing through lips which still fought valiantly to retain their constrained smiles, the poor creatures advanced once more to the platform's edge, once more knelt and touched their brows to the floor, then ran from the stage, only the fear of punishment holding their little baked feet to the short, sliding steps of their artificial run rather than a mad dash for sanctuary from the burning gaze and obscene calls of the onlookers.

"*Dieu de Dieu,*" de Grandin fumed, "will not the troopers ever come? Must more of this shameless business go on?"

A moment later the showman was speaking again: "Let us now give undivided attention to the next number of our program," he was announcing suavely.

Something white hurtled through the archway behind him, and a girl clothed only in strings of glittering rhinestones about throat, wrists, waist and ankles was fairly flung out upon the stage, where she cowered in a perfect palsy of terror. Her hands were fettered behind her by a six-inch chain attached to heavy golden bracelets, and an odd contrivance, something like a bit, was fastened between her lips by a harness fitted over her head, making articulate outcry impossible. Behind her, strutting with all the majesty of a turkey-cock, came a man in the costume of a South American *vaquero* — loose, baggy trousers, wide, nail-studded belt, patent leather boots and broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat of black felt. In his hand was a coiled whip of woven leather thongs — the bull-whip of the Argentine pampas.

"God and the devil!" swore de Grandin, his teeth fairly chattering in rage. "I know it; it is the whipping dance — he will beat her to insensibility — I have seen such shows in Buenos Aires, Friend Trowbridge, but may Satan toast me in his fires if I witness it again. Come, my friend, it is time we taught these swine a lesson. Do you stand firm and beat back any who attempt to pass. Me, I go into action!"

Like some ponderous engine of olden times he strode forward, the joints of his armor creaking with unwonted use.

For a moment guests and servants were demoralized by the apparition descending the stairs, for it was as if a chair or sofa had suddenly come to life and taken the field against

them.

"Here, wash all this, wash all this?" demanded a maudlin young man with drunken truculence as he swaggered forward to bar the Frenchman's way, reaching for his hip pocket as he spoke.

De Grandin drew back his left arm, doubled his iron-clad fingers into a ball and dashed his mailed fist into the fellow's face.

The drunken rake went down with a scream, spewing blood and teeth from his crushed mouth.

"*Awai, a bhut!*" cried one of the servants in terror, and another took up the cry: "*A bhut! a bhut!*"

Two of the men seized long-shafted halberds from an ornamental stand of arms and advanced on the little Frenchman, one on each side.

Clang! The iron points of their weapons rang against his visor-bars, but the fine-tempered, hand-wrought steel that had withstood thrust of lance and glaive and flying cloth-yard arrow when Henry of England led his hosts to victory at Agincourt held firm, and de Grandin hardly wavered in his stride.

Then, with halberd and knife and wicked, razor-edged scimitar, they were on him like a pack of hounds seeking to drag down a stag.

De Grandin strode forward, striking left and right with mailed fists, crushing a nose here, battering a mouth there, or smashing jaw-bones with the ironshod knuckles of his flailing hands.

My breath came fast and faster as I watched the struggle, but suddenly I gave a shout of warning. Two of the Hindus had snatched a silken curtain from a doorway and rushed de Grandin from behind. In an instant the fluttering drapery fell over his head, shutting out sight and cumbering his arms in its clinging folds. In another moment he lay on his back, half a dozen screaming Indians pinioning his arms and legs.

I rushed forward to his rescue, but my movement was a moment too late. From the front door and the back there came a sudden, mighty clamor. The thud of gun-butts and riot sticks on the panels and hoarse commands to open in the law's name announced the troopers had arrived at last.

Crash! The front door splintered inward and four determined men in the livery of the State Constabulary rushed into the hall.

A moment the Hindus stood at bay; then, with waving swords and brandishing pikes they charged the officers.

They were ten to four, but odds were not with numbers, for even as they sprang to the attack there sounded the murderous *r-r-r-rat-tat-tat* of an automatic rifle, and the rank of yelling savages wavered like growing wheat before a gust of summer wind, then went down screaming, while the acrid, bitter fumes of smokeless powder stung our nostrils.

“*Nom d’un porc, mon lieutenant*, you came not a moment too soon to complete a perfect night’s work,” de Grandin complimented as we prepared to set out for home. “Ten tiny seconds more and you should have found nothing but the deceased corpse of Jules de Grandin to rescue, I fear.”

From the secret closets of the house the girls’ clothing had been rescued, wire-clippers in willing hands had cut away the degrading golden masks from the captives’ faces, and Ewell Eaton, the three sorority sisters and the poor little shop-girl whose disappearances had caused such consternation to their families were ready to ride back to Harrisonville, two in the troopers’ side-cars, the rest in hastily improvised saddles behind the constables on their motorcycles.

“We did make monkeys out of ’em, at that,” the young officer grinned. “It was worth the price of admission to see

those guys in their dress suits trying to bluff us off, then whining like spanked kids when I told ’em it would be six months in the work-house for theirs. Gosh, won’t the papers make hash of *their* reputations before this business is over?”

“Undoubtlessly,” de Grandin assented. “It is to be deplored that we may not lawfully make hash of their so foul bodies, as well. Me, I should enormously enjoy dissecting them without previous anesthesia. However, in the meantime—”

He drew the young officer aside with a confidential hand upon his elbow, and a brief, whispered colloquy followed. Two minutes later he rejoined me, a satisfied twinkle in his eye, the scent of raw, new whisky on his breath.

“*Barbe d’un chameau*, he is a most discerning young man, that one,” he confided, as he wiped his lips with a lavender-bordered silk handkerchief.

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

The CORPSE-MASTER

by Seabury Quinn



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C. C. BEAVER

The Corpse-Master

THE ambulance-gong insistence of my night bell brought me up standing from a stuporlike sleep, and as I switched the vestibule light on and unbarred the door, “Are you the doctor?” asked a breathless voice. A disheveled youth half fell through the doorway and clawed my sleeve desperately. “Quick quick, Doctor! It’s my uncle, Colonel Evans. He’s dying. I think he tried to kill himself —”

“All right,” I agreed, turning to sprint upstairs. “What sort of wound has he? — or was it poison?”

“It’s his throat, sir. He tried to cut it. Please, hurry, Doctor!”

I took the last four steps at a bound, snatched some clothes from the bedside chair and charged down again, pulling on my garments like a fireman answering a night alarm. “Now, which way —” I began, but:

“*Tiens,*” a querulous voice broke in as Jules de Grandin came downstairs, seeming to miss half the treads in his haste, “Let him tell us where to go as we go there, my old one! It is that we should make the haste. A cut throat does not wait patiently.”

“This is Dr. de Grandin,” I told the young man. “He will be of great assistance —”

“*Mais oui,*” the little Frenchman agreed, “and the Trump of Judgment will serve excellently as an alarm clock if we delay our going long enough. Make haste, my friend!”

“Down two blocks and over one,” our caller directed as we got under way, “376 Albion Road. My uncle went to bed about ten o’clock, according to the servants, and none of them heard him moving about since. I got home just a few minutes ago, and found him lying in the bathroom when I went to wash my teeth. He lay beside the tub with a razor in his hand, and blood was all over the place. It was awful!”

“Undoubtedly,” de Grandin murmured from his place on the rear seat. “What did you do then, young Monsieur?”

“Snatched a roll of gauze from the medicine cabinet and staunched the wound as well as I could, then called Dockery the gardener to hold it in place while I raced round to see you. I remembered seeing your sign sometime before.”

We drew up to the Evans house as he concluded his recital, and rushed through the door and up the stairs together. “In there,” our companion directed, pointing to a door from which there gushed a stream of light into the darkened hall.

A man in bathrobe and slippers knelt above a recumbent form stretched full-length on the white tiles of the bathroom. One glance at the supine figure and both de Grandin and I

turned away, I with a deprecating shake of my head, the Frenchman with a fatalistic shrug.

“He has no need of us, that poor one,” he informed the young man. “Ten minutes ago, perhaps yes; now” — another shrug — “the undertaker and the clergyman, perhaps the police —”

“The police? Surely, Doctor, this is suicide —”

“Do you say so?” de Grandin interrupted sharply. “Trow-bridge, my friend, consider this, if you please.” Deftly he raised the dead man’s thin white beard and pointed to the deeply incised slash across the throat. “Does that mean nothing?”

“Why — er —”

“Perfectly. Wipe your pince-nez before you look a second time, and tell me that you see the cut runs diagonally from right to left.”

“Why, so it does, but —”

“But Monsieur the deceased was right-handed — look how the razor lies beneath his right hand. Now, if you will raise your hand to your own throat and draw the index finger across it as if it were a knife, you will note the course is slightly out of horizontal — somewhat diagonal — slanting downward from left to right. Is it not so?”

I nodded as I completed the gesture.

“*Très bien.* When one is bent on suicide he screws his courage to the sticking point, then, if he has chosen a cut throat as means of exit, he usually stands before a mirror, cuts deeply and quickly with his knife, and makes a downward-slanting slash. But as he sees the blood and feels the pain his resolution weakens, and the gash becomes more and more shallow. At the end it trails away to little more than a skin-scratch. It is not so in this case; at its end the wound is deeper than at the beginning.

“Again, this poor one would almost certainly have stood before the mirror to do away with himself. Had he done so he would have fallen crosswise of the room, perhaps; more likely not. One with a severed throat does not die quickly. He thrashes about like a fowl recently decapitated, and writes the story of his struggle plainly on his surroundings. What have we here? Do you — does anyone — think it likely that a man would slit his gullet, then lie down peacefully to bleed his life away, as this one appears to have done? *Non, non;* it is not *en caractère!*”

“Consider further” — he pointed with dramatic suddenness to the dead man’s bald head — “if we desire further proof, observe him!”

Plainly marked there was a welt of bruised flesh on the

hairless scalp, the mark of some blunt instrument.

“He might have struck his head as he fell,” I hazarded, and he grinned in derision.

“*Ah bah*, I tell you he was stunned unconscious by some miscreant, then dragged or carried to this room and slaughtered like a pole-axed beef. Without the telltale mark of the butcher’s bludgeon there is ground for suspicion in the quietude of his position, in the neat manner the razor lies beneath his hand instead of being firmly grasped or flung away, but with this bruise before us there is but one answer. He has been done to death; he has been butchered; he was murdered.”

“Will ye be seein’ Sergeant Costello?” Nora McGinnis appeared like a phantom at the drawing room door as de Grandin and I were having coffee next evening after dinner. “He says —”

“Invite him to come in and say it for himself, *ma petite*,” Jules de Grandin answered with a smile of welcome at the big red-headed man who loomed behind the trim figure of my household factotum. “Is it about the Evans killing you would talk with us?” he added as the detective accepted a cigar and demi-tasse.

“There’s two of ’em, now, sir,” Costello answered gloomily. “Mulligan, who pounds a beat in th’ Eighth Ward, just ’phoned in there’s a murder dressed up like a suicide at th’ Rangers’ Club in Fremont Street.”

“*Pardieu*, another?” asked de Grandin. “How do you know the latest one is not true suicide?”

“Well, sir, here’s th’ pitch: When th’ feller from th’ club comes runnin’ out to say that Mr. Wolkof’s shot himself, Mulligan goes in and takes a look around. He finds him layin’ on his back with a little hole in his forehead an’ th’ back blown out o’ his head, an’, bein’ th’ wise lad, he adds up two an’ two and makes it come out four. He’d used a Colt .45, this Wolkof feller, an’ it was layin’ half-way in his hand, restin’ on his half-closed fingers, ye might say. That didn’t look too kosher. A feller who’s been shot through the forehead is more likely to freeze tight to th’ gun than otherwise. Certain’y he don’t just hold it easy-like. Besides, it was an old fashioned black-powder gun, sir, what they call a low-velocity weapon, and if it had been fired close against the dead man’s forehead it should ’a’ left a good-sized smudge o’ powder-stain. There wasn’t any.”

“One commends the excellent Mulligan for his reasoning,” de Grandin commented. “He found this Monsieur Wolkof lying on his back with a hole drilled through his head, no powder-brand upon his brow where the projectile entered, and the presumably suicidal weapon lying loosely in his hand. One thing more: It may not be conclusive, but it would be helpful to know if there were any powder-stains upon the dead man’s pistol-hand.”

“As far’s I know there weren’t, sir,” answered Costello. “Mulligan said he took partic’lar notice of his hands, too. But ye’re yet to hear th’ cream o’ th’ joke. Th’ pistol was in Mr. Wolkof’s open right hand, an’ all th’ club attendants swear he was left-handed — writin’, feedin’ himself an’ shavin’ with his left hand exclusively. Now, I ask ye, Dr. de Grandin, would a man all steamed up to blow his brains out be takin’ th’ trouble to break a lifetime habit of left-handedness when he’s so much more important things to think about? It seems to me that —”

“Ye’re wanted on th’ ’phone, Sergeant,” announced Nora from the doorway. “Will ye be takin’ it in here, or usin’ th’ hall instrument?”

“Hullo? Costello speakin’,” he challenged. “If its’ about th’ Wolkof case, I’m goin’ right over — glory be to God! No! Och, th’ murderin’ blackguard!”

“Gentlemen,” he faced us, fury in his ruddy face and blazing blue eyes, “it’s another one. A little girl, this time. They’ve kilt a tiny, wee baby while we sat here like three damn’ fools and talked! They’ve took her body to th’ morgue —”

“Then, *nom d’un charneau*, why are we remaining here?” de Grandin interrupted. “Come, *mes amis*, it is to hasten. Let us go all quickly!”

With my horn tooting almost continuously, and Costello waving aside crossing policemen, we rushed to the city mortuary. Parnell, the coroner’s physician, fussed over a tray of instruments, Coroner Martin bustled about in a perfect fever of eagerness to begin his official duties; two plainclothes men conferred in muted whispers in the outer office.

Death in the raw is never pretty, as doctors, soldiers and embalmers know only too well. When it is accompanied by violence it wears a still less lovely aspect, and when the victim is a child the sight is almost heart-breaking. Bruised and battered almost beyond human semblance, her baby-fine hair matted with mixed blood and cerebral matter, little Hazel Clark lay before us, the queer, unnatural angle of her right wrist denoting a Colles’ fracture; a subclavicular dislocation of the left shoulder was apparent by the projection of the bone beneath the clavicle, and the vault of her small skull had been literally beaten in. She was completely “broken” as ever medieval malefactor was when bound upon the wheel of torture for the ministrations of the executioner.

For a moment de Grandin bent above the battered little corpse, viewing it intently with the skilled, knowing eye of a pathologist, then, so lightly that they scarcely displaced a hair of her head, his fingers moved quickly over her, pausing now and again to prod gently, then sweeping onward in their investigative course. “*Tiens*, he was a gorilla

for strength, that one,” he announced, “and a veritable gorilla for savagery, as well. What is there to tell me of the case, *mes amis*?” he called to the plainclothes men.

Such meager data as they had they gave him quickly. She was three and a half years old, the idol of her lately widowed father, and had neither brothers nor sisters. That afternoon her father had given her a quarter as reward for having gone a whole week without meriting a scolding, and shortly after dinner she had set out for the corner drug store to purchase an ice cream cone with part of her righteously acquired wealth. Attendants at the pharmacy remembered she had left the place immediately and set out for home; a neighbor had seen her proceeding up the street, the cone grasped tightly in her hand as she sampled it with ecstatic little licks. Two minutes later, from a spot where the privet hedge of a vacant house shadowed the pavement, residents of the block had heard a scream, but squealing children were no novelty in the neighborhood, and the cry was not repeated. It was not till her father came looking for her that they recalled it.

From the drug store Mr. Clark traced Hazel’s homeward course, and was passing the deserted house when he noticed a stain on the sidewalk. A lighted match showed the discoloration was a spot of blood some four inches across, and with panic premonition tearing at his heart he pushed through the hedge to unmowed lawn of the vacant residence. Match after match he struck while he called “Hazel! Hazel!” but there was no response, and he saw nothing till he was about to return to the street. Then, in a weed-choked rosebed, almost hidden by the foliage, he saw the gleam of her pink pinafore. His cries aroused the neighborhood, and the police were notified.

House-to-house inquiry by detectives finally elicited the information that a “short, stoop-shouldered man” had been seen walking hurriedly away a moment after the child’s scream was heard. Further description of the suspect was unavailable.

“*Pardieu*,” de Grandin stroked his small mustache thoughtfully as the plainclothes men concluded, “it seems we have to search the haystack for an almost microscopic needle, *n’est-ce-pas*? There are considerable numbers of small men with stooping shoulders. The task will be a hard one.”

“Hard, hell!” one of the detectives rejoined in disgust. “We got no more chance o’ findin’ that bird than a pig has o’ wearin’ vest-pockets.”

“Do you say so?” the Frenchman demanded, fixing an uncompromising cat-stare on the speaker. “*Alors*, my friend, prepare to meet a fully tailored porker before you are greatly older. Have you forgotten in the excitement that I am in the case?”

“Sergeant, sir,” a uniformed patrolman hurried into the

mortuary, “they found th’ weapon used on th’ Clark girl. It’s a winder-sash weight. They’re testin’ it for fingerprints at headquarters now.”

“Humph,” Costello commented. “Anything on it?”

“Yes, *sir*. Th’ killer must ‘a’ handled it after he dragged her body into th’ bushes, for there’s marks o’ bloody fingers on it plain as day.”

“O.K., I’ll be right up,” Costello replied. “Take over, Jacobs,” he ordered one of the plainclothes men. “I’ll call ye if they find out anything, Dr. de Grandin. So long!”

The Sergeant delayed his report, and next morning after dinner the Frenchman suggested, “Would it not be well to interview the girl’s father? I should appreciate it if you will accompany and introduce me.”

“He’s in the drawing room,” the maid told us as we knocked gently on the Clark door. “He’s been there ever since they brought her home, *sir*. Just sitting beside her and—” she broke off as her throat filled with sobs. “If you could take his mind off of his trouble it would be a God-send. If he’d only cry, or sumpin —”

“Grief is a hot, consuming fire, *Madame*,” the little Frenchman whispered, “and only tears can quell it. The dry-eyed mourner is the one most likely to collapse.”

Coroner Martin had done his work as a mortician with consummate artistry. Under his deft hands all signs of the brutality that struck the child down had been effaced. Clothed in a short light-pink dress she lay peacefully in her casket, one soft pink cheek against the tufted silken pillow sewn with artificial forget-me-nots, a little *bisque* doll, dressed in a frock the exact duplicate of her own, resting in the crook of her left elbow. Beside the casket, a smile sadder than any grimace of woe on his thin, ascetic features, sat Mortimer Clark.

As we tiptoed into the darkened room we heard him murmur, “Time for shut-eye town, daughter. Daddy’ll tell you a story.” For a moment he looked expectantly into the still childish face on the pillow before him, as if waiting an answer. The little gilt clock on the mantel ticked with a sort of whispering haste, far down the block a neighbor’s dog howled dismally; a light breeze bustled through the opened windows, fluttering the white-scrim curtains and setting the orange flames of the tall candles at the casket’s head and foot to flickering.

It was weird, this stricken man’s vigil beside his dead, it was ghastly to hear him addressing her as if she could hear and reply. As the story of the old woman and her pig progressed I felt a kind of terrified tension about my heart. “... the cat began to kill the rat, the rat began to gnaw the rope, the rope began to hang the butcher —”

“*Grand Dieu*,” de Grandin whispered as he plucked me by the elbow, “let us not look at it, Friend Trowbridge — It is a profanation for our eyes to see, our ears to hear what

goes on here. *Sang de Saint Pierre*, I, Jules de Grandin swear that I shall find the one who caused this thing to be, and when I find him, though he take refuge beneath the very throne of God, I'll drag him forth and cast him screaming into hell. God do so to me, and more also, if I do not!" Tears were coursing down his cheeks, and he let them flow unabashed.

"You don't want to talk to him, then?" I whispered as we neared the front door.

"I do not, neither do I wish to tell indecent stories to the priest as he elevates the Host. The one would be no greater sacrilege than the other, but — *ah?*" he broke off, staring at a small framed parchment hanging on the wall. "Tell me, my friend," he demanded, "what is it that you see there?"

"Why, it's a certificate of membership in the Rangers' Club. Clark was in the Army Air Force, and —"

"*Très bien*," he broke in. "Thank you. Our ideas sometimes lead us to see what we wish when in reality it is not there; that is why I sought the testimony of disinterested eyes."

"What in the world has Clark's membership in the Rangers got to do with —"

"*Zut!*" he waved me to silence. "I think, I cogitate, I concentrate, my old one. Monsieur Evans — Monsieur Wolkof, now Monsieur Clark — all are members of that club. *C'est très étrange*. Me, I shall interview the steward of that club, my friend. Perhaps his words may throw more light on these so despicable doings than all the clumsy, well-meant investigations of our friend Costello. Come, let us go away. Tomorrow will do as well as today, for the miscreant who fancies himself secure is in no hurry to decamp, despite the nonsense talked of the guilty who flee when no man pursueth."

We found Costello waiting for us when we reached home. A very worried-looking Costello he was, too. "We've checked th' fingerprints on th' sash-weight, sir," he announced almost truculently.

"Bon," the Frenchman replied carelessly. "Is it that they are of someone you can identify?"

"I'll say they are," the sergeant returned shortly. "They're Gyp Carson's — th' meanest killer th' force ever had to deal with."

"Ah," de Grandin shook off his air of preoccupation with visible effort, "it is for you to find this Monsieur Gyp, my friend. You have perhaps some inkling of his present whereabouts?"

The sergeant's laugh was almost an hysterical cackle. "That we have, sir, that we have! They burnt — you know, electrocuted — him last month in Trenton for th' murder of a milk-wagon driver durin' a hold-up. By rights he should be in Mount Olivet Cemetery this minute, an' by th' same

token he should 'a' been there when the little Clark girl was kilt last night."

"*A-a-ah?*" de Grandin twisted his wheat-blond mustache furiously. "It seems this case contains the possibilities, my friend. Tomorrow morning, if you please, we shall go to the cemetery and investigate the grave of Monsieur Gyp. Perhaps we shall find something there. If we find nothing we shall have found the most valuable information we can have."

"If we find nothing —" the big Irishman looked at him in bewilderment. "All right, sir. I've seen some funny things since I been runnin' round with you, but if you're tellin' me—"

"*Tenez*, my friend, I tell you nothing; nothing at all. I too seek information. Let us wait until the morning, then see what testimony pick and shovel will give."

A superintendent and two workmen waited for us at the grave when we arrived at the cemetery next morning. The grave lay in the newer, less expensive portion of the burying ground where perpetual care was not so conscientiously maintained as in the better sections. Scrub grass fought for a foothold in the clayey soil, and the mound had already begun to fall in. Incongruously, a monument bearing the effigy of a weeping angel leaned over the grave-head, while a footstone with the inscription OUR DARLING guarded its lower end.

The superintendent glanced over Costello's papers, stowed them in an inner pocket and nodded to the Polish laborers. "Git goin'," he ordered tersely, "an' make it snappy."

The diggers' picks and spades bored deep and deeper in the hard-packed, sun-baked earth. At last the hollow sound of steel on wood warned us their quest was drawing to a close. A pair of strong web straps was let down and made fast to the rough chestnut box in which the casket rested, and the men strained at the thongs to bring their weird freight to the surface. Two pick-handles were laid across the violated grave and on them the box rested. With a wrench the superintendent undid the screws that held the clay-stained lid in place and laid it aside. Within we saw the casket, a cheap, square-ended affair covered with shoddy grey broadcloth, the tinny imitation-silver name plate and crucifix on its lid already showing a dull brown-blue discoloration.

"*Maintenant!*" murmured de Grandin breathlessly as the superintendent began unlatching the fastenings that held the upper portion of the casket lid. Then, as the last catch snapped back and the cover came away:

"*Feu noir de l'enfer!*"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"For th' love o' God!" Costello's amazed antiphon

sounded at my elbow.

The cheap sateen pillow of the casket showed a depression like the pillow of a bed recently vacated, and the poorly made upholstery of its bottom displayed a wide furrow, as though flattened by some weight imposed on it for a considerable time, but sign or trace of human body there was none. The case was empty as it left the factory.

“Glory be to God!” Costello muttered hoarsely, staring at the empty casket as though loath to believe his own eyes. “An’ this is broad daylight,” he added in a kind of wondering afterthought.

“*Précisément*,” de Grandin’s acid answer came back like a whipcrack. “This is diagnostic, my friend. Had we found something here it might have meant one thing or another. Here we find nothing; nothing at all. What does it mean?”

“I know what it means!” the look of superstitious fear on Costello’s broad red face gave way to one of furious anger. “It means there’s been some monkey-business goin’ on — who had this burying?” he turned savagely on the superintendent.

“Donally,” the other returned, “but don’t blame me for it. I just work here.”

“Huh, Donally, eh? We’ll see what Mr. Donally has to say about this, an’ he’d better have plenty to say, too, if he don’t want to collect himself from th’ corners o’ a four-acre lot.”

Donally Funeral Parlors were new but by no means prosperous looking. Situated in a small side street in the poor section of town, their only pretension to elegance was the brightly-gleaming gold sign on their window:

JOSEPH DONALLY
Funeral Director & Embalmer
Sexton St. Rose’s R.C. Church

“See here, young feller me lad,” Costello began without preliminary as he stamped unceremoniously into the small, dark room that constituted Mr. Donally’s office and reception foyer, “come clean, an’ come clean in a hurry. Was Gyp Carson dead when you had his funeral?”

“If he wasn’t we sure played one awful dirty trick on him,” the mortician replied. “What’d ye think would happen to you if they set you in that piece o’ furniture down at Trenton an’ turned the juice on? What d’ye mean, ‘was he dead?’”

“I mean just what I say, wise guy. I’ve just come from Mount Olivet an’ looked into his coffin, an’ if there’s hide or hair of a corpse in it I’ll eat it, so I will!”

“*What’s that?* You say th’ casket was empty?”

“As your head.”

“Well, I’ll be —” Mr. Donally began, but Costello forestalled him:

“You sure will, an’ all beat up, too, if you don’t spill th’

low-down. Come clean, now, or do I have to sock ye in th’ jaw an’ lock ye up in th’ bargain?”

“Whatcher tryin’ to put over?” Mr. Donally demanded. “Think I faked up a stall funeral? Look’t here, if you don’t believe me.” From a pigeon hole of his desk he produced a sheaf of papers, thumbed through them, and handed Costello a packet fastened with a rubber band.

Everything was in order. The death certificate, signed by the prison physician, showed the cause of death as cardiac arrest by fibrillar contraction induced by three shocks of an alternating current of electricity of 7½ amperes at a pressure of 2,000 volts.

“I didn’t have much time,” Donally volunteered. “The prison doctors had made a full post, an’ his old woman was one o’ them old-fashioned folks that don’t believe in embalmin’, so there was nothin’ to do but rush him to th’ graveyard an’ plant him. Not so bad for me, though, at that. I sold ’em a casket an’ burial suit an’ twenty-five limousines for th’ funeral, an’ got a cut on th’ monument, too.”

De Grandin eyed him speculatively. “Have you any reason to believe attempts at resuscitation were made?” he asked.

“Huh? Resuscitate *that*? Didn’t I just tell you they’d made a full autopsy on him at the prison? Didn’t miss a damn thing, either. You might as well to try resuscitatin’ a lump o’ hamburger as bring back a feller which had had that done to him.”

“Quite so,” de Grandin nodded. “I did but ask. Now —”

“Now we don’t know no more than we did an hour ago,” the sergeant supplied. “I might ’a’ thought this guy was in cahoots with Gyp’s folks, but th’ prison records show he was dead, an’ th’ doctors down at Trenton don’t certify nobody’s dead if there’s a flicker o’ eyelash left in him. Looks as if we’ve got to find some gink with a fad for grave-robbin’, don’t it, Dr. de Grandin?”

“But say” — a sudden gleam of inspiration overspread his face, “suppose someone had dug him up an’ taken an impression of his fingerprints, then had rubber gloves made with th’ prints on th’ outside o’ th’ fingers? Wouldn’t it be a horse on th’ force for him to go around murderin’ people, an’ leave his weapons lyin’ round promiscuous-like, so’s we’d be sure to find what we thought was his prints, only to discover they’d been made by a gunman who’d been burnt a month or more before?”

“*Tiens*, my friend, your supposition has at least the foundation of reason beneath it,” de Grandin conceded. “Do you make search for one who might have done the thing you suspect. Me, I have certain searching of my own to do. Anon we shall confer, and together we shall surely lay this so vile miscreant by the heels.”

“Ah, but it has been a lovely day,” he assured me with

twinkling eyes as he contemplated the glowing end of his cigar that evening after dinner. "Yes, *pardieu*, an exceedingly lovely day! This morning when I went from that Monsieur Donally's shop my head whirled like that of an unaccustomed voyager stricken by sea-sickness. Only miserable uncertainty confronted me on every side. Now" — he blew a cone of fragrant smoke from his lips and watched it spiral slowly toward the ceiling — "now I know much, and that I do not actually know I damn surmise. I think I see the end of this so tortuous trail, Friend Trowbridge."

"How's that?" I encouraged, watching him from the corners of my eyes.

"How? *Cordieu*, I shall tell you! When Friend Costello told us of the murder of Monsieur Wolkof — that second murder which was made to appear suicide — and mentioned he met death at the Ranger's Club, I suddenly recalled that Colonel Evans, whose death we had so recently deplored, was also a member of that club. It struck me at the time there might be something more than mere coincidence in it; but when that pitiful Monsieur Clark also proved to be a member, *nom d'un asperge*, coincidence ceased to be coincidence and became moral certainty.

"Now, I ask me, 'what lies behind this business of the monkey? Is it not strange two members of the Rangers' Club should have been slain so near together, and in such similar circumstances, and a third should have been visited with a calamity worse than death?"

"You have said it, *mon garçon*," I tell me. 'It is indubitably as you say. Come, let us interview the steward of that club, and see what he shall say.'

"*Nom d'un pipe*, what did he not tell? From him I learn much more than he said. I learn, by example, that Messieurs Evans, Wolkof and Clark had long been friends; that they had all been members of the club's grievance committee; that they were called on some five years ago to recommend expulsion of a Monsieur Wallagin — *mon Dieu*, what a name!

"So far, so fine," I tell me. 'But what of this Monsieur-with-the-Funny-Name? Who and what is he, and what has he done to be flung out of the club?'

"I made careful inquiry and found much. He has been an explorer of considerable note and has written some monographs which showed he understood the use of his eyes. *Hélas*, he knew also how to use wits, as many of his fellow members learned to their sorrow when they played cards with him. Furthermore, he had a most unpleasant stock of stories which he gloried to tell — stories of his doings in the far places which did not recommend him to the company of self-respecting gentlemen. And so he was removed from the club's rolls, and vowed he would get level with Messieurs Evans, Clark and Wolkof if it took him

fifty years to do so.

"Five years have passed since then, and Monsieur Wallagin seems to have prospered exceedingly. He has a large house in the suburbs where no one but himself and one servant — always a Chinese — lives, but the neighbors tell strange stories of the parties he holds, parties at which pretty ladies in strange attire appear, and once or twice strange-looking men as well.

"*Eh bien*, why should this rouse my suspicions? I do not know, unless it be that my nose scents the odor of the rodent farther than the average. At any rate, out to the house of Monsieur Wallagin I go, and at its gate I wait like a tramp in the hope of charity.

"My vigil is not unrewarded. But no. Before I have stood there an hour I behold one forcibly ejected from the house by a gross person who reminds me most unpleasantly of a pig. It is a small and elderly Chinese man, and he has suffered greatly in his *amour propre*. I join him in his walk to town, and sympathize with him in his misfortune.

"My friend" — his earnestness seemed out of all proportion to the simple statement — "he had been forcibly dismissed for putting salt in the food which he cooked for Monsieur Wallagin's guests."

"For salting their food?" I asked.

"One wonders why, indeed, Friend Trowbridge. Consider, if you please. Monsieur Wallagin has several guests, and feeds them thin gruel made of wheat or barley, and bread in which no salt is used. Nothing more. He personally tastes of it before it is presented to them, that he may make sure it is unsalted."

"Perhaps they're on some sort of special diet," I hazarded as he waited for my comment. "They're not obliged to stay and eat unseasoned food, are they?"

"I do not know," he answered soberly. "I greatly fear they are, but we shall know before so very long. If what I damn suspect is true we shall see devilment beside which the worst produced by ancient Rome was mild. If I am wrong — *alors*, it is that I am wrong. I think I hear the good Costello coming; let us go with him."

Evening had brought little surcease from the heat, and perspiration streamed down Costello's face and mine as we drove toward Morrisdale, but de Grandin seemed in a chill of excitement, his little round blue eyes were alight with dancing elf-fires, his small white teeth fairly chattering with nervous excitation as he leant across the back of the seat, urging me to greater speed.

The house near which we parked was a massive stone affair, standing back from the road in a jungle of greenery, and seemed to me principally remarkable for the fact that it had neither front nor rear porches, but rose sheer-walled as a prison from its foundations.

Led by the Frenchman we made cautious way to the

house, creeping to the only window showing a gleam of light and fastening our eyes to the narrow crack beneath its not-quite-drawn blind.

“Monsieur Wallagin acquired a new cook this afternoon,” de Grandin whispered. “I made it my especial business to see him and bribe him heavily to smuggle a tiny bit of beef into the soup he prepares for tonight. If he has been faithful in his treachery we may see something, if not — *pah*, my friends, what is it we have here?”

We looked into a room which must have been several degrees hotter than the stoke-hole of a steamer, for the window was shut tightly and a great log fire blazed on the wide hearth of the fireplace almost opposite our point of vantage. Its walls were smooth-dressed stone, the floor was paved with tile. Lolling on a sort of divan made of heaped up cushions sat the master of the house, a monstrous bulk of a man with enormous paunch, great fat-upholstered shoulders between which perched a hairless head like an owl’s in its feathers, and eyes as cold and grey as twin inlays of burnished agate.

About his shoulders draped a robe of Paisley pattern, belted at the loins but open to the waist, displaying his obese abdomen as he squatted like an evil parody of Mi-lei-Fo, China’s Laughing Buddha.

As we fixed our eyes to the gap under the curtain he beat his hands together, and as at a signal the door at the room’s farther end swung open to admit a file of women. All three were young and comely, and each a perfect foil for the others. First came a tall and statuesque brunette with flowing unbound black hair, sharp-hewn patrician features and a majesty of carriage like a youthful queen’s. The second was a petite blonde, fairylike in form and elfin in face, and behind her was a red-haired girl, plumply rounded as a little pullet. Last of all there came an undersized, stoop-shouldered man who bore what seemed an earthen vessel like a New England bean-pot and two short lengths of willow sticks.

“Jeeze!” breathed Costello. “Lookit him, Dr. de Grandin; ’tis Gyp Carson himself!”

“Silence!” the Frenchman whispered fiercely. “Observe, my friends; did I not say we should see something? *Regardez-vous!*”

At a signal from the seated man the women ranged themselves before him, arms uplifted, heads bent submissively, and the undersized man dropped down tailor-fashion in a corner of the room, nursing the clay pot between his crossed knees and poising his sticks over it.

The obese master of the revels struck his hands together again, and at their impact the man on the floor began to beat a rataplan upon his crock.

The women started a slow rigadon, sliding their bare feet sidewise, stopping to stamp out a grotesque rhythm,

then pirouetting languidly and taking up the sliding, sidling step again. Their arms were stretched straight out, as if they had been crucified against the air, and as they danced they shook and twitched their shoulders with a motion reminiscent of the Negroid shimmy of the early 1920s. Each wore a shift of silken netlike fabric that covered her from shoulder to instep, sleeveless and unbelted, and as they danced the garments clung in rippling, half-revealing, half-concealing folds about them.

They moved with a peculiar lack of verve, like marionettes actuated by unseen strings, sleep-walkers, or persons in hypnosis; only the drummer seemed to take an interest in his task. His hands shook as he plied his drumsticks, his shoulders jerked and twitched and writhed hysterically, and though his eyes were closed and his face masklike, it seemed instinct with avid longing, with prurient expectancy.

“*Las aisselles* — their axillae, Friend Trowbridge, observe them with care, if you please!” de Grandin breathed in my ear.

Sudden recognition came to me. With the raising of their hands in the performance of the dance the women exposed their armpits, and under each left arm I saw the mark of a deep wound, bloodless despite its depth, and closed with the familiar “baseball stitch.”

No surgeon leaves a wound like that, it was the mark of the embalmer’s bistoury made in cutting through the superficial tissue to raise the axillary artery for his injection.

“Good God!” I choked. The languidness of their movements ... their pallor ... their closed eyes ... their fixed, unsmiling faces ... now the unmistakable stigmata of embalming process! These were no living women, they were —

De Grandin’s fingers clutched my elbow fiercely. “Observe, my friend,” he ordered softly. “Now we shall see if my plan carried or miscarried.”

Shuffling into the room, as unconcerned as if he served coffee after a formal meal, came a Chinese bearing a tray on which were four small soup bowls and a plate of dry bread. He set the tray on the floor before the fat man and turned away, paying no attention to the dancing figures and the drummer squatting in the corner.

An indolent motion of the master’s hand and the slaves fell on their provender like famished beasts at feeding time, drinking greedily from the coarse china bowls, wolfing down the unbuttered bread almost unchewed.

Such a look of dawning realization as spread over the four countenances as they drained the broth I have seen sometimes when half-conscious patients were revived with powerful restoratives. The man was first to show it, surging from his crouching position and turning his closed eyes this way and that, like a caged thing seeking escape from its

prison. But before he could do more than wheel drunkenly in his tracks realization seemed to strike the women, too. There was a swirl of fluttering draperies, the soft thud of soft feet on the tiled floor of the room, and all rushed pell-mell to the door.

The sharp clutch of de Grandin's hand roused me. "Quick, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded. "To the cemetery; to the cemetery with all haste! *Nom d'un sale charneau*, we have yet to see the end of this!"

"Which cemetery?" I asked as we stumbled toward my parked car.

"*N'importe*," he returned. "At Shadow Lawn or Mount Olivet we shall see that which will make us call ourselves three shameless liars!"

Mount Olivet was nearest of the three municipalities of the dead adjacent to Harrisonville, and toward it we made top speed. The driveway gates had closed at sunset, but the small gates each side the main entrance were still unlatched, and we raced through them and to the humble tomb we had seen violated that morning.

"Say, Dr. de Grandin," panted Costello as he strove to keep pace with the agile little Frenchman, "just what's th' big idea? I know ye've some good reason, but —"

"Take cover!" interrupted the other. "Behold, my friends, he comes!"

Shuffling drunkenly, stumbling over mounded tops of sodded graves, a slouching figure came careening toward us, veered off as it neared the Carson grave and dropped to its knees beside it. A moment later it was scrabbling at the clay and gravel which had been disturbed by the grave-diggers that morning, seeking desperately to burrow its way into the sepulcher.

"Me God!" Costello breathed as he rose unsteadily. I could see the tiny globules of fear-sweat standing on his forehead, but his inbred sense of duty overmastered his fright. "Gyp Carson, I arrest you —" he laid a hand on the burrowing creature's shoulder, and it was as if he touched a soap bubble. There was a frightened mouselike squeak, then a despairing groan, and the figure under his hand collapsed in a crumpled heap. When de Grandin and I reached them the pale, drawn face of a corpse grinned at us sardonically in the beam of Costello's flashlight.

"Dr. — de — Grandin, Dr. — Trowbridge — for th' love o' God give me a drink o' sumpin!" begged the big Irishman, clutching the diminutive Frenchman's shoulder as a frightened child might clutch its mother's skirts.

"Courage, my old one," de Grandin patted the detective's hand, "we have work before us tonight, remember. Tomorrow they will bury this poor one. The law has had its will of him; now let his body rest in peace. Tonight — *sacré nom*, the dead must tend the dead; it is with the living we have business. *En avant* to Wallagin's, Friend Trowbridge!"

"Your solution of the case was sane," he told Costello as we set out for the house we'd left a little while before, "but there are times when very sanity proves the falseness of a conclusion. That someone had unearthed the body of Gyp Carson to copy his fingerprints seemed most reasonable, but today I obtained information which led me up another road. A most unpleasant road, *parbleu!* I have already told you something of the history of the Wallagin person; how he was dismissed from the Rangers' Club, and how he vowed a horrid vengeance on those voting his expulsion. That was of interest. I sought still further. I found that he resided long in Haiti, and that there he mingled with the *Culte de Morts*. We laugh at such things here, but in Haiti, that dark step-daughter of mysterious Africa's dark mysteries, they are no laughing matter. No. In Port-au-Prince and in the backlands of the jungle they will tell you of the *zombie* — who is neither ghost nor yet a living person resurrected, but only the spiritless corpse ravished from its grave, endowed with pseudo-life by black magic and made to serve the whim of the magician who has animated it. Sometimes wicked persons steal a corpse to make it commit crime while they stay far from the scene, thus furnishing themselves unbreakable alibis. More often they rob graves to secure slaves who labor ceaselessly for them at no wages at all. Yes, it is so; with my own eyes I have seen it.

"But there are certain limits which no sorcery can transcend. The poor dead *zombie* must be fed, for if he is not he cannot serve his so execrable master. But he must be fed only certain things. If he taste salt or meat, though but the tiniest *soupçon* of either be concealed in a great quantity of food, he at once realizes he is dead, and goes back to his grave, nor can the strongest magic of his owner stay him from returning for one little second. Furthermore, when he goes back he is dead forever after. He cannot be raised from the grave a second time, for Death which has been cheated for so long asserts itself, and the putrefaction which was stayed during the *zombie's* period of servitude takes place all quickly, so the *zombie* dead six months, if it returns to its grave and so much as touches its hand to the earth, becomes at once like any other six-months-dead corpse — a mass of putrescence pleasant neither to the eye nor nose, but preferable to the dead-alive thing it was a moment before.

"Consider then: The steward of the Rangers' Club related dreadful tales this Monsieur Wallagin had told all boastfully — how he had learned to be a *zombie*-maker, a corpse-master, in Haiti; how the mysteries of *Papa Nebo*, *Gouédé Mazacca* and *Gouédé Oussou*, those dread oracles of the dead, were opened books to him.

"Ah-ha, Monsieur Wallagin," I say, "I damn suspect you have been up to business of the monkey here in this so pleasant State of New Jersey. You have, it seems, brought here the mysteries of Haiti, and with them you wreak

vengeance on those you hate, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Thereafter I go to his house, meet the little discharged Chinese man, and talk with him. For why was he discharged with violence? Because, by blue, *he had put salt in the soup of the guests whom Monsieur Wallagin entertains.*

"Four guests he has, you say?" I remark. "I had not heard he had so many.

"*Nom d'un nom, yes,*' the excellent *Chinois* tells me. 'There are one man and three so lovely women in that house, and all seem walking in their sleep. At night he has the women dance while the man makes music with the drum. Sometimes he sends the man out, but what to do I do not know. At night, also, he feeds them bread and soup with neither salt nor meat, food not fit for a mangy dog to lap.'

"Oh, excellent old man of China, oh, paragon of all Celestials,' I reply, 'behold, I give you money. Now, come with me and we shall hire another cook for your late master, and we shall bribe him well to smuggle meat into the soup he makes for those strange guests. Salt the monster might detect when he tastes the soup before it are served, but a little, tiny bit of beef-meat, *non.* Nevertheless, it will serve excellently for my purposes.'

"*Voilà, my friends,* there is the explanation of tonight's so dreadful scenes."

"But what are we to do?" I asked. "You can't arrest this Wallagin. No court on earth would try him on such charges as you make."

"Do *you* believe it, Friend Costello?" de Grandin asked

the detective.

"Sure, I do, sir. Ain't I seen it with me own two eyes?"

"And what should be this one's punishment?"

"Och, Dr. de Grandin, are you kiddin'? What would we do if we saw a poison snake on th' sidewalk, an' us with a jolly bit o' blackthorn in our hands?"

"*Précisément,* I think we understand each other perfectly, *mon vieux.*" He thrust his slender, womanishly small hand out and lost it in the depths of the detective's great fist.

"Would you be good enough to wait us here, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked as we came to a halt before the house. "There is a trifle of unfinished business to attend to and — the night is fine, the view exquisite. I think that you would greatly enjoy it for a little while, my old and rare."

It might have been a quarter-hour later when they re-joined me. "What—" I began, but the perfectly expressionless expression on de Grandin's face arrested my question.

"*Hélas,* my friend, it was unfortunate," he told me. "The good Costello was about to arrest him, and he turned to flee. Straight up the long, steep stairs he fled, and at the topmost one, *parbleu,* he missed his footing and came tumbling down! I greatly fear — indeed, I know his neck was broken in the fall. It is not so, *mon sergent?*" he turned to Costello for confirmation. "Did he not fall downstairs?"

"That he did, sir. Twice. The first time didn't quite finish him."

Trespassing Souls

MID-AUGUST was on us and Harrisonville sweltered under the merciless combination of heat and humidity as only communities in the North Atlantic States can suffer in such conditions. Jules de Grandin and I rocked listlessly back and forth in our willow chairs, too much exhausted for further conversation, unhappily aware that the clock had struck midnight half an hour before, but knowing bed meant only a continuation of discomfort and unwilling to make even the little effort involved in ascending the stairs and disrobing.

“*Morbleu*, Friend Trowbridge,” the little Frenchman murmured sleepily, “this day, it is infernal, no less. Were those three old Hebrews transported here, I damn think they would beseech us to take them back to the comforting coolness of Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace! If—”

The muffled drum-roll of my office telephone bell sounded a sleepy interruption to his comment, and I rose wearily to respond to the summons.

“Yes,” I answered as a frightened voice pronounced my name questioningly over the wire, “this is Dr. Trowbridge.”

“This is Aubrey Sattalea,” the caller told me. “Can you come over to 1346 Pavonia Avenue right away, please? My wife is very ill — heat prostration, I’m afraid. If she doesn’t get help soon, I fear—”

“All right,” I interrupted, making a note of the address and reaching for my hat, “fill a hot-water bottle and put it at her feet, and if you’ve any whisky that’s fit to drink, give her a little in water and repeat the dose every few minutes. I’ll be right along.”

In the surgery I procured a small flask of brandy, some strychnine and digitalis, two sterile syringes, alcohol and cotton sponges, then shoved a bottle of quinine tincture into the bag as an added precaution.

“Better run along to bed, old chap,” I advised de Grandin as I opened the front door. “I’ve been called to attend a woman with heat prostration, and mayn’t be back till morning. Just my luck to have the car laid up for repairs when there’s no possibility of getting a taxi,” I added gloomily, turning to descend the front steps.

The Frenchman rose languidly and retrieved his wide-brimmed Panama from the porch floor. “Me, I suffer so poignantly, it is of no moment where I am miserable,” he confided. “Permit me to come, too, my friend. I can be equally unhappy walking beside you in the street or working beside you in the sickroom.”

The Sattalea cottage was a pretty example of the Colonial bungalow type-modified Dutch architecture with a low porch covered by an extension of the sloping roof and all rooms on the ground floor. Set well back from the double row of plane-trees bordering the avenue’s sidewalks, its level lawn was bisected by a path of sunken flagstones leading to the three low steps of the veranda. Lights showed behind the French windows letting into a bedroom at the right end of the porch, and the gentle flutter of pongee curtains and the soft whining of an electric fan told us the activities of the household were centered there. Without the formality of knocking we stepped through the open window into the room where Vivian Sattalea lay breathing so lightly her slender bosom scarce seemed to move at all.

She lay upon the bed, uncovered by sheet or blanket, only the fashionably abbreviated green-voile nightrobe veiling her lissome body from the air. Her soft, copper-gold hair, worn in a shoulder bob, lay damply about her small head on the pillow, and her delicate, clean-cut features had the smooth, bloodless semi-transparence of a face cunningly molded in wax.

“*La pauvre!*” de Grandin murmured as I introduced myself to the frightened young man who hovered, hot-water bottle in hand, beside the unconscious woman, “*La belle, pauvre enfant!* Quick, Friend Trowbridge, her plight is worse than we supposed; haste is imperative!”

As I undid the fastenings of my emergency kit he advanced to the bed, took the girl’s wrist between his fingers and fixed his eyes intently on the dial of the diminutive watch strapped to the underside of her left wrist. “Seventy” — he counted slowly, staring at the little timepiece — “*non*, sixty-seven — sixty—”

Abruptly he dropped her hand and bent down till his slim, sensitive nostrils were but an inch or so from the girl’s gently parted lips.

“*Sacré bleu, Monsieur*, may I ask where you obtained the liquor with which you have stimulated your wife?” he demanded, staring with a sort of incredulous horror at Sattalea.

The young husband’s cheeks reddened. “Why — er — er,” he began, but de Grandin cut him short with an impatient gesture.

“No need,” he snapped, rising and regarding us with blazing eyes. “*C’est la prohibition, pardieu!* When this poor one was overcome by heat, it was Dr. Trowbridge’s order that you give her alcohol to sustain her, is it not so?”

“Yes, but—”

“‘But’ be everlastingly consigned to the flames of hell! The only stimulant which you could find was of the bootleg kind, is it not true?”

“Yes, sir,” the young man admitted, “Dr. Trowbridge told me to give her whisky in broken doses, if I had it. I didn’t, but I got a quart of gin a couple of weeks ago, and—”

“Name of a thousand small blue devils!” de Grandin half shrieked. “Stand not there like a paralyzed bullfrog and offer excuses. Hasten to the kitchen and bring mustard and hot water, quickly. In addition to heat prostration, this poor child lies poisoned to the point of death with wooden alcohol. Already her pulse has almost vanished. Quick, my friend; rush, fly; even now it may be too late!”

Our preparations were made with feverish haste, but the little Frenchman’s worst predictions were fulfilled. Even as I bent to administer the mixture of mustard and water which should empty the fainting woman’s system of the deadly wood alcohol, her breast fluttered convulsively, her pale lids drew half-way open, disclosing eyes so far rolled back that neither pupil nor iris was visible, and her blanched, bloodless lips fell flaccidly apart as her chin dropped toward the curve of her throat and the fatuous, insensible expression of the newly dead spread over her pallid countenance like a blight across a stricken flower.

“*Hélas*, it is finished!” de Grandin rasped in a furious whisper. “Let those who sponsor such laws as those which make poisonous liquor available accept responsibility for this poor one’s death!”

He was still swearing volubly in mingled French and English as we walked down the flagstone pathway from the house, and in the blindness of his fury all but collided with an undersized, stoop-shouldered man who paused speculatively on the sidewalk a moment then turned in at the entrance to the yard and sauntered toward the cottage.

“*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*,” de Grandin apologized, stepping quickly aside, for the other made no move to avoid collision, “it is that I am greatly overwrought, and failed to—

“*Morbleu*, Friend Trowbridge, the ill-mannered *canaille* has not the grace to acknowledge my amends. It is not to be borne!” He wheeled in his tracks, took an angry step after the other, then stiffened abruptly to a halt and paused irresolute a second, like a bird-dog coming to a “point.” With an imperative, half-furtive gesture he bade me follow, and stepped silently over the grass in the wake of the discourteous stranger.

Silently we ascended the path and crept up the porch steps, tiptoeing across the veranda to the open window letting into the room of death. The Frenchman’s raised finger signaled me to halt just beyond the line of light

shining through the midnight darkness, and we paused in breathless silence as a soft, suave voice inside addressed the stricken husband.

“Good evening, sir,” we heard the stranger say, “you seem in trouble. Perhaps I can assist you?”

A heart-wrenching, strangling sob from young Sattalea was the only answer.

“Things are seldom as bad as they seem,” the other pursued, his words, pronounced in a sort of silky monotone, carrying distinctly, despite the fact that he spoke with a slight lisp. “When ignorant quacks have failed, there are always others to whom you can turn, you know.”

Another sob from the prostrated husband was his sole reply.

“For instance, now,” the visitor murmured, almost as though speaking to himself, “two witless charlatans just told you that your love is dead — so she is, if you wish to accept *their* verdict, but—”

“*Monsieur*,” de Grandin stepped across the window-sill and fixed his level, unwinking stare on the intruder, “I do not know what game it is you play; but I make no doubt you seek an unfair advantage of this poor young man. It were better for you that you went your way in peace, and that immediately; else—”

“Indeed?” the other surveyed him with a sort of amused contempt. “Don’t you think it’s *you* who’d best be on his way? You’ve already broken his heart with your inability to tell the difference between life and death. Must you add insults to injury?”

De Grandin gasped in a sort of unbelieving horror as he grasped the import of the stranger’s accusation. On the bed before us, her pale features somewhat composed by the little Frenchman’s deft hands, lay the corpse of the woman we had seen die an hour before; after thirty years of general practise and a full term of hospital duty, I knew the signs of death as I knew the symptoms of chicken-pox, and de Grandin had vast experience in the hospitals of Paris, the military lazarets of the War and infirmaries throughout the world; yet this interloper told us to our faces we were mistaken.

Yet, despite the fellow’s impudence, I could not help a sudden twinge of doubt. He was unquestionably impressive, though not pleasantly so. Shorter, even, than the diminutive de Grandin, his height was further curtailed by the habitual stoop of his shoulders; indeed, there was about him the suggestion of a hunched back, though closer inspection showed no actual deformity. His face, narrow, pointed and unnaturally long of chin, was pale as the under side of a crawling reptile, and despite the sultriness of the night showed no more evidence of perspiration than if his skin possessed no sweat-glands. Clothed all in black he was from the tips of his dull-kid shoes to the wide-brimmed felt hat

upon his sleek, black hair, and from his stooping shoulders there hung a knee-length cape of thin black silk which gave him the look of a hovering, unclean carrion bird which waited opportunity to swoop down and revel in an obscene feast. But his eyes attracted and repelled me more than anything. They were dark, not black, but of an indeterminate, slate-like shade, and glowed brightly in his toad-belly-white face like corpse lights flickering through the eye-holes of a death mask.

His thin, bloodless lips parted in a sardonic smile which was more than half snarl as he turned his cloaked shoulder on de Grandin, addressing young Sattalea directly. "Do you want to take the word of these ignoramuses," he asked "or will you take my assurance that she is not dead, but sleeping!"

A look of agonized hope flamed up in Sattalea's face a moment. "You mean—" he choked, and the other's soft rejoinder cut his incredulous question in two:

"Of course; it is but the work of a moment to call the wandering spirit to its tenant. May I try?"

"Do not heed him, my friend!" de Grandin cried. "Trust him not, I implore you! I know not what vile chicanery he purposes to practise, but—"

"Be still, you!" Sattalea commanded. "The man is right. You've had your chance, and the best you did was tell me my poor darling is dead. Give him a chance. Oh" — he stretched imploring hands to the sinister stranger — "I'll give my soul, if you will—"

"*Monsieur*, for the love of the good God, think what it is you say!" de Grandin's shouted injunction drowned out the desperate man's wild offer. "Let this blood brother of Iscariot work his evil if you must; but offer not your soul for sale or barter as you hope one day to stand in spiritual communion with her who was your earthly love!"

The trembling, eager husband ignored the Frenchman's admonition. "Do what you will," he begged. "I'll give you anything you ask!"

The stranger chuckled softly to himself, threw back the corners of his sable cloak as though fluttering unclean wings preparatory to flight, and leaned above the dead woman, pressing lightly on her folded eyelids with long, bony fingers which seemed never to have known the warmth of human blood in their veins. His pale, thin lips writhed and twisted over his gleaming animal-like teeth as he mouthed an incantation in some tongue I could not understand. Yet as he raised his voice in slight emphasis once or twice I saw de Grandin's slim nostrils tighten with quickly indrawn breath, as though he caught a half-familiar syllable in the mutterings.

The stranger's odd, nondescript eyes seemed fairly starting from their shallow sockets as he focused a gaze of demoniacal concentration on the still, dead face before him,

and over and over again he droned his formula, so that even I caught the constant repetition of some word or name like *Sathanas* — *Barran-Sathanas* and *Yod-Sathanas*.

I saw de Grandin mop his forehead as he shook his head impatiently, clearing his eyes of the perspiration which trickled downward from his brow, and take a short half-step forward with extended hand, but next moment both he and I stood stone-still in our places, for, as a crumb of cochineal dropped into a glass of milk incarnadines the white fluid, so a faintest flush of pink seemed creeping and spreading slowly in the dead woman's face. Higher and higher, like the strained shadow of a blush, the wave of color mounted, touched the pallid lips and cheeks, imparted a dim but unmistakable glow of life to the soft curving throat and delicate, cleft chin. A flutter, scarcely more than the merest hinted flicker of motion, animated the blue-veined lids, and a sudden spasmodic palpitation rippled through the corpse's breast.

"It is not good — no good can come of it—" de Grandin began, but Sattalea cut him short.

"You may go!" he shouted, glaring at the little Frenchman across the resurrected body of his wife. "I don't want to see you — either of you again. You damned quacks, you—"

De Grandin stiffened and his face went almost as pale as the mysterious stranger's under the insult, but he controlled himself with an almost superhuman effort. "*Monsieur*," he answered with frigid courtesy, "I congratulate you on your seeming good fortune. Pray God you need not call on us again!"

With a bow of punctilious formality he turned on his heel to leave the house, but the stranger sent a parting shaft of spiteful laughter flying after him. "No fear of that," he promised. "Hereafter I shall minister to this house, and—"

"The Devil can quote Scripture for his evil ends," the Frenchman interrupted sharply. "I make no doubt his servants sometimes simulate the holy miracles for purposes as sinister. Some day, perhaps, *Monsieur*, we shall match our powers."

2

"For heaven's sake," I asked in bewilderment as we walked slowly through the tree-leaved avenue, "what *was* it we saw back there? I'll stake my professional reputation we saw that woman die; yet that queer-looking fellow seemed to have no more trouble reviving her than a hypnotist has in waking his subject."

The little Frenchman removed his red-banded Panama and fanned himself with its wide brim. "*Le bon Dieu* only knows," he confessed. "Me, I do not like it. Undoubtedly, the woman died — we saw her. Unquestionably, she was

revived, we saw that, too; but *how*? The grip of death is too strong to be lightly loosed, and though I could not understand all the words he said, I most distinctly heard him pronounce the ancient Devil Worshipers' term for Satan not once, but many times. I greatly fear, my friend — *cordieu*, have the care!" he broke off, leaping forward and flinging himself bodily on a short, stout man in clerical garb, hurling him backward to the sidewalk.

Walking with bowed head and mumbling lips the priest had descended from the curb into the path of a hurrying, noiseless motor-car, and but for the Frenchman's timely intervention must inevitably have been run down.

"*Mille pardons*," de Grandin apologized as he assisted the astonished cleric to his feet, "I am sorry to have startled you, but I think no damage has been done, whereas, had I not acted in time—"

"Say no more," the clergyman interrupted in a rich, Irish brogue. "'Tis glad I am to be able to curse ye for your roughness, sir. Sure, 'tis time I was payin' more attention to me feet, anyhow. It's the Lord Himself, no less, provides protection for such as I. You, now, sir, were the instrument of heaven, and I'm not so sure I didn't see an emissary from the other place not long ago."

"Indeed?" returned de Grandin. "I greatly doubt he could have prevailed against you, Father."

"Sure, and he did not," the other replied, "but I was after thinkin' of him as I walked along, and 'twas for that reason I so nearly stepped to me own destruction a moment hence. One o' me parishioners down the street here was called to heaven a little time ago, and I got there almost too late to complete anointin' her. As I was comin' from the house, who should be strollin' up the steps, as bold as brass, but the very divil himself, or at least one o' his most trusted agents.

"Good evenin', Father," says he to me, as civil as ye please.

"Good evenin' to ye, sir," I replies.

"Are ye, by anny chance, comin' from a house o' death?" he wants to know.

"I am that," I answers, 'and, if I'm not bein' too bold, what affair is it of yours?"

"Are ye sure the pore woman is dead?" he demands, fixin' me with a pair o' eyes that niver changed expression anny more than a snake's.

"Dead, is it?" says I. 'How ye know 'tis a woman who lies in her last sleep in yonder house I've no idea, and I don't propose to inquire, but if ye're wantin' to know whether or not she's dead, I can tell ye she is. Sure, 'tis meself that's been ministerin' to the dead and dyin' for close to fifty years, and when the time comes that I can't recognize those the hand o' the Lord has touched, I'll be wearin' me vestments for the last long time, so I will.'

"Oh, but," he answers, cool as anny cucumber, 'I think

perhaps she's still alive; perhaps she's not dead, but sleepin'. I shall endeavor to awake her.' And with that he makes to push past me into the house.

"Ye *will* not," I tells him, barrin' his way. 'I've no idea what sort o' play-actin' ye're up to, young felly, but this I tell ye, Bernardine McGuffy lies dead in that house, and her soul (God rist it!) has gone where neither you nor anny mortal man can reach it. Stand away from that door, or I'll forget I'm a man o' peace and take me knuckles from the side o' your face, so I will.'

"With that he turns away, sirs, but I'm tellin' ye I've niver before seen a human face which more resembled the popular conception o' the Prince o' Darkness than his did that minute, with his long chin, his pale, corpse cheeks and the wicked, changeless expression in his starin', snaky eyes. I—"

"*Pardieu*, do you say it?" de Grandin interpreted excitedly. "Tell me, *Monsieur l'Abbé*, did your so mysterious stranger dress all in black, with a silken cloak draping from his shoulders?"

"Indeed and he did!" the priest replied. "When first I saw him he was standin' and starin' at the house where poor Bernardine died as though debatin' with himself whether or not to enter it, and it was the long black cloak o' him — like the wings o' some dirty buzzard who did but wait his time to flap up to the window o' the room o' death — which first made me mind him particularly."

"U'm? and this was when, if you please?"

"An hour ago, I'd say. I was delayed on me way home by two sick calls — not that I had to make 'em, ye understand, but there I was in the neighborhood, and the pore children were sufferin' with the heat, as were their mother, also. What use are us old fellies who are childless for the sake o' God if not to minister to all His sufferin' little ones?"

"Precisely," de Grandin agreed, raising his hat formally as he turned to leave. To me he murmured as we pursued our homeward way:

"Is it not redolent of the odor of fish, Friend Trowbridge? Half an hour before Madame Sattalea dies this cloaked man appears at another house hard on the tracks of the angel of death, and would have forced entrance had not the sturdy Irish priest barred his way. And did you also note the evil one used the same words to the good father that he addressed to the poor young Sattalea before he worked his devilish arts upon the dead woman — 'She is not dead, but sleeping'? *Cordieu*, I think perhaps I spoke more truly than I knew when I remarked the devil can quote Scripture for his purposes. I can not see far into this matter, but nothing I have seen so far looks good."

A tall, rather good-looking young man with prematurely gray hair and the restrained though by no means cheerless

manner of his profession rose from one of the rockers on my front porch as de Grandin and I approached the house. “Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge,” he greeted. “Old Mr. Eichelberger passed away a while ago, and the boss asked me to run over and get you to give us a certificate. There’s not much doing tonight, and I figured you’d probably be awake anyhow; I shouldn’t have minded if you couldn’t have seen me, though — I’d as lief be driving around as sitting in the office on a night like this.”

“Oh, good evening, McCrea,” I answered, recognizing the chief assistant to Coroner Martin, who is also the city’s leading funeral director. “Yes, I’ll sign the certificate for you. Dr. Renshaw helped me in the case, and was actually in attendance this evening, but I’ve been formally in charge, so the registrar will take my certificate, I suppose. We gave up hope for the poor old gentleman yesterday afternoon; can’t do much with interstitial nephritis when the patient’s over seventy, you know.”

“No, sir,” the young mortician agreed, accepting a cigarette from de Grandin’s proffered case.

As I returned from the office with the filled-in death certificate, the two of them were deeply immersed in shop talk. “Yes, sir,” McCrea was telling de Grandin, “we certainly run up against some queer things in our business. Take what happened this evening, for instance: Mr. and Mrs. Martin had gone out to see some friends, and Johnson, the regular night man, was out on a call, so I was alone in the office. A chap I knew when I was studying at Renouard’s called me up from Hackettstown, and I’d just run off when I noticed a shadow falling across the desk. I tell you, sir, I almost jumped out of my chair when I glanced up and saw the darndest-looking individual you ever saw not three feet away and smiling at me like a pussy-cat saying good evening to a canary. The screen door to the office was latched, though not locked, and anybody coming in would have been obliged to rattle the handle, you’d have thought, but there this fellow was, almost down my throat, and I hadn’t heard so much as a footstep till I saw him.

“He was an undersized little pipsqueak, bony as a shad and pale as a clown, with a funny-looking black cape, something like those trick overcoats the dukes wear in the European movies, hanging from his shoulders. Can you tie that — wearing a cape on a night like this?”

“A-a-ah?” de Grandin’s interjection was so low I could scarcely hear it, but so sharp it seemed to cut through the sultry summer darkness like a razor. “Say on, my friend; I am all attention.”

“Humph. I shouldn’t be much surprised if there’s somebody missing when they call the roll at the Secaucus asylum tomorrow morning, sir. What d’ye think this funny-looking chap wanted?”

“*Cordieu*, I can damn imagine,” de Grandin murmured,

“but I would prefer that you tell me!”

“No, sir, you don’t,” the other replied with a chuckle. “You could sit there and guess for a month o’ Sundays, but you’d never suspect what he was up to. Listen:

“‘Good evening, sir,’ he said, grinning at me all the time as if he’d enjoy biting a hunk out of my neck; ‘are you interested in money?’

“‘Now, what’s this, a touch or a stock salesman working overtime?’ I asked myself as I looked, him over. ‘Sure, I am,’ I answered. ‘Know anyone who isn’t?’

“‘With that he reaches down into his pocket and fishes out a roll of bills — most of ’em yellow, too — big enough to make a hippopotamus take two bites, and sort o’ ruffled ’em through his fingers, as a professional gambler might play with the cards before commencing to shuffle. ‘I have need of a woman’s corpse in my scientific work,’ he told me, still ruffling the loose ends of the bills against his thumb. ‘If you have such an one here, and it is as yet unembalmed, I will pay you any amount you ask for it.’

“‘He stopped and stared hard at me with those queer eyes of his, and I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck beginning to stand up like those on a tom-cat’s tail when he sees a bulldog coming toward him. Positively, Dr. de Grandin, the fellow had me almost groggy, just looking at me, and the harder I tried to look away the harder I seemed to have to stare at him.

“‘Money, much, much money,’ he kept repeating in a kind o’ solemn singsong whisper. ‘Money to buy liquor, fine clothes, motor-cars, the favors of beautiful women — all these shall be yours if you will let me have a woman’s corpse. See, I will give you—’

“‘You and who else?’ I yelled, jumping up and reaching into the drawer where we keep a pistol for emergencies. ‘Get to hell out o’ here before I fix you so’s they’ll have to hold an inquest on you!’

“‘I reckon I sort o’ flew off the handle, sir, for he was a harmless sort of nut, after all, but that funny get-up of his and the soft, sneaky way he had of speaking, and those devilish, unchanging eyes of his all together just about got my goat. Honestly, I believe I’d have let him have a bullet just for luck in another minute.’

“‘And what time was this, if you please?’ the Frenchman demanded sharply.

“‘Almost exactly twelve o’clock, sir. I can place it by the fact that the door had hardly shut on the lunatic when the call to take charge of Mr. Eichelberger’s remains came over the ’phone, and, of course, I entered the time up on the arrangement card. The boss came in a minute or so later and said he’d take the call himself while I came over here to get the death certificate.’

“‘Ah?’ de Grandin breathed. Then, in a more natural tone he added: “You are doubtlessly right, my friend. Some poor

one has made good his escape from the asylum, and wanders about under the delusion that he is a great scientist. Let us hope he startles no more members of your noble calling with his offers of princely bribes.”

“Not much fear of that,” the young man returned with a chuckle as he turned to descend the porch steps. “I think I put the fear o’ God into him when I flashed that gun. He may be crazy, but I don’t think he has any special craving to stop a bullet.”

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*,” de Grandin almost wailed as the young embalmer entered his motor and drove off, “I shall go wild, *caduc* — crazy like a hatter. Behold the facts: This same damnation man in black goes first to an *entrepreneur des pompes funèbres* and attempts to buy a corpse; next he appears before the house where a woman lies newly dead, and would have forced an entrance. Foiled there, he crops up as if by unclean magic at the very door of Monsieur Sattalea’s house almost before we have composed poor, dead Madame Sattalea’s limbs. *Mordieu*, it is wicked, it is iniquitous, it is most devilishly depraved, no less! Like a carrion crow, scenting the corpse-odor from afar, he comes unerringly to the place of death, and always he asks for a female cadaver. Twice repulsed, at the third trial he meets success. What in the name of three thousand little blue devilkins does it portend?”

“If we hadn’t seen that uncanny show at Sattalea’s I’d say McCrea was right, and the fellow’s an escaped lunatic,” I answered, “but—”

“Ah *hélas*, we have always that fearful ‘but’ making mock of us,” he rejoined. “When first I saw this Monsieur of the Black Cloak I liked his looks little. To one who has battled with the powers of evil as I have, there is a certain family resemblance among all those who connive with devilishness, my friend. Therefore, when I did behold that colorless, cadaverish face of his silhouetted against the evening air, I determined to follow him quietly into the Sattalea house and see what he would do. *Dieu de Dieu*, we did observe a very great plenty. I was wondering about him and the means he might conceivably have employed to bring about Madame Sattalea’s seeming revivement when we met the good *curé* and learned from him of the Black One’s attempt to break into another dead woman’s house; now, *parbleu*, after hearing Monsieur McCrea’s story, I am greatly afraid! What it is I fear I do not know. I am like a timid little boy who ventures into the darkened nursery; all about me are monstrous, dreadful things the nature of which I can not descry. I put forth my hand, there is nothing there; but always in the darkness, just beyond the reach of my groping fingers, leers and gibbers the undefined shadow of something terrible and formless. *Cordieu*, my friend, we must make a light and view this terror of the darkness face to face! It shall not play hide-and-go-seek with us. No!”

3

A mild epidemic of summer grippe kept me fully occupied for the succeeding two weeks, and de Grandin was left largely to his own devices. Whether he sought the key to the mystery of the man in black, and under what particular door-mat he looked for it I do not know, for the little Frenchman could be as secretive at some times as he was loquacious at others, and I had no wish to excite his acid comments by bringing the matter up unasked.

One Friday afternoon when August was slowly burning out with its own intensity, we were strolling leisurely toward the City Club, intent on a light luncheon to be followed by a round of golf at the Sedgemoor links when our attention was called to a little boy. Sturdy and straight as a young live-oak he was, his bright, fair hair innocent of covering, his smooth, fair skin tanned to the rich hue of ripened fruit, the sort of lad to give every middle-aged bachelor a twinge of regret and make him wonder if his freedom had been worth while, after all. I smiled involuntarily as my eyes rested on him, but the smile froze on my lips as I noticed the expression of abject misery and fright on his little, sunburned face.

De Grandin noted the lad’s affrighted look, too, and paused in quick sympathy. “*Holà*, my little cabbage,” he greeted, his small blue eyes taking in every detail of the obviously terrified child, “what is it troubles you? Surely affairs can not be so dreadful?”

The lad looked at him with the trustful gaze all children instinctively bestowed on one they felt to be their friend, and his red, babyish lips trembled pitifully as great tears welled up in his eyes. “I dropped the rice, sir,” he answered simply. “Mother sent me to the grocery for it, ’cause they forgot to send it with the rest of the order, and I dropped it. The — the bag broke, and I couldn’t gather it up, though I tried ever so hard, and — she’ll beat me! She beats me every day, now.”

“*Tiens*, is it so?” the Frenchman replied. “Be of courage. I shall give you the price of another sack of rice and your excellent *mère* shall be none the wiser.”

“But she told me to hurry,” the little chap protested, “and if I’m late I’ll be whipped anyway.”

“But this is infamous!” Sudden rage flamed in de Grandin’s small round eyes. “Come, we shall accompany you. I shall explain all to your *maman*, and all shall be well.”

With all the confidence in the world the little boy slipped his small, brown fist into de Grandin’s slim white hand and together we walked down the street and turned into the smoothly clipped front yard of — the Sattalea cottage.

Someone was playing the piano softly as we ascended the

porch steps, the haunting, eery notes of Saint Saens' *Danse Macabre* falling lightly on our ears as we crossed the porch. Fearfully, on tiptoe, the lad led us toward an open French window, then paused timorously. "If *he's* with her I'll surely catch it!" he whispered, hanging back that we might precede him into the house. "He holds me while she beats me, and laughs when I cry!"

De Grandin caught his breath sharply at the little boy's announcement, and his small face was stern as he stepped softly into the semi-darkened drawing-room. Seated on the bancal before a baby grand piano, her body swaying gently with the rhythm of the music, was a woman — Vivian Sattalea. As I glanced at her delicate, clean-cut features framed in their aureole of rose-gold hair, the carmine of her parted lips blushing vividly against the milky whiteness of her face, I could not help feeling she had undergone some fundamental change since last I saw her. True, on the former occasion she had lain at the very door of death, whereas now she seemed in abundant health, but there was something more than the difference between sickness and health in her changed countenance. Despite her desperate condition when I saw her before, there had been a look of innate delicacy and refinement in the cameo-clear outline of her face. Today there was something theatrical — professional — in her beauty. The ruddy blondness and expert arrangement of her hair, the sophisticated look in her violet eyes, the lines about her full, too-red lips were those of the woman who lives by the exploitation of her charms. And in the flare of her nostrils, the odd tightness of the flesh above her cheek-bones and the hungry curves about her petulant, yearning mouth there was betrayed a burning greed for primal atavistic emotion scarcely to be slaked though every depth of passion be plumbed to the nadir.

Even as we halted at the window, undecided how best to announce our advent, the woman abruptly ceased playing and clutched at the keyboard before her with suddenly convulsed, clenching fingers, the long, polished nails fairly clawing at the polished ivory keys like the unsheathed talons of a feline. And as her hands clenched shut she leaned backward, turning her vivid, parted lips up in a voluptuous smile. From the shadow of the piano another shadow drifted quickly, halted beside the woman and bent downward swiftly to seize her in frenzied embrace.

I gasped in amazement. Holding Vivian Sattalea's cheeks between his hands, kissing her ripe, scarlet lips, was the man in black, the mysterious stranger who had called her errant soul back from God only knew what mystic space the night de Grandin and I pronounced her dead.

"*Cordieu,*" I heard the Frenchman murmur, "*c'est une affaire amoureuse!*"

"Your pardon, sir and *madame,*" he apologized after a discreet pause, "I would not for the world disturb your

innocent pastime, but on the street I did meet *Madame's* little son, and—"

"That sneaking brat!" the woman rasped, freeing herself from her lover's embrace and rising to face de Grandin with furious, flaming cheeks. "I'll teach him to spy on me and drag strangers to the house to—"

"Excuse, please, *Madame,* you will do nothing whatever at all concerning the little man," de Grandin denied in a level, almost toneless voice. "When first we did encounter him in the street he told us he greatly feared a beating at your hands, and I took it on myself to guarantee him immunity. I would not have it said I have failed him."

"We'll see about that!" She took a swift step toward the cowering child, the cold fire of murderous hate gleaming in her eyes, but de Grandin interrupted.

"*Madame,*" he reminded, "you forget what it is I have said." Quick as a striking snake his hand shot out, grasping her wrist in a paralyzing grip and halting her in mid-stride,

"Oh!" she sobbed as his steely fingers bit cruelly into her yielding flesh. "Pontou," she turned to the black-clothed man, "will you let this insolent—"

De Grandin released her, but kept his body between her and the frightened child as he regarded the livid-faced man with cold, menacing eyes. "*Monsieur,*" he promised, clipping his words with metallic hardness, "should you care to resent any affront you may conceive *Madame* has suffered, I am at your service at any time and place you wish to name."

A moment he waited, his slender body braced for the assault he fully expected, then, as the other made no move, turned a contemptuous shoulder on the woman and her companion.

"Come, *mon brave,*" and he took the little boy's hand in his; "let us go. These, they are unworthy to share the company of men like us. Come away. Friend Trowbridge and I shall feed you bonbons and chocolate till you are most gloriously ill, then nurse you back to health again. We shall take you to see the animals at the zoo; we shall—"

"But see here, de Grandin," I expostulated as I followed him to the street, "you can't do this. It's against the law, and—"

"My friend," he assured me, "I have already done it. As for the law, if it would be respected it must be respectable. Any statute which compels a little man like this to live with such an unnatural parent is beneath all honest men's contempt."

He was as good as his word. Little Aubrey Sattalea spent a glamorous afternoon with us at the zoological garden, stuffed himself to capacity with unwholesome sweetmeats and ate a dinner fit for a longshoreman that night.

The Frenchman was deep in the relation of a highly

original version of the story of Cinderella as we sat on the veranda after dinner when quick, angry steps sounded on the front path. “Where’s that Frenchman, de Grandin?” a furious voice demanded as Aubrey Sattalea, senior, mounted the porch, his face working with rage. “Where’s the man who came to my house and stole my little boy—”

“Here, at your very good service, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin announced, rising from his chair and bowing formally, but holding his supple body poised to resist any attack the other made. “As for stealing your fine little man, I pride myself upon it. They shall no longer torture him, though you and a thousand others seek to drag him back.”

“What d’ye mean?” Sattalea demanded, advancing menacingly on the diminutive Frenchman.

“Come and see,” de Grandin responded, backing slowly toward the hall. As Sattalea followed him into the house, he halted suddenly, snapped on the electric light and thrust his hand down the front of the child’s white-linen blouse, ripping the garment open and turning it down to display the lad’s slim, straight back. Sattalea and I gave simultaneous gasps of astonished horror. From shoulder to waist the child’s back was a mess of crisscrossed, livid wales, the unmistakable signs of recent cruel beatings with a whip or small cane.

“Did *you* do this?” the Frenchman demanded, taking a threatening half step toward the visitor. “*Parbleu*, if you did, though you be twenty times his father, I shall beat you insensible!”

“Good Lord!” the horrified parent exclaimed. “Who — what—”

“Mother did it, Daddy,” the little boy broke in sobbingly. “Since that night when she was so ill, that funny-looking man’s been coming to the house every day and she’s changed so. She says she doesn’t love me any more and she beats me for almost nothing — I didn’t mean to look in that day he kissed her — honestly, I didn’t — but she said I was spying on them and the two of them beat me till—”

“Aubrey! What are you saying?” his father cried.

“*Morbleu*, no more than all the neighbors know, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin returned impassively. “This afternoon, when Friend Trowbridge and I had returned from our outing with your son, I took some magazines, which I pretended to sell, and my most persuasive manner to the back doors of the houses of your block. In one small hour’s conversation with the domestic servants of the neighborhood I found that you alone are unaware of what goes on in your home.”

Sattalea faced the Frenchman with a look of incredulous horror; then, as the import of de Grandin’s words sank home, an expression of hopeless desolation spread over his face. “That explains it!” he sobbed. “She *has* changed since that night she di— you gentlemen gave her up for dead!

She’s grown more beautiful every day, but — but she’s not my Vivian, not the girl I married. Sometimes I’ve felt as though some stranger had come to take her place, and—”

“*Monsieur*, I think it not unlikely,” de Grandin spoke softly as he laid his hand on the man’s shoulder with an almost fatherly gesture. “Believe me, I can appreciate your trouble. It were best that we did not make mock of Providence, my friend. It is better that we leave bad enough alone, lest it become worse. Alas, the olden days of happiness are gone forever; but we can at least repair the greater wrong before it has gone too far. Will you help me make your home a fit place for your little son to dwell, *Monsieur*?”

“Yes,” Sattalea agreed. “I’ll do anything you say. Sometimes I think it would have been better if Vivian really had died. She’s a changed woman. She used to be so sweet, so gentle, so loving, now she’s a very devil incarnate, she’s—”

“Let us not waste time,” de Grandin interrupted. “Tonight you will inform *Madame* your wife that you must leave town on business early in the morning. When all preparations are made for your seeming trip, you will come here, and remain hidden until I give the word. Then, *parbleu*, we shall show this species of a rat who would buy dead women’s bodies who holds the stronger cards — whose magic is more potent — may the Devil, his master, roast me if we do not so!”

4

Shortly before noon the following day a taxicab deposited Aubrey Sattalea and several pieces of luggage at my front door, and after seeing the guest secreted in an upstairs room de Grandin excused himself, saying he had several important missions to execute. “Remember, my friend,” he warned the visitor, “you are not to leave the house for any reason less urgent than fire, and you will refrain from so much as showing yourself at the window until I say otherwise. The secrecy of your whereabouts is greatly important, I assure you.”

Dinner was about to be served when he returned, his little eyes shining with elated excitement. “See, my friends, he ordered as we finished dessert, is it not a pretty thing which I obtained in New York this afternoon?” From his jacket pocket he drew a small case which he snapped open, displaying a tiny, shining instrument bedded in folds of cotton wool.

It was a glass-and-nickel syringe of twenty-five minim size, with a short heavy slip-on needle attached. The piston was of ground glass, set on a metal plunger which led through a cap. On this plunger, instead of the usual metal set-screw, was a tiny, trigger-like, safety lever which locked

the piston so that the syringe could be carried full without danger of spilling its contents.

"H'm, I've never seen one quite like it," I admitted, examining the instrument with interest.

"Probably not," the Frenchman returned as he snapped the safety-catch on and off, testing its perfect response to the lightest pressure of his finger. "They are not widely known. For the average physician they are an unnecessary luxury, yet there are times when they are invaluable. In psychiatric work, for instance. The doctor who attends the mad often has need of a syringe which can carry quick unconsciousness, even as the soldier and gendarme has need of his pistol, and when he must draw and use his instrument at one there is no time to stop and fill it. *Voilà*, it is then this little tool becomes most handy, for it can be filled and carried about like a gun, rendered ready for action by the touch of the finger, and there has meantime been no danger of the drug it carries being lost. *C'est adroit, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"But what need have you for it?" I asked. "I don't understand—"

"But of course not," he agreed with a vigorous nod. "But if you will be so good as to wait a few hours — ah, I shall show you a tremendously clever trick, my friends. Meantime, I am wearied. I shall sleep four hours by the alarm clock; then, if you please, we shall perform our duty. Until then—"

Rising, he bowed formally to us in turn and ascended to his bedroom.

Midnight had sounded on the tall clock in the hall and twelve deep, vibrant strokes had echoed from the great gong in the courthouse tower before de Grandin rejoined us, refreshed by his four-hour nap and a cold shower. "Come, my friends," he ordered, filling his new syringe with a twenty per cent solution of cannabis indica and thrusting it handily into his jacket pocket, "it is time we repaired to the rendezvous."

"Where?" Sattalea and I demanded in chorus.

"Wait and see," he returned enigmatically. "Quick, Friend Trowbridge, the car, if you please."

Under his direction I drove to within a hundred feet or so of the Sattalea cottage, then parked the motor at the curb. Together we dismounted and stole softly toward the house.

All was quiet within the dwelling; not a light showed through the long, unshuttered windows, but de Grandin led the way unerringly across the porch, through the drawing-room and down the hall to the white-enameled door of the principal bedroom. There he paused, and in the flash of his pocket electric torch I saw his small, heart-shaped face twitching with excitement. "Are we ready?" he demanded, his narrow, black brows arched interrogatively.

I nodded, and he turned sharply, bearing his weight

against the white panels of the door and forcing them inward. Next instant, de Grandin in the lead, Sattalea and I at his elbows, we entered the darkened room.

For a moment I saw nothing but the vague outlines of furniture, only dimly picked out by the moonlight filtering through the Venetian blinds which hung before the window, but as I paused, striving to accustom my eyes to the quarter-light, I made out the hazy, indistinct shape of something human, so still it seemed inanimate, yet somehow instinct with life and viciousness.

"*Permettez-moi*," de Grandin exclaimed, feeling quickly along the wall for the electric switch, pressing the button and flooding the chamber with light. Beyond the bed, clad in pajamas and dressing-gown, crouched the white-faced, stoop-shouldered man who had proved such a mystery to us, his thin, evil features drawn in a snarling grimace of startled fury. Backed against the wall at the bedstead's head, rigid in an attitude of mingled fear and defiance, stood Vivian Sattalea. Her slim, white body showed statuesquely through the silken tissue of her nightrobe, her supple, rounded limbs and torso rather emphasized than concealed by the diaphanous garment. Her arms were extended straight down beside her, her hands pressing the wall against which she leaned till the flesh around the long, brightly polished nails showed little half-moons of white. Her red, passionate mouth was twisted in an animal-snarl of rage, and out of her purple eyes looked something which had never belonged to the woman Aubrey Sattalea married five years before — some evil trespasser in possession, some depraved interloper holding high holiday behind the windows of her soul.

"Vivian!" Sattalea looked in agonized disbelief from the crouching, slinking intruder to his wife, and his honest, commonplace young face seemed fairly to crumble with the devastation of overwhelming disillusion. "Oh, Vivi, how could you — and I loved you so!"

"Well, you silly, fatuous fool!" the woman's voice was thin and wire-edged as she spoke, and that evil, half-seen something seemed dodging back and forth in her wide-open eyes like a criminal lunatic playing hide-and-seek at the barred windows of his cell. "What did you think — did you expect me to put up with *you*? You—"

"Silence!" de Grandin's command, sharp as a whip-crack, cut through her tirade. "The time for speech is past. It is to act!"

Agilely as a leopard he leaped across the bed, his left hand seizing the crouching, corpse-faced man by the collar of his gown and forcing him backward on the couch. There was a short, fierce struggle, the flash of something bright in the electric light, then a muffled, strangling cry as de Grandin sank the needle of his hypodermic in the other's arm, released the safety-catch and shot the plunger downward.

“Stop — stop, you’re killing him!” the woman shrieked, leaping like an infuriated cat from her retreat against the wall and flinging herself on de Grandin, clawing at his face, gnashing at him with her teeth like a tigress fighting for her mate.

The Frenchman thrust his half-conscious antagonist from him with a vigorous shove of his foot, seized the woman’s right wrist in his left hand and jerked her forward, so that she lay prone across the bed. As she writhed and twisted in his grip, he shot the hypodermic needle into her rounded arm and forced the piston down, emptying the last dregs of the powerful hypnotic drug into her veins. I saw the white skin around the needle-point swell like an oversized blister as the sense-stealing hashish flooded into her system, saw her red mouth close convulsively, as though she swallowed with an effort, then watched fascinated as her taut, lithe muscles went slowly limp, her lips fell senselessly apart and her eyes slowly closed, the lids fighting fiercely to stay open, and murderous, insatiable hatred looking from her face as long as a flicker of her eyes remained unveiled by the lowering lids.

“Quick, my friends!” de Grandin ordered as her body went flaccid in complete anaesthesia. “We must hasten; the drug will not control for long, and we must attack while the barrier of their physical consciousness is down.”

Under his directions we laid Vivian Sattalea and her paramour on the bedroom floor, and while Sattalea and I crossed their hands and feet after the manner of memorial effigies on mediæval tombs the Frenchman extracted four waxen candles from the inner pocket of his jacket, placed one at the head and another at the foot of each unconscious form.

Stooping quickly he traced a six-pointed figure in chalk on the bedroom rug, then snapped off the electric light and set the four candles aflame. “Do not step beyond the lines, my friends,” he warned, pushing Sattalea and me inside the design he had drawn; “there will soon be that outside which no mortal can look on unprotected and live!”

As the candle flames burned brightly in the hot, still room, I noticed a subtle, indefinable odor, strangely similar to ecclesiastical incense yet differing from it in some way I could not define. There was something soporific about it, and I felt my lids go heavy as I inhaled, but was brought back to attentive consciousness by de Grandin’s words. Bending ceremonially to the east, the south, finally to the west, with a sort of jerky genuflection, he had begun a low, singsong chant. The words he used I could not understand, for they were in some outlandish tongue, but constantly, like the recurrence of the name of Deity in a litany, I caught the surname Amalik, and mingled with it that of Suliman ebn Dhoud and other Arabic and Hebrew titles till the half-dark room seemed fairly redolent with the chanted Oriental titles.

“Look, look, *for God’s sake, look!*” rasped Aubrey Sattalea in my ear, seizing my arm in a panic-strengthened grip and pointing toward the northwest corner of the room.

I looked, and caught my breath in a terrified sob.

Rearing nearly to the ceiling of the chamber, so indistinct that it was more like the fleeting, uncertain vision of an object behind us seen from the corner of the eye, there was a monstrous, fear-begetting form. When I gazed directly at it there was nothing but shadow to be seen, but the moment my eyes were partly averted it took sudden substance out of nothing, and its shape was like that of a mighty, black-robed man, and, despite the white beard which fell nearly to the hem of its garment, the being seemed not old as we are wont to consider men, but rather strong with the strength which mighty age gives to giant trees and hills and other things which endure forever. And from the being’s shadowy face looked forth a pair of terrifying, deep-set eyes which glowed like incandescent metal, and between its upraised, mighty hands there gleamed the wide blade of a sword which seemed to flicker with a cold, blue, phosphorescent light. Over all my body I could feel the rising of horripilation. The hairs upon my head and the shorter hairs of my hands and arms seemed rising stiffly, as though an electrical current ran through me, and despite my utmost efforts my teeth rattled together in the cachinnation of a chill; for the air about us had become suddenly gelid with that intense, numbing cold which means utter absence of vital heat.

“By the Three Known and One Unknown Elements; by the awful word whispered in the ears of the two Khirams by Shelomoh, the Temple-Builder” — de Grandin made the threefold signs of Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master with flashing quickness — “by the mastery of Eternal Good over Evil, and by the righteousness of Him who planned the Universe, I bind you to my bidding, O Azra’il, dread Psychopompos and Bearer of the Sword!” De Grandin’s voice, usually a light tenor, had deepened to a powerful baritone as he pronounced the awful words of evocation. “Come to my aid, O Powers of Light and of Darkness,” he chanted. “To me are ye bound by the words of Power and Might, nor may ye depart hence till my will be done!”

A light wind, colder, if possible, than the freezing air of the room, seemed to emanate from the dreadful form in the darkened corner, making the candle flames flicker and the shadows flit and dance in arabesques across the walls and ceiling of the room. The unconscious man upon the floor moved slightly and groaned as though in nightmare, and the woman beside him shuddered as if the chilling wind had pierced even the barriers of her unconsciousness.

“Speak out, seducer of the dead, destroyer of the living!” de Grandin commanded, fixing his burning gaze on the groaning man. “I command you, declare to us your true name and nature!”

“Pontou,” the voice issuing from the supine, drug-bound man was faint as an echo of a whisper, but in that silent room it sounded like a shout.

“Pontou is my name, my birthplace Brittany.”

“And what did you there, Pontou?”

“I was clerk to Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz, Marèchal of France, Chamberlain to His Majesty, the King, and cousin to the mighty Duke of Brittany.

“*Aie*, but there were brave doings in the château at Marchecoul when the Sire de Retz dwelt there! The castle chapel was gorgeous with painted windows and cloth of gold, the sacred vessels encrusted with gems, and churchly music sounded as the mass was celebrated thrice daily, but at night there was a different sort of mass, for with me as deacon and Henriët as subdeacon, before the desecrated altar of the Galilean Gilles de Retz celebrated *la messe noire*, and from the throats of little children we drew the ‘red milk’ wherewith to fill our chalices in honor of Barran-Sathanas, our Lord and Master. *Aie*, ’twas sweet to hear the helpless little ones plead for mercy as we bound them on the iron grille before the sanctuary, and sweeter still to hear their strangled moans as Henriët and I, or sometimes the great Gilles de Retz himself, passed the keen-edged knife across their upturned throats; but sweetest of all it was to quaff the beakers of fresh lifeblood, still warm from their veins and toss their quivering hearts into the brazier which burned so brightly before the throne of Barran-Sathanas!”

De Grandin’s small, white teeth were chattering, but he forced another question:

“Accursed of heaven, when came your career to an end? Speak, by the powers that bind you, I command it!”

“In 1440,” the answer came falteringly. “’Twas then Pierre de l’Hôpital came to Nantes with his power of men-at-arms and took us into custody. *Aie*, but the mean little folk who never dared look us in the face before flocked to the courtroom to testify how we had ravished away their brats from the cradle and sometimes from the breast, and made them sacrifices to our Lord and Master, the Prince of Evil!

“Our doom was sealed or ever we stood before the bench of justice, and in all the crowded hall there was none to look on me with pity save only Lizette, the notary’s daughter, whom I had taken to the castle and initiated into our mysteries and taught to love the ‘red milk’ even as I did.

“Five days our trial lasted, and *À mort* — to death,’ the court condemned us.

“They bore us to the meadow of Bisse beyond the gates of Nantes, and hanged us by the neck. Henriët turned craven at the end, and made his sniveling peace with God, but the Sire De Retz and I stood steadfast to our master, Barran-Sathanas, and our souls went forth unshriven and unrepentant.

“My soul was earthbound, and for weeks I haunted the scenes I knew in life. The fourth month from my execution a butcher died, and as his spirit left his body I found that I could enter in. That very night, as his corpse awaited burial I draped it round me as a man may don a cloak, and went to Rouen, where later I was joined by my light o’ love, Lizette. We lived there twenty years, haunting cabarets, filching purses, cutting throats when money was not otherwise to be obtained.

“At length Lizette died, and I was left alone, and though I knew her spirit hovered near me, I could not teach her how to find the flesh to clothe herself. When my second body died, I entered into the cadaver of a headsman, and plied my trade of blood for nearly thirty years, yet always did I seek some way to seize a body for Lizette. The learning I absorbed with Gilles de Retz I added to by going to the East and studying under masters of black magic, but though I nearly succeeded several times, there was always something missing from the charm which was to open the gates to my love-light’s spirit into human flesh.

“Ten years ago, in Northern Africa, I came upon the missing words of the incantation, and practised it successfully, but only to have my triumph ravished from me, for the body we used was so weakened by disease that it could not stand the strains we put upon it, and once again Lizette’s spirit was discarnate.

“In this city I have searched the homes of the dying in quest of a body suitable to our purposes, and found one when Vivian Sattalea gave up her fleshly garb two weeks ago.

“*Aie*, what pleasures we have known, once more treading the good green earth together. What sins we have committed, what joy we took in torturing the brat the cuckold husband sired and thought my Lizette still mothered! In the dead of night we have broken into churches, defiled the holy elements and—”

“Enough — *parbleu*, too much!” de Grandin shouted. “Pontou, condemned of man, accursed of God, rejected by that very Devil to whom of old you bowed the knee, I charge and enjoin you, by the might, power and majesty of that God whom you have so dishonored, depart hence from this earthly body you have stolen, and enter not into flesh again. And you, Lizette, wanton mistress of a villainous paramour, depart you likewise to that place where spirits such as yours abide, and trouble not the living or the dead again with your uncleanly presence. Begone! *In nomine Domini*, be off, and come not hither any more again!”

As he concluded there sounded a dual groan from the bodies stretched before us on the floor, and from the left breast of the man and from the woman’s left bosom there rose what looked like little jets of slowly escaping steam.

The twin columns rose slowly, steadily, spreading out and thinning like vapor from a kettle-spout coming in contact with cold air, and as they swirled and twisted they merged and coalesced and clung together for an instant. Then the hovering, indistinct shape in the corner seemed suddenly to swoop downward, enveloped them in its ghostly folds as a drooping cloth might have done, and a soft, swishing noise sounded, as of a gentle wind soughing through bare tree-limbs. That was all. The candle lights winged out as if an extinguisher had pressed on them, and the warm, sultry air of August replaced the frigid cold which had chilled us to the marrow.

“It is finished — all is done, de Grandin’s matter-of-fact announcement sounded through the darkness. “Will you be good enough to examine Madame Sattalea, Friend Trowbridge?”

I knelt beside the woman as he snapped on the lights, putting my fingers to her wrist. “Why,” I exclaimed in bewilderment, “she’s dead, de Grandin!”

“*Précisément*,” he agreed with an almost casual nod, “and has been since that evening two weeks ago when you and I pronounced her so. It was but the spirit of the wicked Lizette which animated and defiled her poor, dead flesh. If you will be so good as to sign a certificate of death, I shall prepare for the disposal of this—” he touched the body of the man disdainfully with the polished toe of his dress shoe.

“*Monsieur*,” he turned to Sattalea, a look of sympathy on his face, “it were best that you said farewell to *Madame*, your wife, quickly. I go to call Monsieur Martin and bespeak his professional services for her.”

“Oh, Vivian, Vivian,” young Sattalea sobbed, dropping to his knees and pressing his lips to his wife’s lifeless mouth, “if only I could forget these last two weeks — if only I hadn’t let him desecrate your dead body with that—”

“*Monsieur* — attention — look at me!” de Grandin cried sharply.

For a moment he stared fixedly into Sattalea’s eyes, then slowly put his hands to the other’s forehead, stroked his brow gently, and:

“You will forget all that is past — you will not remember your wife’s seeming interval of life since the night Friend Trowbridge and I pronounced her dead. Your wife has died of heat-stroke, we have attempted to save her, and have failed — there has been no invasion of her flesh by foul things from beyond, you have no recollection of Pontou, or of anything he has said or done — do you understand? Sleep, now, and awaken in half an hour, not sooner.”

A dazed look in Sattalea’s eyes and a faint, almost imperceptible nod of his head was the only answer.

“*Très bon!*” de Grandin exclaimed. “Quick, Friend Trowbridge, help me place her on the bed. She must not be found thus when he awakens!”

Working with feverish haste, we clothed the dead man’s body in his black garments, bundled him into the tonneau of my car and drove slowly toward the river. At a darkened highway bridge we halted, and after looking about to make sure we were not observed, dropped the corpse into the dark waters. “Tomorrow or next day the police will find him,” de Grandin remarked. “Identification will not be difficult, for the young McCrea will testify of his visit to Monsieur Martin’s and his attempt to buy a corpse — the coroner’s jury will decide a harmless lunatic fell overboard while wandering through the town and came to his death by misadventure. Yes. It is much better so.”

“But see here,” I demanded as we turned homeward, “what was all that rigmarole that dead man told us? It isn’t possible such a monster as that Gilles de Retz ever lived, or—”

“It is unfortunately all too true,” de Grandin interrupted. “The judicial archives of the ancient Duchy of Brittany bear witness of the arrest, trial and execution of one of the greatest nobles of France, Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz and marshal of the King’s armies, at a specially convoked ecclesiastical court at Nantes in 1440. Together with two servants, Pontou and Henriette, he was hanged and burned for murder of more than a hundred little children and young girls, and for indisputably proven sorcery and devil-worship. Yes.

“As for the possibility of Pontou’s spirit being earth-bound, it is quite in line with what we know of evilly disposed souls. By reason of his intense wickedness and his vicious habits, he could not leave the earthly atmosphere, but must perforce hover about the sort of scenes which had pleased him in life. You remember how he was in turn a robber and a public executioner? Good.

“When we were called to attend Madame Sattalea and this so villainous Pontou first appeared on the scene, I was greatly puzzled. The magical formula he mouthed above the corpse of the poor dead lady I could not understand, for he spoke too quickly, but certain words I recognized, and knew them for the sign-words by which the necromancers of old called back the spirits of the dead. That was my first clue to how matters stood.

“When Monsieur McCrea told us of Pontou’s attempt to buy a corpse, and the good *curé*’s story of his effort to force entrance to a house of death coincided, I knew this evil man must have some special reason for desiring the body of a woman, and a woman only.

“When we met the little lad and went to Monsieur Sattalea’s and there beheld the love scene between his wife and the evil black-clothed one, I was certain he had called the evil spirit of some woman long dead to inhabit the body of poor Madame Vivian that he might have companionship of his own wicked kind, and when she called him by name

— Pontou — I did remember at once that the vilest of the servants of that blasphemous monster, Gilles de Retz had been so named, and realized something like the story confessed to us tonight might have happened.

“Therefore, I made my plans. The air about us is filled with all sorts of invisible beings, my friend. Some are good, some are very evil indeed, and some are neither one nor the other. Wise old King Solomon was given dominion over them as one of the few mortals who could be trusted not to abuse so great a power. To marshal them to his assistance he did devise certain cabalistic words, and he who knows the ancient Hebrew formulæ can call the invisible ones into visibility, but the risk is great, for the evil ones may come with those who are good, and work great injury. Nevertheless, I determined to make the experiment. By calling aloud the words of Solomon’s incantations I provided us with strong spiritual allies, which should force the rebellious spirit of Pontou to speak, whether he willed it or not. Too, when I had so bound Pontou’s spirit to answer my inquiries, I had him at a disadvantage — I could also call it forth from the body it had usurped. And once it was clear of that body the ghostly allies I had summoned made short work of it.”

“But that dreadful half-seen thing which stood in the corner,” I persisted. “What was it? I couldn’t see it clearly; indeed, the more closely I looked at it, the vaguer it seemed, but when I looked away I thought I descried a tall, terrible old man with flashing red eyes and a naked sword between his hands. Was it—”

“Pontou the wicked one, who by his necromantic sorcery more than once escaped the bounds of death, had long cheated Azra’il, the Death Angel,” he replied. “The ancient lore is full of stories of the psychopompos, or spirit-leader; who takes the severed soul from the new-dead body and

conducts it through the frontiers of the spirit world. Perhaps it was none other than Death’s own angel who stood among the shadows and waited patiently for the spirits which long had cheated him, my friend. I myself do remember the whispered gossip which went the rounds of St. Petersburg some twenty years and more ago. I was studying in the Imperial Hospital at the time, and servants of the Winter Palace whispered a strange story of a little duchess who accidentally ate some oysters intended for the Tsar, and fell fainting to the floor, and how her little cousin awoke screaming in the night to say a tall, bearded figure had come into their room, then trodden silently into the poisoned child’s apartments. Next instant, while still the frightened children’s screams rang out, the poisoned little one gave up her soul. I do not know, but—”

“But that’s absurd,” I cut in. “All this talk of death angels is a lot of old wives’ balderdash, de Grandin, you know as well as I. What we call death is nothing but a physiological fact — the breaking-down of the human mechanism for one reason or another. As to the spiritual phases of it, of course, I’m not prepared to say, but—”

“Of course not,” he agreed. “We know so little of the spirit world that he who would expound it stamps himself a fool thereby.

“But this I say without fear of denial, my friend, there is one sort of spirit who is no mystery, and with him I would hold immediate communion. In the lower left-hand drawer of your office desk reposes a bottle of Three-Star cognac, distilled in *la belle France* long years before Monsieur Volstead’s blighting legislation was thought of. This moment it is full. *Parbleu*, if I do not decrease its contents by half before I am an hour older may every fiend of lowest hell fly off with me!”

The Silver Countess

MY DEAR Trowbridge [the letter ran] If you will be good enough to bring your friend Dr. de Grandin, of whom I've had some favorable reports, out to Lyman's Landing, I think I can present him with a problem worthy of his best talents. More I do not care to write at this time, but I may add that whatever fee he may think proper in the premises will be promptly paid by

Yours cordially,
WALKER SWEARINGEN.

Jules de Grandin lit a cigarette with slow deliberation, dropped a second lump of sugar in his coffee, and watched the small resultant bubbles rise in the cup as though they were a hitherto unnoted piece of physical phenomena. "The Monsieur Swearingen who writes so cautiously of the case he would present me, then concludes his note as if my performance were to be by royal command, who is he, if you please?"

"We were in college together," I explained. "Swearingen was a shy sort of lad, and I rather took him under my wing during our freshman year. He went into some sort of brokerage concern when he graduated, and we've met only casually since — alumni dinners and that sort of thing. I understand he's piled a monstrous stack of money up, and — well, I'm afraid that's about all I can tell you. I don't really know him very well, you see. There's not much question he thinks the case important, though; I don't believe he's trying to be deliberately mysterious, more likely he thinks the matter too urgent to be set out in writing and prefers to wait for a personal interview."

"U'm? He is wealthy, this one?"

"Very. Unless he's lost his money in unlucky speculation he must be worth at least a million, possibly two."

"*Tiens*, in that case I think we should accept his kind invitation, and unless I greatly miss my guess, he shall be less wealthy when he has paid my fee. I do not greatly fancy his letter; one would think he seeks to hire a mountebank; but there is probably no way in which his self-esteem can be reduced save by collection of a large price. *Alors*, I shall deflate his pocketbook. Will you advise him that we come without delay, and shall expect a handsome fee for doing so?"

Lyman's Landing, Walter Swearingen's summer place, stood on a wide, almost level promontory jutting out into the Passaic. Smooth lawns lay round the house, a tall, carefully tended hornbeam hedge separated the grounds from the

highway, and a line of graceful weeping willows formed a lush green background for the red-brick homestead. Painted wicker chairs sat on the lawns, to one side of the house was a rose garden riotous with color; farther away an oblong swimming pool was partially screened by a hedge of arborvitae, and a quartette of youngsters played mixed doubles on a grass tennis court.

As we drove toward the house my glance fell on a young girl lounging in a gaily-striped canvas hammock. She wore the regulation "sunworshipper's" outfit — a bright bandanna scarf bound round her bosom like a brassière, a pair of much-abbreviated linen shorts, rope-soled espadrilles, and, as far as I could discern, no more. As we drew abreast of her she kicked off one of her sandals and brushed a hand across the sole of her foot, as if to flick away a pebble that had worked into the shoe as she played.

I heard de Grandin breathe a sharp exclamation and felt the dig of his sharp elbow in my side. "Did you observe, my friend?" he asked in an urgent whisper. "Did you perceive what I did?"

"Could I help it?" I retorted. "Don't you think that little hussy wanted us to? She could hardly have worn less in the bathtub, and she's so elementally sex-conscious she can't let even a pair of middle-aged men drive past without taking off part of —"

"*Larmes d'un poisson!*" he interrupted with a chuckle. "The man who knows anatomy as he knows the inside of his pocket frets at sight of a small naked foot! It was not that I meant, my friend, but no matter. Perhaps it is of no importance; at any rate, you would not understand."

"What d'ye mean?" I countered, nettled as much by his bantering manner as his words. "I understand quite well. I saw five shameless pink toes —"

"*Parbleu*, did you, indeed? Perhaps I did not see what I saw, after all. No matter; we are arrived, and I should greatly like to confer with Monsieur Swearingen concerning this matter which he cannot put on paper, and for which he is prepared to pay so handsomely."

The thirty placid, prosperous years that had passed since our college days had been kind to Walter Swearingen. In addition to wealth he had acquired poise and embonpoint, a heavy, deliberate style of speech, a Vandyke beard, and an odd, irritating manner of seeming to pay half attention to what was said to him and treating the remarks of anyone not primarily interested in money with the grave mock-courtesy an affable adult shows a child's prattle.

"Glad to welcome you to Lyman's Landing, Dr. de Grandin," he acknowledged my introduction. "Er, ah" — he smiled somewhat self-consciously — "there are certain phases of the case that make me think you're better able to handle it than the ordinary type of detective —"

"Monsieur," de Grandin began, and his little blue eyes flashed ominously, but Swearingen characteristically took no notice of the attempted interruption.

"The county police and state constabulary are quite out of the question, of course. To be quite frank, I'm not prepared to say just what *is* behind it all; it has some aspects of a silly childish prank, some similarity to a possible case of kleptomania, and in other ways it like an old fashioned ghost story. I leave its proper labeling to you. U'm" — he consulted a memorandum — "last Thursday night several of my guests were disturbed by someone in their rooms. None of them actually saw the intruder, but next morning it was found a number of valueless or nearly valueless articles had been stolen. Then —"

"And the missing articles were what, if you please, Monsieur?" This time our host could not ignore the query.

"H'm," he favored the small Frenchman with an annoyed stare, "Miss Brooks — Elizabeth Brooks, my daughter Margery's chum — lost an Episcopal prayer book; Elsie Stephens, another friend, who is a Roman Catholic, missed an inexpensive string of beads; Mr. Massey, one of the young men guests, lost a pocket Testament, and my daughter could not find a small book of devotional poems which had been on her desk. I fancy none of the young people is greatly distressed at his loss, but such things are disturbing, you understand.

"Friday night John Rodman, another guest, had a most disconcerting experience. Sometime between midnight and daybreak he woke in a state of profuse perspiration, as he thought, and feeling extraordinarily weak. It was only by the greatest effort he was able to light his bedlamp and discover that his pyjamas and bedclothes were literally drenched with blood from a small superficial wound in his left breast. We called a physician, and the boy's no worse for his experience, but it caused considerable comment, as you may well imagine. It's impossible he should have wounded himself, for there was no weapon in his room capable of making the incision from which he'd bled — his razors were in the adjoining bathroom, and there were no bloodstains on the floor, so the supposition he had walked in his sleep, cut himself, and then gone back to bed may be ruled out. Besides, the wound was small and almost circular in shape, as if made with an awl or some such small, sharp instrument.

"It was after this unfortunate accident that I wrote Dr. Trowbridge. Last night, however, Mr. Rodman's experience was repeated, the wound being in the left side of his throat

this time. Rodman's a fine young chap and wouldn't do anything to embarrass me — he told me of the second wounding privately this morning. Now it's up to us to find out who's behind this nonsense. I realize it may sound like a tempest in a teapot to you, but I'm prepared to pay —"

"*Eh bien*, Monsieur, let us postpone the talk of payment till a later time, if you please," de Grandin put in. "I cannot say how large or small my fee should be until I know what I am called upon to do, and have done it. Meantime, if you will tell me if the beads which Mademoiselle Stephens lost were merely ornamental trinkets or a rosary, it will be of interest."

"Er, yes, I believe such beads are called rosaries," Swearingen returned, evidently annoyed at such a trivial technicality. "Now, if you've any further questions, or suggestions —" He paused expectantly.

De Grandin took his narrow chin between his thumb and forefinger, gazing thoughtfully at the floor. "Is there a guest who has not complained of loss?"

"Oh, yes, we've ten house guests; only those I've mentioned have been annoyed."

"U'm. Perhaps you will be good enough to show us the house, Monsieur. It is well to know the terrain over which one fights."

We made a brief survey of the establishment. It was a big, rambling building with wide halls, broad staircases and large rooms, unremarkable in any way save for the lavish manner in which it had been furnished, and offering no secret nooks or crannies for nighttime lurkers.

"This is the art gallery," our host announced as he pushed open a wide door in the rear of the first floor. "It's the biggest room in the place, and — what the devil!" he paused at the entrance, a frown of mixed perplexity and anger gathering on his face. "By George, this thing is ceasing to be a joke!"

We had only to follow the line of his angry glance to see its cause. Against the farther wall hung an ornate gilt frame, some four feet high by three wide. To the inner edges of the gilded moulding a narrow border of painted canvas adhered, but the picture which the frame had enclosed had obviously been cut away with a less than razor-sharp blade, since ravelled bits of mutilated fabric roughened the lips of the cut.

"This is outrageous, infamous!" stormed Swearingen, striding across the gallery and glaring at the violated frame. "By George, if I can find out who did this I'll prosecute, guest or no guest!"

"And what was the picture which was ravished away?" de Grandin asked.

"It was a picture of the Virgin Mary — 'The Virgin of Eckartsau,' they called it — it cost me a thousand dollars,

and —”

“*Tenez*, Monsieur, it can not have gone far. Distinctive pictures of the Blessèd Virgin identify themselves; the thief can not easily dispose of it, and the police will have small trouble tracing it and putting reputable dealers on guard.”

“Yes, yes, of course; but this is most confoundedly mystifying. My dear man, d’ye realize everything stolen since this business started is of a religious nature?”

De Grandin’s answering stare was as expressionless as that of a china doll. “I had begun to suspect it, Monsieur,” he replied. “Now this — *Cordieu*, Friend Trowbridge, give attention. Do you observe it?”

With what seemed unjustified excitement he dashed across the wide room to a piece of sculpture, and as he looked at it the tips of his trim, waxed mustache twitched like the whiskers of an eager tom-cat scenting a well-fatted mouse.

It was the top portion of a medieval altar tomb, the effigy of a recumbent woman executed in what appeared to be Carrara marble lying on an oblong plinth about the chamfered edge of which ran an inscription in Romanesque capitals. The figure wore the habit of a Benedictine nun, a leather belt and knotted girdle circling the slender waist, the hands folded demurely across the breast beneath the scapular. The head, however, instead of being coiffed in a nun’s bonnet and wimple was crowned with luxuriant long hair, parted in the middle and braided in two long plaits which fell forward over the shoulders and extended nearly to the knees, and on the brow was set a narrow diademlike coronet ornamented with a row of ingeniously carved strawberry leaves. It was a beautiful face the old-time sculptor had wrought, the features delicate, regular and classical, but with an intangible something about them which went beyond mere beauty, something nearly akin to life, something which seemed subtly to respond to the gaze of the beholder.

But it was not on the lovely carven features de Grandin’s fascinated gaze rested. His eyes sped swiftly from the slender, curving throat, the gently swelling bosom and delicately rounded knees to the sandaled feet peeping beneath the hem of the monastic gown. Like those of most pietistic figures of its period the effigy’s pedal extremities were represented uncovered save for the parchment soles and narrow crossed straps of *religieuse* sandals. With the fidelity characteristic of the elder craftsmen the carver had shown the feet prolated, as was natural when the extensor muscles had lengthened in cadaveric flaccidity, but the seat of death had obscured none of their beauty. The heels were narrow and the insteps high, the toes were long, slender and fingerlike, terminating in delicately tapering ends tipped with filbert-shaped nails.

“You see?” he pointed to the nearer foot, almost, but not

quite touching it with his fingertip.

“Eh?” I queried, puzzled; then, “By Jove, yes!”

Slender as patrician hands, beautifully formed as they were, the statue’s feet were anomalies. Each possessed an extra toe inserted between the long, aquiline fourth digit and the little toe.

“Odd that he should have made such a slip; he was so faithful to detail every other way,” I commented.

“U’m, one wonders,” he murmured. “Me, I should not be astonished if his faithfulness persisted even here.” He shook his head as if to clear his vision, then bent beside the plinth on which the statue lay, deciphering the inscription incised in the stone.

Although the effigy was perfect in every way, the letters of the epitaph had been defaced in several places, so we could not read the legend in its entirety. The part still legible presented considerably more of a puzzle than a key to the lady’s identity:

HIC JACET ELEANOR — A COMITISSA ARGENT ...
QVAE OBUT ANNO CHRISTI MCCX ...
CVJVS MISEREATVR DEVS

“Humph,” I muttered, “evidently this statue once decorated the tomb of a Countess Eleanor somebody who died sometime in the Thirteenth Century, but —”

“*Regardez-vous*, my friend!” de Grandin’s excited comment broke through my stumbling translation. “Observe this, if you please.”

Inscribed on the extreme lower edge of the plinth, faint as though scratched with a stylus, was the cryptic notation:

Mal. iii, I

“What make you of it?” he demanded.

“H’m,” I hazarded, “the sculptor’s signature, perhaps?”

“*Le bon Dieu* knows, not I,” he admitted. “I do not think the sculptor would have signed his work thus — he would have used a chisel and his letters would have been more regularly formed. However, one guess is as good as another at this time.

“What have you to tell us of her?” he asked Swearigen who stood before his mutilated painting, oblivious of our inspection of the marble.

“Eh? Oh, that? I don’t know much about it. Picked it up at a junk shop in Newark last month. Gloomy sort o’ thing. I wouldn’t ha’ bought it if the face hadn’t struck me as being rather pretty. It can’t be very valuable. The dealer let me have it for fifty dollars, and I believe I could have had it for half that if I’d held out. He seemed anxious to get rid of it. Confounded nuisance it is, too. The boys are always flocking in here looking at it — I caught young Rodman kissing it once, and —”

“*Fanons d’un têtard*, do you tell me so?” the Frenchman almost shouted. “Quick, Monsieur, give me the name of that so generous junkman who parted with this bit of almost priceless *virtu* so cheaply — right away, immediately, at once!”

“Eh, what’s the hurry?” our host asked. “I don’t think —”

“Precisely, exactly, quite so; I am aware of it, *but I do*. The name and address, quickly, if you please. And while we are about it, when was it the young Rodman embraced this — this statue?”

“H’m, last Friday, I believe, but —”

“*Morbleu*, the work was swift! Come, Monsieur, I wait the dealer’s name.”

“Adolph Yellen, Dealer in Antique Furniture, Bric-à-Brac and Objets d’art,” was the legend printed on the rather soiled billhead Swearingen produced in response to de Grandin’s insistence.

We reached the dingy little shop in Polk Street just as the proprietor was about to fasten the gratings before his windows for the night.

“*Holà, mon ami*,” de Grandin called as he leaped from the car and approached the stoop-shouldered, bearded shopman, “you are Monsieur Yellen, I make no doubt? If so, I would that you tell us about a certain statue — a piece of carven marble representing a reclining lady — which you sold Monsieur Swearingen of Lyman’s Landing last month.”

The little antique dealer regarded him through the astonishingly thick lenses of his horn-rimmed spectacles a moment, then raised his shoulders in a racial shrug. “I do not know nuttings habout her,” he returned. “I get her at a auction sale ven der lawyers sell Meestair Pumphrey’s things. All I know, I’m gladt to be rid from her — she vas onlucky.”

“I hope you’re not thinking of buying the piece, sir,” interrupted a scholarly-looking young man who had been talking with Mr. Yellen when we arrived. “Mr. Yellen is quite right, it is an unlucky bit of *virtu*, and —”

“Ah, it is that you know something, then?” the Frenchman cut in. “*Bon*, say on, Monsieur, I listen.”

“No-o, I can’t say I know anything definite about the statue,” the young man confessed with a diffident smile, “but I admit a strong antipathy to it. I’m Jacob Silverstein, Rabbi of the Beth Israel Congregation, and it may be simply our traditional theological distaste for graven images that leads me to dislike this woman’s effigy, but I must confess the thing affected me unpleasantly from the moment I first saw it. I tried to dissuade Adolph from selling it, and asked him to present it to some museum, or, better still, break it up and throw the pieces in the river, but —”

“One moment, *Monsieur le Rabbin*, is there some reason you should so dislike this piece of lifeless stone. If so, I am

interested, if not, *parbleu*, I shall listen to what you say also.”

The young Hebrew regarded de Grandin speculatively, as though debating his answer. “You heard Mr. Yellen say the image was unlucky. He bought it, as he told you, at the auction of the late Horace Pumphrey’s effects. Mr. Pumphrey was a wealthy eccentric who collected artistic oddities, and this altar tomb was the last thing he bought. Within a month of its acquisition he began to manifest unmistakable symptoms of insanity, and would have been put in restraint if he had not died by falling from a second storey window of his house. There was some gossip about suicide, but the final verdict was death by misadventure.

“The first time I saw the statue in Mr. Yellen’s shop it produced a most unpleasant sensation; rather like that one experiences when looking into a cage of snakes at the zoo — you may know you’re in no danger, but the ancient human horror of serpents rouses your unconscious fears. After that I avoided it as much as possible, but once or twice I was obliged to pass it and — it was doubtless a trick of the light falling on the figure’s features — it seemed to me the thing smiled with a sort of malicious contempt as I went by.”

The rabbi paused, a faint flush mounting to his dark, hard-shaven cheeks. “Perhaps I’m unduly prejudiced, but I’ve always attributed Sydney’s trouble to some malign influence cast by that statue. At the time he bought the image Mr. Yellen had a young man named Sydney Weitzer in his employ, a youth he’d known practically all his life, and one of the most honest and industrious boys I’ve ever seen. Two months after that statue was brought into the shop Mr. Yellen was obliged to discharge him for stealing — caught him red-handed in theft. A few nights later the police arrested him as he attempted to burglarize the store.”

“U’m?” de Grandin nodded sympathetically. “Were your losses great, Monsieur Yellen?”

“Ha, dot boy, he vas a *schlemihl!* Vot you t’ink he stold? Books — religious books — old Bibles, prayer books, a missal from Italy vid halluf der pages missink, a worthless old rosary and a vooden statue from a saint. Er lot of dem I wouldn’t gaff you terventy dollars for!”

“Am I to understand that he confined himself to stealing worthless religious objects?”

Mr. Yellen lifted an expressive shoulder. “Dey vas all I had. I don’t buy moch religious stoffot goes by der richer dealers, but vunce in a vile I get some vid a job-lot of t’ings. Efferyt’ing of der kind in der shop that *schlemihl* stole. Vot he did vid dem Gott only knows. Nobody vid sense vould haff paid him money for dem. Oh, vell” — he waved his hand in a gesture of finality — “vot can you eggspeck from a crazy feller, anyhow?”

“Crazy —”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Rabbi Silverstein broke in. “When Sydney came to trial for attempted burglary his only explanation was to say, ‘She made me do it — I had to go to her.’ He could not or would not explain who ‘she’ was, but begged so piteously to be allowed to return to her that the magistrate committed him for observation. Later he was sent to an asylum.”

On Jules de Grandin’s face there was the absorbed, puzzled look of one attempting to recall a verse or tune that eludes memory. “This is most odd, Monsieur. You think—”

The rabbi smiled deprecatingly. “It’s prejudice, no doubt, but I do associate that statue with Mr. Pumphrey’s death and Sydney’s otherwise inexplicable aberration. The regiment with which I served as chaplain passed through Valence en route to Italy, and made a short halt there. While going through the town I heard a story which might almost apply here. Not far from the city there is the ruin of an old *château fort*, and the country people tell a gruesome legend of a woman called the ‘Silver Countess’ who —”

“*Mord d’un chat! vie d’un coq!*” de Grandin cried. “But that is it! Since first I saw her lying there so sweetly innocent in six-toed sleep I’ve wondered what the keynote to this melody of mystery can be. Now, thanks to you, *Monsieur le Rabbin*, I have it! *Adieu*, you have been of the greatest help. Friend Trowbridge, we must hasten back to Lyman’s Landing. It is imperative.” He bowed courteously to the Jewish gentlemen and fairly dragged me to the waiting car.

“Past a book shop, my friend,” he told me. “We must consult a Bible, right away, at once, immediately, and all too well I realize we shall find none at Monsieur Swearingen’s.”

I drove slowly through the downtown section and finally located a small secondhand book store. De Grandin hurried in and came back in a moment with a small black volume in his hand. “Attend me, my old one,” he ordered, “what is the final book of the Old Testament?”

“H’m,” I ransacked memory for forgotten Sunday School teachings, “Malachi, isn’t it?”

“*Bravo!* And how would you designate the first verse of the third chapter of that book if you wrote it.” He thrust a pencil and notebook at me.

After a moment’s thought I scribbled “Mal. iii, 1,” and returned the book to him.

“*Précisément!*” he exulted. “Now, concentrate. Where have you seen precisely that citation recently — within the last six hours?”

“U’m” I knit my brows. “Why, that’s what we saw scratched on the plinth of that statue —”

“But yes, of course; certainly! Now, see this. That verse commences: ‘Behold, I will send my messenger.’ What does it mean?”

“Nothing, as far as I’m concerned,” I confessed. “It

doesn’t make sense.”

“Perhaps not, perhaps so,” he replied thoughtfully. “But of this I am sure: The lady of the six toes who lies at Monsieur Swearingen’s is undoubtedly the ‘Silver Countess’ of whom *Monsieur le Rabbin* spoke. Does not her epitaph proclaim, ‘*Hic Jacet Eleanora comitissa*,’ which is to say, ‘Here lies the Countess Eleanor’? Yes, of course. And though the terminal of the next word is broken we have left the letters a-r-g-e-n-t, which undoubtedly might be completed as *argentum*, signifying silver in the Latin, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“I dare say,” I conceded, “but who the devil was this Silver Countess, and what was it she did?”

“That I do not certainly remember,” he admitted ruefully. “One little head is far too small to hold the multitude of legends about wicked ladies of the past. However, at the earliest chance I shall ask my friend Dr. Jacoby of the *Musée Metropolitan*. That man knows every bit of scandal in the world, provided the events took place not later than the Fifteenth Century!”

The long summer twilight had deepened into dusk by the time we reached Lyman’s Landing, and the wide, tree-shaded lawn was like a picture executed in silver and onyx mosaics. “My word,” I exclaimed enthusiastically, “it’s beautiful, isn’t it? Like a bit of fairyland.”

“Ha, fairyland, yes,” he agreed. “Like fairyland where pixies lure mortals to their doom and Morgaine la Fée queens it over her court of succubi.”

We had barely time to change for dinner before the meal was announced, and course followed heavy course, red and white, dry and sweet wines accompanying the food, and cognac bland as May and potent as December complementing coffee, which was served on the terrace.

If the events of the afternoon had worried him de Grandin gave no evidence of it. He ate like a teamster, drank like a sailor, and, judging from the peals of laughter which came from the young people surrounding him, jested like a second Rabelais throughout the meal. But he excused himself when they urged him to join them in an after-dinner swim, and locked himself in Swearingen’s study, where he put through a number of urgent telephone calls.

“Little fools,” grumbled Swearingen as the youngsters raced toward the pool. “Someone’s bound to get hurt jumping in that frog-pond after dark. I’d have the thing filled in, only Margery puts up such a —”

“Mr. Swearingen, oh, Mr. Swearingen!” the hail came from the pool. “Look what we found.” A young man came running, followed by the other bathers. Holding it above his head, lest it trail against the lawn, he held a strip of canvas, cracked from rough handling and spoiled by water, but unmistakably a painting, the missing *Virgin of Eckartsau*. “I

dived right into it," the boy exclaimed breathlessly. "Fred Boerum hopped in ahead of me, and kicked the water up, and this thing must have come loose from the bottom where it lay and floated up — I stuck my face right into it when I went off the springboard."

"Who the devil put it there?" demanded Swearingen. "When I missed that picture this morning I thought perhaps we had a thief in the crowd; now I think we've been entertaining a lunatic. No one in his right mind would cut a picture from its frame and sink it in the pool. That sort of thing just isn't done."

"You may have right, Monsieur," de Grandin stepped from the house and examined the salvaged painting critically. "However, it appears to have been done here. Tell me, is it possible to drain the pool?"

"Yes, we can cut off the intake and open the drain —"

"Then I suggest we do so instantly. Who knows what more may lie concealed in it?"

In a few minutes the last drop went gushing down the pool's waste pipe, and the rays of half a dozen electric torches played upon the shining tiles. Ten minutes' inspection failed to produce anything more than a few waterlogged leaves, but de Grandin was not satisfied. Dropping to the shallow end of the bath, he began a methodical circuit of the tank, stopping now and then to thrust his fingers under the sill just beneath the coping. At last, as he reached the deep end, he called jubilantly, "To me, Friend Trowbridge; I have found them."

He held three little water-soaked books up for inspection. Their bindings were warped and peeling, their pages mere pulpy ruins, but the gilt letters still adhering to their backs proclaimed them the Book of Common Prayer, the New Testament and "Elegant Extracts of Devotional Poetry." As he regained the ground the Frenchman thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a small, beautifully carved coral rosary.

"They were securely wedged beneath the ledge," he explained. "Had we not drained the bath there is small doubt they would have lain there till the water had completely destroyed them. *Eh bien*, it is fortunate the young people decided to go swimming this evening."

"But who could have done it? — Who would play a silly, senseless prank like that?" the guests chorused.

No sign of guilt appeared on any face, but every one looked at his neighbor with suspicion. "*Tiens*," de Grandin broke the awkward silence, "we waste time here, my friends. Why do you not repair to the veranda and turn on the radio? It is a superb night for *le jazz*, *n'est-ce pas*?"

I was on the point of disrobing when he tapped at my door. "Do not retire yet, my friend," he whispered. "We have work to do."

"Work —"

"Precisely. It is her next move. We have called 'check,' but not 'checkmate.' You will take your station in the art gallery, if you please, and stop whoever tries to enter there, or having entered, tries to leave. Me, I shall patrol the corridors, for I have a feeling there will be strange things abroad tonight. Come, the house is silent; let us go."

The wide, low-ceilinged gallery was ghostly-dark, only an occasional beam of moonlight entering the tall leaded windows as the trees outside shifted their boughs in the light breeze. The dim forms of the glassed-in cases filled with bric-à-brac, the shadowy outlines of framed pictures on the walls, and the wraithlike gleam of marbles through the darkness gave the place a curiously haunted air, and I shivered slightly in spite of myself as my vigil lengthened from quarter-hours to halves, and from halves to hours. Somewhere in the main hall a big clock struck three slow deliberate notes, seconded by the staccato triple beat of smaller timepieces; an owl hooted in the willows, and a freshening early morning breeze stirred the trees, momentarily unveiling the windows and letting in long oblique shafts of moonlight. I settled deeper in my chair, muttering a complaint at the task de Grandin had set me. "Foolishness," I mumbled. "Who ever heard of putting a death-watch over a piece of statuary? Silliest thing I ever heard—" Insensibly, I nodded and my tired eyes blinked slowly shut.

How long I napped I do not know. It might have been half an hour, though the chances are it was less. At any rate, I started tensely into full wakefulness with the feeling something near me moved with soft inimical stealth. I looked apprehensively about, noting the ordered rows of glass-doored cases, the pictures, the pallid marble of the statues — ah! I half rose from my seat, my fingers tense on the chair arms as my glance fell on the corner where the funerary statue of the Silver Countess lay. The marble image seemed to have grown, to have risen from its marble bed, to be in slow, deliberate motion. There was a half-seen vision of a pair of carmine lips, of large, intent dark eyes, a curving throat of tawny cream — a mist of white, fine linen.

"Who's there?" I challenged, leaping up and grasping the length of rubber-coated telephone cable de Grandin had handed me as a weapon. "Stand where you are, or —" my fingers felt along the wall, seeking the electric switch —

A gurgling, contemptuous titter, a flouncing of white draperies, the creaking of a window-hinge answered me. Next instant the light flooded on, and I blinked about the empty room.

"Trowbridge, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, are you within — are you awake?" de Grandin's anxious hail sounded from the hall, and the door behind me swung open. "What has happened — is all well — did you see anything?"

"No — yes — I don't know!" I answered in a single

breath. “I must have dropped off and dreamed — when I turned the lights on the place was empty. It *must* have been a dream.”

“And did you dream the tight-shut window open?” He pointed to the swinging casement. “And — *grand Dieu des artichauts!* — and this?” He bent above the supine statue of the Countess, his lips drawn back in a sardonic grin. I joined him, glanced once at the marble figure, and fell back with a gasp. The statue’s stony, carven lips were smeared with fresh red blood.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed. “What —”

“What, indeed?” he assented. “Attend me, Friend Trowbridge. There is much and very potent evil in this house. Tonight, before I took up my patrol, I smeared the floor before the young Monsieur Rodman’s door with talcum powder, that anyone who passed the threshold might surely leave his foot-tracks on the carpet of the hall. When I came back that way I found them — found them plainly marked upon the carpet, and let myself into his room. And what did I find there? Attend me while I tell you. I found him weltering in blood, by blue! Another wound had been pierced in his throat, and yet another in his breast above the heart. I bandaged him forthwith, for he was bleeding freely, then came to tell you of my find. Behold, I find you blinking like in owl at midday, and the casement window open, then this” — he pointed to the statue’s gory mouth — “to mock at my precautions.

“Furthermore, my watchful, alert friend, as I rushed through the hall to tell you what I had found, I saw a form, a white form like that of *Madame la Comtesse* about to enter this room. Come, let us go up.”

“But —” I expostulated.

“No buts, if you will be so kind. Let us observe those footprints.”

On the carpet of the upper hall, beginning at Rodman’s door and growing fainter as they receded, was a perfectly defined set of footprints. Someone walking barefoot had stepped into the film of toilet powder and tracked the white dust on the red broadloom. Dropping to my knees I looked at them, looked again, and shook my head in incredulity. The tracks were short and narrow — woman’s footprints — and each was of a six-toed foot.

“What — who?” I began, but he silenced me with a bleak smile.

“*Madame la Comtesse* who lies downstairs with blood-stained mouth, has feet which might have made such tracks.”

“But that’s absurd — impossible! A stone image can’t walk. It’s against the course of nature —”

“And it is natural that an image should drink blood?” he asked with sarcastic mildness. “No matter. Let us not argue. There is still another explanation. Let us see about it.”

Leading me down the corridor he came to pause before a white-enameled door, listened intently at the keyhole a moment, then crept into the room.

By the early-morning greyness we descried a rumpled evening dress thrown carelessly across a chair, a pair of silver sandals on the floor, and draped across another chair a pair of laced-edge crepe panties and a wisp of bandeau.

He laid his finger to his lips and dropped to hands and knees to crawl toward the bedstead, and I did likewise, feeling extraordinarily foolish, but all thought of the ridiculous figure I made vanished as he paused beside the bed and pointed to the sleeper. She wore a filmy night dress of Philippine cotton, and neither sheet nor blanket lay over her. It was with difficulty I stifled a gasp as my gaze came to rest upon her feet. Along their plantar region was a thin film of white powder — talcum powder — and on each there grew an extra toe; not a rudimentary, deformed digit, but one as perfectly shaped as its companions, joining the instep between the bases of the fourth and little toes.

Once more the little Frenchman signaled my attention; then, bending above the sleeping girl, played his flashlight across her face. Her lips were crimson with fresh blood, and at each corner of her mouth a little half-dried trickle of it drooled.

“*Voyez-vous, mon vieux*, are you convinced?” he asked in a low voice.

I made a silencing gesture, but he shrugged his shoulders indifferently. “No need for caution,” he returned. “Observe her respiration.”

I listened for a moment, then nodded agreement. Her inhalations gradually became faster and deeper, then slowly ebbed to shallowness and hesitancy — a perfect Cheyne-Stokes cycle. Unquestionably she lay in a light coma.

“What does it mean?” I asked as he piloted me toward the door.

“*Parbleu*, I damn think it explains the cryptic writing on that statue’s base,” he murmured. “Does it not say, ‘*Behold, I will send my messenger?*’ And have we not just gazed upon her messenger in person? I should say damn yes.”

“But —”

“*Ah bah*, let us not stand here like two gossiping fishwives. Come with me and I shall show you something more.”

“Do you not think it rather cold in here?” he asked as we reentered the art gallery.

“Cold?”

“*Mais oui*, have I not said so?”

“It’s rather cool,” I admitted, “but what that has to do —”

“Be good enough to place your hand upon the brow of *Madame la Comtesse*,” he ordered.

Wondering, I rested my fingertips on the smooth marble

features, but drew them away with a sharp exclamation. The lifeless stone was warm as fevered human flesh, velvet-soft and slightly humid to the hand, as if it had been living cuticle.

From the farther wall de Grandin reached down an Eleventh Century mace, an uncouth weapon consisting of a shaft of forged iron terminating in a metal sphere almost as large as a coconut and studded with angular iron teeth. The thing, designed to crush through tough plate armor and batter mail-protected skulls to splinters, was fully two stone in weight, and seemed grotesquely cumbersome in the little Frenchman's dainty hands, but he swung it to his shoulder as a woodsman might bear his axe as he marched toward the statue.

"Whatever —" I began, but he shook his head.

"I shall complete the work the liberated peasants left unfinished," he paused beside the effigy and raised his ponderous weapon. "*Madame la Comtesse*, your reign is at an end. No longer will you send your messengers before you; no more will guiltless ones go forth to garner nourishment for your vileness!" He swung the iron weapon in a wide arc.

"Good heavens, man, don't! Stop it!" I cried, seizing the iron bludgeon's shaft and deflecting the blow he was about to deliver.

He turned on me, his face almost livid. "You, too, my friend?" he asked, a sort of wondering pity in his tone.

"It seems like sacrilege," I protested. "She's too beautiful — see, anyone would think she knows what you're about and asks mercy!"

It was true. Although the marble lids lay placidly above the eyes the whole look of the face seemed subtly altered, and about the sweet, full-lipped mouth was an expression of pleading, almost as though the image were about to speak and beg the furious little man to stay his hand.

"*Cordieu*, you have it right, my friend," he agreed, "and thus do I requite her pleadings! Mercy, *ha?* Such mercy as she has shown others shall be hers!" The iron weapon thudded full upon the bloodstained marble lips.

Blow after shattering blow he struck; chip after chip of marble fell away. The classically lovely face was but a horrid featureless parody of its former self, devoid of lifelikeness as a dead thing far gone in putrefaction. The fragile hands that crossed demurely on the quiet breast were hewn to fragments; the exquisite six-toed feet were beaten from their tapering ankles and smashed to rubble, and still he swung the desecrating mace, hewing, crashing, splintering, obliterating every semblance to humanity in the statue, leaving only hideous desolation where the lovely simulacrum had lain a few minutes before.

At last he rested from his vandalism and leaned upon the helve of his weapon. "*Adieu, Madame la Comtesse*," he

panted, "*adieu pour ce monde et pour l'autre.*"

He dabbed his forehead with a lavender-bordered white silk handkerchief. "*Parbleu*, it was no child's-play, that; that damnation statue was tougher than the devil's own conscience. Yes, one requires time to catch one's breath."

"Why'd you do it?" I asked reproachfully. "It was one of the most beautiful pieces of statuary I ever saw, and the idea of your venting your rage on it because that little she-devil upstairs —"

"*Zut!*" he shut me off. "Speak not so of the innocent instrument, my friend. Would you destroy the pen because some character-assassin uses it to write a scurrilous letter? Consider this, if you please." He retrieved a scrap of marble from the floor, a finger from one of the smashed hands, and thrust it at me. "Examine it; closely, *mon vieux.*"

I held the pitiful relic up to the light, and nearly dropped it in amazement. "Wh — why, it can't be!" I stammered.

"Nevertheless, it is," he assured me. "With your own eyes you see it; can you deny it with your lips?"

Running through the texture of the ruptured stone, as though soaked into its grain, was a ruddy stain tinting the broken, rough-edged fragment almost to the hue of living flesh, and offering a warm, moist feel to my hand.

"But how —"

"How, indeed, my friend? You saw the stain of warm, new blood on her lips, and on her cheeks you felt the warmth of pseudo-life. Even in her stony veins you see the vital fluid. Is it not so?"

"Oh, I suppose so; but —"

"No buts, my friend; come now and see a further wonder; one I am sure has come to pass."

Dreading some fresh horror I followed him to the telephone and waited while he dialed a number. "*Allo,*" he challenged finally, "is this the State Asylum for the Criminal Insane? Bon. I am Dr. Jules de Grandin, and ask concerning one of your inmates; one Sydney Weitzer. Yes, if you will be good enough." To me he ordered, "Take up the adjoining 'phone, my friend; I would that you should hear the message I receive."

"Hello," a voice came faintly after we had waited a few minutes, "this is Dr. Butterforth. I've had charge of Weitzer the past few hours. He's been unusually violent, and we had to strap him up about half an hour ago."

"Ah?" de Grandin breathed. "And now?"

"Damn queer," the other replied. "About ten minutes ago he stopped raving and came out of the delirium like a person waking from a dream. Didn't know where he was or who we were, or what it's all about. Almost had a fit when he found out he was here — couldn't remember being arrested for burglary or anything leading up to his commitment. It's too soon yet to start bragging, but I'm hanged if I don't think the poor kid's regained his sanity. Damnedest thing I

ever saw.”

“Precisely, you speak truer than you know, my friend,” de Grandin returned as he hung up. To me he observed simply, “You see?”

“I’ll be shot if I do,” I denied. “I’m glad the poor boy’s on the mend, but I can’t see a connection —”

“Perhaps I can explain it to you,” he promised, “but not now.” He patted back a yawn and rose. “At present I am very tired. I shall feel better after sleep, a shower and breakfast. When I am rested I shall tell you everything I can. Till then, *à bientôt, cher ami.*”

He did not rise till after luncheon, and Swearingen was on the verge of apoplexy while he ate an unhurried brunch, but finally he finished and joined us in the library. “It is but fitting what you see together, seeing what is pertinent, and understanding what you see,” he told us as he lit a cigarette.

“Let us, for example, take Mademoiselle Hatchot, whom I saw for the first time as we approached your house, Monsieur Swearingen. She was lying in a hammock, and as we passed by she slipped her shoe off, permitting us a glimpse of her so lovely foot. The glimpse was but a wink’s-time long, but long enough for me to see she had six toes.

“Now, in my travels I have learned that among all primitive peoples, and among those not so primitive, who still retain traditions of olden days, the possession of an extra toe or finger is regarded as more than a mere physical freak. Those having extra digits are thought to be peculiarly sensitive to either good or evil influence. Though angels may more readily commune with them the same holds true of demons, even the Arch Fiend himself. You may remember that Dulac the great English painter, in recognition of this once-widespread belief, depicted both Circe and Salome with six toes on each foot.

“What your case was I did not know, Monsieur, for you had wisely failed to set on paper that which, had it reached other eyes than ours, might have made you a laughing-stock; but that you had a problem of more than ordinary interest I suspected, so I said to me, ‘I shall bear in mind this lady of the six toes; she are undoubtedly connected with the problem of this house.’

“Then you told me of apparently trifling thefts, and of the odd manner in which a young-man guest had been hurt. Then you show us the statue of *Madame la Comtesse*. I gaze upon her loveliness — and she was very lovely, too — and what is it I see? Six toes on both her feet, *parbleu!* This is most strange; it pulls the long arm of coincidence clear out of joint. Here are two women, one of flesh, one of stone, and each of them has two more toes than usual.

“You tell me that the young men of your party are intrigued by the statue; that one of them has kissed her on the lips, and that he is the same one who has sustained

mysterious woundings in the night whereby he has lost blood.

“The olden legends are perhaps but fairy tales to frighten children, yet when great clouds of smoke arise we may look for at least a little fire, and old legends are but the embalmed remains of ancient fact. From earliest times we have stories of men who wrought their ruin by embracing images of evil association, or otherwise acting the lover toward them. These things I think about while I try in vain to decipher the meaning of the inscription on the base of the monument.

“When we go to Monsieur Yellen the antique dealer’s to ask about the statue’s antecedents we meet a young rabbi, who tells us of a tale he heard in Drôme concerning one known as ‘The Silver Countess.’ That is sufficient to prime my memory, for I remember hearing tales of that same lady, and I remember the cryptogram of the inscription, ‘Mal. iii, 1,’ concerning which Friend Trowbridge and I have argued. To test the soundness of my theory I procure a small Bible and have Friend Trowbridge write down the Scriptural inscription which I read. He writes exactly as I have anticipated, and in the Bible I find the first verse of the third chapter of the Book of Malachi begins, ‘*Behold, I will send my messenger.*’ — ‘It is a small thing, but enough. I am on the right trail, though my memory of the Silver Countess is still hazy.

“At once I call my good friend Professor Jacoby by telephone, and what he tells me makes my blood to run like ice water. In the olden days when such things were there lived a woman called the Countess Eleanor, sometimes called the Silver One, or Silver Countess. Her beauty was so great that no man could look in her face without becoming subject to her will. Her skin was like new milk, her lips were like old wine, her hair was like the moonlight — hence her sobriquet — and her soul was blacker than a raven bathed in ink.

“At fourteen she was married to a prowessed knight and went to live with him in his château near Valence, and presently he went away to fight the Turks for the faith that was in him. The Countess did not go with him. She stayed at home, and when he came back unexpectedly and rushed to greet her in her bower he found her in the embrace of an incubus — a demon lover with whom she had long consorted by stealth.

“*Tiens*, there is no fool like a strong man in love, my friends. Instead of killing her forthwith, he took her to his bosom and forgave her, then went away to fight the infidel again.

“Among the hangers-on at the château was a talented young sculptor to whom the Silver Countess sat for her funerary monument, and when it had been finished she placed the statue in the château chapel where the moon’s rays fell on it. There she would go to it, and lay her warm

lips on its cold stone mouth, her pulsing, warm bosom against its chilly marble breast. It was not right, it was unholy; but she was lady and mistress of the castle. What could her servants do?

“All soon horror came to the castle. One by one her servants failed and pined away, though no man knew their malady, and when at last there were none to keep watch on her the Countess Eleanor made high holiday with imps and satyrs, incubi and devils, and all the mighty company not yet made fast in hell.

“It could not last. In those days the Church frowned on such practices, and made her frown effective. At a specially convened tribunal the Countess Eleanor was put upon her trial for witchcraft and diabolism, convicted and sentenced to be hanged and burned like any common witch.

“The night before her execution she interviewed the sculptor of her statue. Next morning, when her sinful body had been burned to ashes and the ashes cast into the Rhine the young sculptor could not be found, but nightly ghostly revels were observed in the château. One by one the holy relics vanished from the chapel, by degrees the other monuments — those duly blessed with bell and book and candle — were defaced; at last the only image perfect and unblemished was that of Countess Eleanor, keeping lonely vigil in the *chapelle mortuaire*.

“Upon a night a hideous thing with blazing eyes and long and matted hair, clothed in motley rags and howling like a beast, attacked a peasant ploughman at the fall of dusk hard by the castle. The peasant defended himself lustily, and his assailant, sorely smitten, made to run away, but the ploughman followed hard, and tracked him to the château chapel, where he and some companions who had joined the chase came on the vanished sculptor lying prone upon the statute of the wicked countess, his lips pressed to hers, and on his mouth and on her stone lips was a smear of blood. The wretch had opened his own veins, sucked forth his blood, then with his mouth all reeking pressed it to the image of the woman he adored in death.

“*Eh bien*, there were ways of making those who did not wish to speak tell all they knew in those old days, my friends. Under torment he confessed that he had made a compact with his leman to steal the blessed objects from the chapel, since her sinful spirit could not abide their nearness; and thereafter to rend and slay those whom he met and bear their blood in his mouth to her cold, sculptured lips for her refreshment.

“In my country we have a proverb concerning history: ‘*Plus ça change plus c’est la même chose* — the more it changes the more it is the same.’ so it was with Countess Eleanor, it seems. In 1358 when the Jacques revolted, the castle was stormed and taken, but for some reason her tomb was left inviolate. Again, in 1793, when every vestige of

kingcraft was swept from France, a guard of Republican soldiers was sent to the château to demolish it, but save to deface the epitaph upon the tomb the *citoyens* did no hurt to the beautiful and evil effigy.

“For years the ruins bore an evil name. No traveler who knew the road would venture near them after dark, but sometimes strange wayfarers took shelter there, and death or madness was their portion.

“The last known chapter of the tragic history was in the war of France’s betrayal in 1871. In autumn of that year a foraging party of Uhlans was benighted near the castle and took shelter in the ancient chapel, the only portion of the building still under even partial roof.

“Next morning a company of *francs-tireurs* found them — three dead, the other dying. The dying man related how at midnight he had wakened with the pain of a sword-cut in his side, and seen his corporal lapping flowing blood from the severed throat of a comrade, then, with his dripping mouth, kissing and caressing a statue which lay stark and white in the midnight moonlight. With his pistol he had shot his officer, and the attitude of the man’s body bore witness that his tale was true; for across the marble statue lay the dead, his bloody lips fast-hung to those of Countess Eleanor.

“When I had learned these things I knew why old Monsieur Pumphrey went mad directly he had bought that statue; I understood why the poor Jewish young man went crazy and stripped his master’s shop of every holy thing, and why thereafter he sought to break and enter the shop. He whom the Silver Countess enthralled she first makes mad, then criminal. He must commit abominations, then seal the contract of his iniquity with a bloody kiss.

“Then it occurs to me this six-toed young lady also has a part in all this business — she and the young Monsieur Rodman who has been seen kissing that abominable statue. I make a survey of the facts. It does not appear that the Countess Eleanor ever partook of female blood; always it was that of a man which was put to her lips. Young Rodman has caressed her, it is possible — indeed, it are quite probable — that he is one of her conquests. But the nature of his woundings seems to negative his having taken his own blood to her. Who, then, has been the go-between, the messenger? Why not the six-toed girl? Is it not logical to think there is *rapport* between the six-toed living woman and the six-toed effigy of the beauteous witch? Why not, *en vérité*?

“Very well. Last night I set a trap. When I found Mademoiselle Hatchot’s footprints in the hall I knew young Rodman had been visited by her, and rushed into his room without ceremony. It was well I did so, for he was sorely wounded and bleeding much. I made repairs on him and hurried to the gallery below where I found fresh blood — - the blood of the young Rodman, *parbleu!* — upon the

statue's lips. It are a sign and seal of evil service rendered by her helpless servant. '*Behold, I will send my messenger,*' was her parting gibe at humanity, carved on her tomb by that poor one whose soul she later stole away with her so evil loveliness.

"'*Madame la Comtesse,*' I tell her, 'I damn believe you have sent your last messenger. I, Jules de Grandin, have found you!' Yes.

"*Alors,* to Mademoiselle Hatchot's chamber I repair and on her little six-toed feet I find the marks of powder I have spread before young Rodman's door; but more important, on her lips I find the trace of the new blood which she has carried to that naughty one who lies all still and cold below. 'It is sufficient evidence,' I tell me. 'At once, immediately, right away, I shall do the needful.' And so I did.

"Against Friend Trowbridge's protests I smash that *sacré* statue like a potter's vessel. Beneath the hammering of my mace she are completely smashed, abolished, ruined, *pardieu!*

"Immediately I call the hospital where the young Weitzer are confined, and find that at the moment of that statue's smashing he regained his sanity. The final link was fitted

into the chain. Your so strange case is settled, Monsieur Swearingen."

"What about the Hatchot girl?" asked Swearingen.

"What about the telephone through which you send a message, whether good or bad? She is wholly innocent. By chance she wears twelve toes instead of ten, and by that chance she became servant to a creature of extreme wickedness. Her mental state while in the service of her evil mistress was like that of one in anaesthesia. She knew not what she did, she can remember nothing. Friend Trowbridge can vouch that she lay in a light coma when we inspected her —"

"D'ye expect me to believe this damn nonsense?" Swearingen scoffed.

De Grandin lifted his shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman who wishes to indicate complete dissociation from a matter can give. "What you believe or disbelieve is of no moment to me, Monsieur. Me, I have disposed of the case according to your request.

"Tomorrow, or the next day, or perhaps the next day after that, you will receive my bill for services."

The House without a Mirror

MY FRIEND Jules de Grandin was in one of his gayest moods. Reclining against the plank seat of the john-boat he gazed with twinkling, bright blue eyes at the cloudless Carolina sky, tweaked the tips of his diminutive blond mustache till the waxed hairs thrust out to right and left of his small, thin-lipped mouth as sharply as a pair of twin fish-hooks, and gave vent to his own private translation of a currently popular song:

*“Oui, nous n’avons plus de bananes;
Nous n’avons plus de bananes aujourd’hui!”*

he caroled merrily.

“Say, looka yere, boss,” protested our colored factotum from the boat’s stern, “does yo’ all want ter shoot enny o’ dem birds, youh’s best be cuttin’ out dat music. Dese yere reed-birds is pow’ful skittish, wid so many no’ten gemmen comin’ ddown yere an’ bangin’ away all ober de place wid deir pump-guns, an—”

“*Là, là, mon brave,*” the little Frenchman interrupted, “of what importance is it whether we kill ten dozen or none at all of the small ones? Me, I had as soon return to Monsieur Gregory’s lodge with empty bag as stagger homeward with a load of little feathered corpses. Have not these, God’s little ones, a good right to live? Why should we slay them when our bellies are well filled with other things?”

The Negro boy regarded him in hang-jawed amazement. That anyone, especially a “gemman” from the fabulous “no’th,” should feel compunction at slaughtering the reed-birds swarming among the wild rice was something beyond his comprehension. With an inarticulate grunt he thrust his ten-foot pole into the black mud bottom of the swamp canal and drove the punt toward a low-lying island at the farther end of the lagoon-like opening in the waterway. “Does yo’ all crave ter eat now?” he asked. “Ef yuh does, dis yere lan’ is as dry as enny ’round yere, an—”

“But of course,” de Grandin assented, reaching for the well-filled luncheon hamper our host had provided. “I am well-nigh perished with hunger, and if Monsieur Gregory has furnished brandy as well as food — *Mordieu*, may the hairs of his head each become a waxen taper to light his way to glory when he dies!”

The hamper was quickly unpacked and we sat cross-legged on a slight eminence to discuss assorted sandwiches, steaming coffee from vacuum bottles and some fine old cognac from a generously proportioned flask.

A faint rustling in the short grass at de Grandin’s elbow

drew my attention momentarily from my half-eaten sandwich. “Look out!” I cried sharply.

“Lawd Gawd, boss, don’ move!” the colored boy added in a horrified tone.

Creeping unnoticed through the short, sun-dried vegetation with which the island was covered, a huge brown moccasin had approached within a foot of the little Frenchman and paused, head uplifted, yellow, forked tongue flickering lambently from venom-filled mouth.

We sat in frozen stillness. A move from the Negro or me might easily have irritated the reptile into striking blindly; the slightest stirring by de Grandin would certainly have invited immediate disaster. I could hear the colored guide’s breath rasping fearfully through his flaring nostrils; the pounding of my own heart sounded in my ears. I ran my tongue lightly over suddenly parched lips, noting, with that strange ability for minute inventory we develop at such times, that the membrane seemed rough as sandpaper.

Actually, I suppose, we held our statue-still pose less than a minute. To me it seemed a century. I felt the pupils of my eyes narrowing and ceasing to function as if I had just emerged from a darkened room into brilliant sunlight, and the hand which half raised the sandwich to my lips was growing heavy as a leaden fist when sudden diversion came.

Like a beam of light shot through a moonless night something whizzed through the still afternoon air from a thicket of scrub trees some thirty feet behind us; there was a sharp, clipping sound, almost like a pair of scissors snipping shut, and the deadly reptile’s head struck the ground with a smacking impact. Next instant the foul creature’s blotched body writhed upward, coiling and wriggling about a three-foot shaft of slender, flexible wood like the serpent round Mercury’s caduceus. A feather-tipped arrow had cleft the snake through the neck an inch or less behind its ugly, wedged-shaped head, and pinned it to the earth.

“Thank you, friend,” de Grandin cried, turning toward the direction from which the rescuing shaft had sped. “I know not who you are, but I am most greatly in your debt, for—”

He broke off, his lips refusing to frame another word, his small, round eyes staring unbelievably at the visage which peered at us between the leaves.

The Negro boy followed the Frenchman’s glance, emitted a single shrill, terrified yell, turned a half somersault backward, regaining his feet with the agility of a cat and scurrying down the mud-flat where our boat lay beached.

“Lawdy Gawdy,” he moaned, “hit’s de *ha’nt*; hit’s de swamp ha’nt, sho’s yuh bo’n! Lawd Gawd, lemme git erway fr’m heah! Please, suh, Gawd, sabe me, sabe dis pore nigger fr’m de ha’nt!”

He reached our punt, clambered aboard and shoved off, thrusting his pole against the lagoon bottom and driving the light craft across the water with a speed like that of a racing motorboat. Ere de Grandin or I could more than frame a furious shout he rounded the curve of a dense growth of wild rice and disappeared as completely as though dissolved into the atmosphere.

The Frenchman turned to me with a grimace. “*Cordieu*,” he remarked, “we would seem to be between the devil and the sea, Friend Trowbridge. Did you, by any chance, see what I saw a moment hence?”

“Ye-es; I think so,” I assented. “If you saw something so dreadful no nightmare ever equaled it—”

“*Zut!*” he laughed. “Let us not be ungrateful. Ugly the face is, I concede; but its owner did us at least one good turn.” He pointed to the still-writhing snake, pinned fast to the earth by the sharp-tipped arrow. “Come, let us seek the ugly one. Though he be the devil’s own twin for ugliness, he is no less deserving of our thanks. Perhaps he will show further amiability and point out an exit from this doubly damned morass of mud and serpents.”

Treading cautiously, lest we step upon another snake, we advanced to the clump of scrub trees whence the repulsive face had peered. Several times de Grandin hailed the unseen monster whose arrow had saved his life, but no answer came from the softly rustling bushes. At length we pushed our way among the shrubs, and reached the covert where our unknown friend had been concealed. Nothing rewarded our search, though we passed entirely through the coppice several times.

I was about ready to drop upon the nearest rotting log for a moment’s rest when de Grandin’s shrill cry hailed me. “*Regardez-vous*,” he commanded, pointing to the black, greasy mud which sloped into the stagnant water.

Clearly outlined in the mire as though engraved with a sculptor’s tool was the imprint of a tiny, mocassined foot, so small it could have been made only by a child or a daintily formed woman.

“Well—” I began, then paused for lack of further comment.

“Well, indeed, good friend,” de Grandin assented with a vigorous nod. “Do not you understand its significance?”

“U’m — can’t say I do,” I confessed.

“*Ah bah*, you are stupid!” he shot back. “Consider: There is no sign of a boat having been beached here; there is nothing to which a boat could have been tied within ten feet of the water’s edge. We have searched the island, we know we are alone here. What then? How came the possessor of

this so lovely foot here, and *how did she leave?*”

“Hanged if I know,” I returned.

“Agreed,” he acquiesced, “but is it not fair to assume that she waded through yonder water to that strip of land? I think so. Let us test it.”

We stepped into the foul marsh-water, felt the mud sucking at our boots, then realized that the bottom was firm enough to hold us. Tentatively, step by cautious step, we forded the forty-foot channel, finding it nowhere more than waist-deep, and, bedraggled, mud-caked and thoroughly uncomfortable, finally clambered up the loamy bank of the low peninsula which jutted into the marsh-lake opposite the island of our adventure.

“*Tiens*, it seems I was right, as usual, Friend Trowbridge,” the Frenchman announced as we floundered up the bank to solid ground. Again, limned in the soft, moist earth, was a tiny, slender footprint, followed by others leading toward the rank-growing woods.

“I may be wrong,” he admitted, surveying the trail, “but unless I am more mistaken than I think, we have but to follow our noses and these shapely tracks to extricate ourselves. Come; *allez vous en!*”

Simple as the program sounded, it was difficult of accomplishment. The guiding footprints trailed off and lost themselves among the dead, crackling leaves with which the wood was paved, and the thick-set trees and thicker undergrowth disclosed nothing like a path. Beating the hampering bushes aside with our guns, staggering and crashing through thorny thickets by main strength and direct assault, we forced our way, turning aside from time to time as the land became spongy with seeping bogwater or an arm of the green, stagnant swamp barred our advance. We progressed slowly, striving to attain open country before darkness overtook us, but before we realized it twilight fell and we were obliged to admit ourselves hopelessly lost.

“No use, old chap,” I advised. “The more we struggle, the deeper in we get; with night coming on our chances of being mired in the swamp are a hundred to one. Best make camp and wait for daylight. We can build a fire and—”

“May Satan bake me in his oven if we do!” de Grandin interrupted. “Are we the Babes in the Woods that we should lie down here and wait for death and the kindly ministrations of the robin-redbreasts! Come away, my friend; we shall assuredly win through!”

He returned to the assault with redoubled vigor, beat his way some twenty yards farther through the underbrush, then gave a loud, joyous hail.

“See what is arrived, Friend Trowbridge!” he called. “*Cordieu*, did I not promise we should find it?”

Heavy-footed, staggering with fatigue, I dragged myself to where he stood, and stared in amazement at the barrier

barring our path.

Ten feet away stood an ancient wall, gray with weather and lichen-spotted with age. Here and there patches of the stucco with which it had originally been dressed had peeled away, exposing the core of antique firebrick.

“Right or left?” de Grandin asked, drawing a coin from his pocket. “Heads we proceed right; tails, left.” He spun the silver disk in the air and caught it between his palms. “*Bon*, we go right,” he announced, shouldering his gun and turning on his heel to follow the wall.

A few minutes’ walk brought us to a break in the barrier where four massive posts of roughly dressed stone stood sentry. There should have been gates between them, but only ancient hand-wrought hinges, almost eaten away with rust, remained. Graven in the nearest pillar was an escutcheon on which had been carved some sort of armorial device, but the moss of many decades had smothered the crest so that its form was indistinguishable.

Beyond the yawning gateway stood a tiny, box-like gatekeeper’s lodge, like the wall, constructed of brick faced with stucco. Tiles had scuffed from its antiquated roof, the panes of old, green bottle-glass were smashed from its leaded casements; the massive door of age-discolored oak leaned outward drunkenly, its sole support, a single lower hinge with joints long since solidified with rust.

Before us stretched the avenue, a mere unkept, overgrown trail straggling between two rows of honey locusts. Alternating shafts of moonlight and shadow barred its course like stripes upon a convict’s clothes. Nothing moved among the trees, not even a moth or a bird belated in its homeward flight. Despite myself, I shivered as I gazed on the desolation of this place of bygone splendor. It was as if the ghosts of ten generations of long-dead gentlefolk rose up and bade us stay our trespassing steps.

“*Eh bien*, it is not cheerful,” de Grandin admitted with a somewhat rueful grin, “but there is the promise of four walls and at least the remnant of a roof beyond. Let us see what we shall see, Friend Trowbridge.”

We passed between the empty gate-pillars and strode up the driveway, traversing perhaps a hundred yards before we saw the house — a low, age-ravaged building of rough gray stone set in the midst of a level, untended grass plot and circled by a fourteen-foot moat filled with green, stagnant water in which floated a few despondent-looking lily pads. The avenue continued to a crumbling causeway, broke abruptly at the moat’s lip, then took up its course to the grilled entrance of the house. Two tumbledown pillars reared astride the driveway at the farther side of the break, and swung between them, amazingly, was a mediæval drawbridge of stout oaken planks held up by strands of strong, almost new Manila hawser.

“*Grand diable*,” the Frenchman murmured wonderingly,

“a *château fort* — here! How comes it?”

“I don’t know,” I responded, “but here it is, and it’s in tolerable repair — what’s more, someone lives in it. See, there’s a light behind that window.”

He looked, then nodded briefly. “My friend,” he assured me, “I damnation think we shall eat and sleep within walls tonight.

“*Allo*,” he shouted through cupped hands, “*holà, là-haut*; we hunger, we thirst, we are lost; we are miserable!”

Twice more he hailed the silent house before lights stirred behind the narrow windows piercing its walls. Finally the iron grille guarding the door swung slowly outward and an elderly, stoop-shouldered man shuffled out, an old-fashioned bull’s-eye lantern dangling in his left hand, a modern and efficient-looking repeating rifle cradled in the crook of his right elbow.

“Who calls?” he asked, peering through the darkness and pausing to flash his smoky lantern in our direction. “Who is it?”

“*Mordieu*, two weary, wayworn travelers, no more,” de Grandin answered. “All afternoon we have battled with this *sacré* woodland, and lost ourselves most thoroughly. We are tired, *Monsieur*, we are enervated, and the magnitude of our hunger is matched only by that of our thirst.”

“Where are you from?” the other challenged, placing his lamp on the ground and surveying us suspiciously.

“From the hunting-lodge of Monsieur Wardman Gregory. In a fortuneless moment we accepted his invitation to come South and hunt the detestable little birds which frequent these morasses. This afternoon our seventy-times-damned traitor of a guide fled from us, leaving us to perish in a wilderness infested by snakes and devil-faced monsters of the woods. Surely, you will not deny us shelter?”

“If you’re Gregory’s guests it’s all right,” the other returned, “but if you come from *him* — you needn’t look for mercy if I find it out.”

“*Monsieur*,” de Grandin assured him, “half of what you say is intelligible, the other half is meaningless. The ‘*him*’ of whom you speak is a total stranger to us; but our hunger and fatigue is a real and present thing. Permit that we enter, if you please.”

The master of the house eyed us suspiciously a second time; then he turned from his inspection and drew back the ratchet which held the hawser-drum. Creakingly, the drawbridge descended and bumped into place against its stone sill. “Come over,” the old man called, taking up his gun and holding it in readiness, “but remember, the first false move you make means a bullet.”

“*Parbleu*, he is churlish, this one,” de Grandin whispered as we strode across the echoing planks.

Arrived beyond the moat, we assisted our unwilling host to rewind the ropes operating the bridge, and in compliance

with a gesture containing more of suspicion than courtesy preceded him to the house.

The building's gray, bare rooms were in keeping with its gray, dilapidated exterior; age and lack of care had more than softened the antique furnishings, it had reduced them to a dead level of tonelessness, without accent, making the big, stone-paved hall in which they stood seem empty and monotonous.

Our host put down his lantern and gun, then called abruptly: "Minerva — Poseidon — we have guests, prepare some food, make haste!"

Through a swinging door connecting with a rear apartment an ancient, wrinkled little yellow woman sidled, paused at the threshold and looked about her uncertainly. "Did yuh say we all has *guests*, Marse Jawge?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes," replied her master, "they've been traveling all day, too. Shake up something to eat, quickly."

"Yas, suh," she returned and scuttled back to her kitchen like a frightened rabbit scurrying into its burrow.

She reappeared in a few minutes, followed by an aged and intensely black little man, each of them bearing a tray on which were slices of cold roast fowl, fresh white bread, preserved fruits, coffee and decanters of red, home-made wine. These they set on the massive table occupying the center of the room, and spread fresh napkins of coarse but carefully bleached linen, then stood waiting attentively.

A certain fumbling ineptness in their movements made me glance sharply at them a second time. Realization was slow in coming, but when it burst upon me I could hardly repress an exclamation. Both the aged servants were stone-blind; only the familiarity of long association enabled them to move about the room with the freedom of those possessing vision. I glanced hastily at de Grandin, and noted that his narrow, expressive face was alight with curiosity as he beheld the expressionless, sightless eyes of the servants.

Our host accompanied us to table and poured a cup of coffee and a glass of wine for himself as soon as we began our attack on the more substantial portions of the menu. He was a man well advanced in years, thin-faced, lean and sun-burned almost to the point of desiccation. Time had not dealt gently with him; his long, high-cheeked face, rendered longer by the drooping gray mustache and imperial he affected, seemed to have been beaten into angularity by merciless hammer-blows of unkind fortune. His lips were thin, almost colorless and exceedingly bitter in expression; his deep-set, dark eyes glowed and smoldered with a light of perpetual anger mingled with habitual distrust. He wore a suit of coarse linen crash, poorly tailored but spotlessly clean; his white-cotton shirt had seen better days, though not recently, for its wristbands were frayed and tattered: at the

edges, though it, too, was immaculate as though fresh from the laundress' hands.

Ravenous from his fast and the exhausting exercise of the afternoon de Grandin did voracious justice to the meal, but though his mouth was too full for articulate speech, his little, round blue eyes looked eloquent curiosity as they roved round the big, stone-floored hall, rested on the ancient, moldering tapestries and the dull Flemish oak furniture, and finally took minute inventory of our host.

The other noted the little Frenchman's wondering eyes and smiled with a sort of mournful pride. "The house dates from Jean Ribault's unfortunate attempt to colonize the coast," he informed us. "Georges Ducharme, an ancestor of mine, accompanied one of the unsuccessful expeditions to the New World, and when the colonists rose against their leaders at Port Royal, he and a few companions beat a path through the wilderness and finally settled here. This place was old when the foundations of Jamestown were laid. For almost four hundred years the Ducharmes have lived here, serving neither French king nor English, Federal Government nor Confederate States — they are and have always been a law unto themselves, accountable to none but their own consciences and God, sirs."

"U'm?" de Grandin cleared his mouth of roast pheasant and bread with a prodigious swallow, then helped himself to a generous stoup of home-made wine. "And you are the last of the Ducharmes, *Monsieur*?"

Quick suspicion was reborn in the other's dark, deep-set eyes as he regarded the Frenchman. For a moment he paused as a man may pause for breath before diving into a chilling stream; then, "Yes," he answered shortly. "I am the last of an ancient line. With me the house of Ducharme ceases to exist."

De Grandin tweaked the waxed ends of his tiny blond mustache after the manner of a well-fed tom-cat combing his whiskers. "Tell me, Monsieur Ducharme," he demanded as he chose a cigarette from his case with deliberate care and set it alight in the flame of one of the tall candles flickering on the table, "you have, presumably, passed the better part of your life here; of a certainty you are familiar with the neighborhood and its traditions. Have you, by any fortunate chance, heard of a certain monstrosity, a thing of infinite hideousness of appearance, which traverses the trackless wastes of these swamps? Today at noon I was all but exterminated by a venomous serpent, but a timely arrow — *an arrow*, mind you — shot from a near-by thicket, saved my life. Immediately I would have given thanks to the unknown archer who delivered me from the reptile, but when I turned to make acknowledgment, I beheld a face so vilely ugly, so exceedingly hideous, that it startled me to silence. *Eh bien*, it did more than that to our superstitious Negro guide. He shrieked something about a specter which

haunts the swampland and fled incontinently, leaving us to face the wilderness alone — may seven foul fiends torment his spirit unceasingly in the world to come!

“Thereafter we did search for some trace of the ill-favored one, but nothing could we find save only a few footprints — *parbleu*, such footprints as a princess might have boasted to possess!” He bunched his slender fingers at his lips and wafted an ecstatic kiss toward the vaulted stone ceiling.

Ducharme made a queer, choking noise in his throat. “You — you found footprints! You — traced — them — here?” he asked in an odd, dry voice, rising and gripping his chair till the tendons showed in lines of high, white relief against the backs of his straining hands.

“By no means,” de Grandin answered. “Though we did struggle like flies upon the *papier des mouches* to extricate ourselves from this detestable morass, we found neither sign nor trace of human thing until we were stopped by the wall which girdles your estate, for which last the good God be devoutly thanked!”

Ducharme bent a long, questioning look on the little Frenchman, then shrugged his shoulders. “No matter,” he murmured as though speaking to himself; “if you’re *his* messengers I’ll know it soon enough, and I’ll know how to deal with you.”

Aloud he announced: “You are probably tired after the day’s exertions. If you’ve quite finished your repast, we may as well retire — we sleep early at Ducharme Hall.”

Beside the newel-post of the wide, broad-stepped staircase curving upward from the hall stood a small oaken table bearing several home-dipped candles in standards of antique silver. Taking one of these, our host lit it from the candelabrum on the dining-table, handed it to me, then repeated the process and supplied de Grandin with a taper. “I’ll show you to your room,” he offered with a courteous bow.

We trooped up the stairs, turned down a narrow, stone-paved corridor and, at Ducharme’s invitation, entered a high-celled, stone-floored chamber lighted by a single narrow window with leaded panes of ancient greenish glass and furnished with a four-post canopied bed, a massive chest of deep-carven oak and two straight-backed cathedral chairs which would have brought their weight in gold at a Madison Avenue antique dealer’s.

“I’ll have Poseidon wait on you in the morning,” our host promised. “In spite of his natural handicaps he makes an excellent valet.” What seemed to me a cruel smile flickered across the thin, pale lips beneath his drooping mustache as he concluded the announcement, bowed politely and backed from the room, drawing the door soundlessly shut behind him.

For a moment I stood in the center of the little, narrow

room, striving to make a survey of our surroundings by the light of our tallow dips; then, moved by a sudden impulse, I ran on tiptoe to the door, seized its ancient, hand-wrought handle and pulled with all my might. Firm as though nailed to its easing, it resisted my strongest effort. As I gave over the attempt to force the panels open and turned in panic to de Grandin I thought I heard the muted echo of a low, malicious chuckle in the darkened corridor outside.

“I say, de Grandin,” I whispered, “do you realize we’re caught here like flies in a spider-web?”

“Very probably,” he replied, smothering a yawn. “What of it? If they slit our throats while we sleep we shall at least have the advantage of a few minutes’ repose before bidding Saint Peter *bonjour*. Come, let us sleep.”

But despite his assumed indifference I noticed that he placed one of the great carved chairs before the door in such manner that anyone entering the apartment would do so at imminent peril of barked shins, perhaps of a broken leg, and that he removed only his boots and jacket and lay down with his vicious little automatic pistol ready to his hand.

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, awake, arise and behold!” de Grandin’s sharp whisper cut through my morning sleep. The early October day was well advanced, for a patch of warm golden sunlight lay in a prism-mottled field on the stone pavement of the room, little half-moons of opalescent coloring marking the curved lenses of the green bottle-glass of the casement through which the beams came. Gazing with fixed intensity at some object below, the little Frenchman stood at the half-opened window and motioned me to join him.”

As I stepped across the chilled paving-blocks of the bedroom floor the high sweet notes of the polonaise from *Mignon* floated up to us, the singer taking the quadruple trills with the easy grace of a swallow skimming over sunlit water, never faltering in the vocal calisthenics which give pause to many a professional musician. “Wha — who —” I stammered wonderingly as I reached his side. “I thought Ducharme said —”

“*S-s-st!*” He cut me off. “Remark her; *c’est belle, n’est-ce-pas?*”

Just beyond the drawbridge, full in the rich flood of early-morning sunlight stood a girl, slim, straight and virginal as a hazel wand, her head thrown back, a perfect torrent of clear, wine-rich soprano melody issuing from her throat. Only the rippling cascade of her abundant, wavy auburn hair told her sex, for from feet to throat she was arrayed like a boy — small, sturdy woodsman’s moccasins laced calf-high about her straight, slender legs, riding-breeches of brown corduroy belted about her slight waist by a wide girdle of soft brown leather, an olive-drab flannel shirt of military pattern, rolled elbow-high at the sleeves and open at the

collar encasing her spare torso. Her back was to us as she trilled her joyous aubade to the rising sun, and I noticed that a leather baldric was swung across her left shoulder, a quiver of arrows with unstrung bow thrust among them laced to the wide suede strap.

Hands as white and delicately formed as any I had ever seen fluttered graciously in rhythm to the music as she poured her very heart out in song; as she ended on a high, true note, she wove her fingers together in a very ecstasy of self-engendered emotion, stood in lovely tableau a moment, then set off toward the forest with a swinging, graceful stride which told of long days spent in walking beneath the open sky with limbs unhampered by traveling-skirts and feet unfettered by modish shoes.

“De Grandin,” I exclaimed, “can it be — is it possible — those little, mocassined feet, those arrows — can *she* be the archer who killed the snake yester—”

“You do forget the face we saw,” he interrupted in a bleak, monotonous voice.

“But couldn’t she — isn’t it possible she wore a dreadful mask for some reason—”

“One wonders,” he returned before I could complete my argument. “One also wonders who she is and what she does here.

“Yes, Ducharme distinctly told us he was the only one—”

“*Ah bah*,” he cut in. “That Monsieur Ducharme, I think he flatters himself he fools us, Friend Trowbridge. Meanwhile — *allo?* Who calls?”

A soft, timid knock sounded on our door, followed by a second rap, then, after a discreet interval, a third.

“Hit’s Poseidon, suh,” the old Negro’s voice answered quaveringly. “Marse Jawge, he done tol’ me ter come up yere an’ valet y’all dis mo’nin’. Is yuh ready fo’ yo’ baffs an’ shaves, suhs? Ah done got de watah yere fo’ yuh.”

“By all means, enter, my excellent one,” de Grandin replied, crossing to the door and flinging it back. With a start I noticed that it swung inward without resistance.

The old blind servant shuffled into the room, a towel and two old-fashioned razors in one hand, a porcelain basin clutched beneath his elbow and a pewter pitcher of steaming water in the other hand. “Ah’ll shave yuh first, den drag in de baff, if yuh please, suh,” he announced, turning his sightless eyes toward the corridor where a long, tin bathtub rested in readiness.

“*Bien non, mon brave*,” de Grandin denied, “I shall shave myself, as I have done each day since my sixteenth year. Bring me the mirror, if you please.”

“Mirruh, suh?” the servant queried. “Dey ain’t no sech thing in de house, suh. Minervy an’ me, we don’ need nuffin like hit, an’ Marse Jawge, he manage ter git erlong wid me ter shave him. Mis’ Clarimonde, she ain’t nebber seen ’er — oh, Lawdy, suh, please, *please*, suh, don’ nebber tell Marse

Jawge Ah said nuffin erbout—”

“*Tiens*, my friend,” the Frenchman reassured, “fear nothing. The best of us sometimes make slips of the tongue. Your lapse from duty shall be safe in my keeping. Meanwhile, however excellently you may barber your master, I fear I must dispense with your services. Trowbridge, my friend, lend me your glasses, if you please.”

“My glasses?” I repeated, in surprise. “What—”

“But certainly. Must one draw diagrams before you understand? Is Jules de Grandin a fool, or has he sense? Observe.” Taking my spectacles from the carved chest, he fixed them to the back of one of the tall chairs, draping his jacket behind the lenses to make a dark background. Thus equipped he proceeded to regard his image in the primitive mirror while he spread the lather thickly over cheeks and chin, then scraped it off with the exquisitely sharp blade of the perfectly balanced English razor the blind servant handed him.

“*Très bon*,” he announced with a satisfied smile. “Behold, I am my own valet this morning, nor has my complexion suffered so much as one little scratch. This old one here, he seems too innocent to practise any wrong on us, but — he who goes to dinner with the devil should take with him a long spoon. Me, I do not care to take unnecessary chances.”

Following de Grandin’s example, I shaved myself with the aid of my glasses-mirror, and one after the other we laved ourselves in the tubs of luke-warm water the ancient servitor dragged in from the hall.

“If y’all is ready, suhs,” the Negro announced as we completed our toilets, “Ah’ll ’scort yuh to de dinin’-room. Marse Jawge is waitin’ yo’ pleasure below.

“Ah, good morning, gentlemen,” Ducharme greeted as we joined him in the main hall. I trust you enjoyed a good night’s rest?”

The Frenchman eyed him critically. “I have had worse,” he replied. “However, the sense of security obtained by well-bolted doors is not greatly heightened by knowledge that the locks operate from the further side, *Monsieur*.

A faint flush mounted our host’s thin cheeks at de Grandin’s thrust, but he chose to ignore it. “Minerva!” he cried sharply, turning toward the kitchen. “The gentlemen are down; bring in some breakfast.”

The old, blind Negress emerged from her quarters with the promptness of a cuckoo coming from its cell as the clock strikes the hour, and placed great bowls of steaming cornmeal mush before us. Idly, I noticed that the pitcher for the milk accompanying the mush was of unglazed pottery and the pot in which the steaming coffee was served was of tarnished, dull-finished silver.

With a rather impatient gesture, Ducharme motioned us to eat and excused himself from joining us by saying he had breakfasted an hour or so before.

De Grandin's little eyes scarcely left our host's face as he ate ravenously, but though he seemed on the point of putting some question point-blank more than once, he evidently thought better of it, and held his peace.

"It's impossible for me to get a guide for you this morning, gentlemen," Ducharme apologized as we finished breakfast, "and it's hardly practicable for me to accompany you myself. However, if you'll be good enough to remain another day, I think — perhaps — I may be able to find someone to take you back to Gregory's. Provided, of course, you really wish to go there." Something like a sneer crossed his lips as he concluded, and de Grandin was on his feet instantly, his small face livid with rage.

"*Monsieur*," he protested, his little eyes snapping ominously, "on more than one occasion you have been good enough to intimate we are impostors. I have heard much of your vaunted Southern hospitality in the past, but the sample you display leaves much to be desired. If you will be so good as to stand aside we shall give ourselves the pleasure of shaking your dust from our feet forthwith. Meantime, since you have small liking for the post of social host, permit that we compensate you for our entertainment." His face still white with fury, he thrust his hand into his pocket, withdrew a roll of bills and tossed several on the table. "I trust that is sufficient," he added cuttingly. "Count it; if you desire more, more shall be forthcoming."

Ducharme had risen with de Grandin. As the Frenchman finished his tirade, he stepped quickly to the corner and snatched up his rifle. "If either of you attempts to leave this house before I give permission," he announced in a low, menacing voice, "so help me God, I'll blow his head off!" With a quick backward step he reached the door, slipped through it and banged it shut behind him.

"Are you going to stand this?" I demanded angrily, turning to de Grandin. "The man's mad — mad as a hatter. We'll be murdered before sunset if we don't get away!"

"I think not so," he returned, resuming his seat and lighting a cigarette. "As for killing us, he will need more speed than he showed just now. I had him covered from my pocket before he took up his gun, and could have stopped his words with a bullet any time I was so minded, but — I did not care to. There are things which interest me about this place, Friend Trowbridge, and I desire to remain until my curiosity is satisfied."

"But his insinuations — his insulting doubt—" I began.

"*Tiens*, it was well done was it not?" he interrupted with a self-satisfied smile. "*Barbe d'un chameau*, I play-acted so well I did almost deceive myself!"

"Then you weren't really angry—"

"Jules de Grandin is quick to anger, my friend, if the provocation be sufficient, but never has he bitten off his nose through desire to revenge himself upon his face. No.

Another time I might have resented his boorishness. This morning I desire to remain more greatly than I wish to leave; but should I disclose my real desires he would undoubtedly insist upon our going. *Alors*, I make the monkey business. To make our welcome doubly sure I deceive Monsieur Ducharme to think that leaving is our primary desire. *C'est très simple, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"I suppose so," I admitted, "but what earthly reason have you for wanting to stay in this confounded place?"

"One wonders," he returned enigmatically, blowing a twin cloud of smoke from his nostrils.

"One certainly does," I agreed angrily. "I, for one—"

He tossed his cigarette into his porringer and rose abruptly. "Is it of significance to you, my friend, that this *sacré* house contains not only not a single mirror, but not so much as one polished surface in which one may by any chance behold himself with the exception of the spectacles which adorn your kindly nose this minute? Or that the servants here are blind?" he added as I shook my head doubtfully. "Or that Monsieur Ducharme has deliberately attempted to mislead us into thinking that he, we and the two blind ones are the only tenants of the place?"

"It is mystifying," I agreed, "but I can't seem to fit the facts into any kind of pattern. Probably they're just coincidences, and—"

"Coincidence is the name we give to that we can not otherwise explain," he interrupted. "Me, I have arrived already at a theory, though much still remains obscure. At dinner tonight I shall let fly a random shot; who knows what it may bring down?"

Ducharme kept out of sight the remainder of the day, and it was not till well after dark we saw him again. We were just concluding our evening meal when he let himself in, a more amiable expression on his sour face than I had seen before.

"Dr. de Grandin, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted as he placed his rifle in an angle of the wall and drew a chair up to the table, "I have to tender you my humblest apologies. My life has been a bitter one, gentlemen; and I live in daily dread of something I can not explain. However, if I tell you it is sufficient to make me suspicious of every stranger who comes near the house, you may understand something of the lack of courtesy I have shown you. I did doubt your word, sirs, and I renew my apologies for doing so. This morning, after warning you to stay indoors, I went to Gregory's — it's less than a three hours' trip, if you know the way — and made certain of your identity. Tomorrow, if you wish, I shall be happy to guide you to your friends."

The Frenchman bent along, speculative stare upon our host. At length: "You are satisfied from Monsieur Gregory's report that we are indeed physicians?" he asked.

“Of course—”

“Suppose I add further information. Would it interest you to know that I hold degrees from Vienna and the Sorbonne, that I have done much surgical work for the University of Paris, and that in the days after the Armistice I was among those who helped restore to pre-war appearance the faces of those noble heroes whose features had been burned away by Hunnish *flammenwerfer*?” He pronounced the last words with slow, impressive deliberation, his level, unwinking gaze fixed firmly on the dark, sullen eyes of our host.

Quick, incredulous fury flamed in the other’s face. “You spying scoundrel — you damned sneak!” he cried, leaping from his chair and making for his rifle.

“Slowly!” De Grandin, too, was on his feet, his small, round eyes blazing with implacable purpose, his little, deadly pistol aimed unwaveringly at Ducharme’s breast. “Greatly as I should regret it,” he warned, “I shall kill you if you make one further move, *Monsieur*.”

The other wavered, for there was no doubting de Grandin’s sincerity.

“Ah, that is better,” he remarked as Ducharme halted, then returned slowly to his seat. “Now we shall talk sense.

“A moment since, *Monsieur*,” he continued as Ducharme dropped heavily into his chair and sank his face in his hands, “I did avail myself of what the Americans call the bluff. Consider, I am clever; the wool can not successfully be drawn across my eyes, and so I suspected what I now know for the truth. Yesterday an arrow saved my life; anon we found small footprints in the mud; last night when we arrived here we met with scant welcome from you, and inside the house we found you waited on by blinded servants. This morning, when I ask for a mirror that I may shave myself, your servant tells there is not one in all the house, and on sober thought I recall that I have seen no single polished surface wherein a man may behold his own image. Why is it! If strangers are unwelcome, if there be no mirrors here, if the servants be blind — is there not something hideous within these walls, something of which you know, but which you desire to be kept most secret? Again, you are not beautiful, but you would not necessarily be averse to regarding your reflection in a mirror. What then? Is it not, perhaps, I think, that you greatly desire that the ugly one — whoever it be — not only not be seen, but shall not see itself? It are highly probable.

“This morning I have seen a so lovely young girl attired for *le footing*, who sings divinely in the early sunlight. But I have not seen her face. No. However, she wears upon her back a bow and quiverful of arrows — and an arrow such as those saved me from the serpent yesterday, one little moment before we beheld the face of awful ugliness.

“Two and two invariably make four, *Monsieur*. You have said there is no other person but yourself and your servants

in the house; but even as you doubted me, so I have doubted you. Indeed, from what I have seen, I know you have been untruthful; but I think you are so because of some great reason. And so I tell you of my work in restoring the wrecked faces of the soldiers of France.

“But I am no idle boaster. No. What I say is true. Call in the unfortunate young lady; I shall examine her minutely, and if it are humanly possible I shall remold her features to comeliness. If you do not consent you are a heartless, inhuman monster. Besides,” he added matter-of-factly, “if you refuse I shall kill you and perform the operation anyway.”

Ducharme gazed unbelievably at him. “You really think you can do it?” he demanded.

“Have I not said it?”

“But, if you fail—”

“Jules de Grandin does not fail, *Monsieur*.”

“Minerva!” Ducharme called. “Ask Miss Clarimonde to come here at once, please.”

The old blind woman’s slipshod footsteps sounded along the tiled floor of a back passage for a moment, then faded away as she slowly climbed a hidden flight of stairs.

For something like five minutes we sat silently. Once or twice Ducharme swallowed nervously, de Grandin’s slim, white fingers drummed a noiseless, devil’s tattoo on the table, I fidgeted nervously in my chair, removed my glasses and polished them, returned them to my nose, then snatched them off and fell to wiping them again. At length the light tap-tap of slippered feet sounded on the stairs and we rose together as a tall, graceful figure emerged from the stairway shadow into the aura of light thrown out by the candles.

“My daughter, gentlemen — Clarimonde, Dr. de Grandin; Dr. Trowbridge,” Mr. Ducharme introduced in a voice gone thin and treble with nervousness. From the corner of my eye I could see him watching us in a sort of agony, awaiting the horror we were bound to show as the girl’s face became visible.

I saw de Grandin’s narrow, pointed chin jut forward as he set his jaw against the shock of the hideous countenance, then watched the indomitable will within him force his face into the semblance of an urbane smile as he stepped forward gallantly and raised the girl’s slim, white hand to his lips.

The figure which stepped slowly, reluctantly, into the dull luminance of the candles was the oddest patch-work of grotesquerie I had ever seen. From feet to throat she was perfectly made as a sculptured Hebe, slim, straight, supple with the pliancy of youth and abundant health. Shoes of white satin and stockings of sheerest white silk complemented a straight, plain frock of oyster-white which assuredly had come from nowhere but Vienna or the Rue de la Paix; a Manila shawl, yellowed with years and heavily

fringed, lay scarfwise over her ivory shoulders and arms; about her throat was clasped a single tight-fitting strand of large, lustrous pearls.

The sea-gems were the line of demarcation. It was as if by some sorcery of obscene surgery the lovely girl's head had been sheared off by a guillotine three inches above the clavicle and replaced by the foulest specimen from the stored-up monstrosities of a medical museum. The skin about the throat was craped and wrinkled like a toad's, and of the color of a tan boot on which black dressing has inadvertently been rubbed, then ineffectually removed. Above, the chin was firm and pointed, tapering downward from the ears in good lines, but the mouth extended a full five inches across the face, sweeping in a curving diagonal from left to right like a musical turn mark, one corner lifted in a perpetual travesty of a grin, the other sagging in a constant snarl. Between the spaces where the brows should have been the glabella was so enlarged that a protuberance almost like a horn stood out from the forehead, while the eyes, fine hazel, flecked with brown, were horrifically cocked at divergent angles so that it was impossible for her to gaze at an object directly before her without turning her head slightly to the side. The nose was long and curved, exaggeratedly high-bridged and slit down the outer side of each flaring nostril as the mouth of a hairlipped person is cleft. Like the throat, the entire face was integumented in coarse, loosely wrinkled skin of soiled brown, and, to make the contrast more shockingly incongruous, a mass of gleaming auburn hair, fine and scintillant as spun rose-gold, lay loosely coiled in a Grecian coronal above the repulsive countenance.

Had the loathsomeness been unrelieved by contrasting comeliness, the effect would have been less shocking; as it was, the hideous face inlaid between the perfect body and glowing, ruddy-diadem of hair was like the sacrilegious mutilation of a sacred picture — as though the oval of the Sistine Virgin's face were cut from the canvas and the sardonic, grinning features of a Punchinello thrust through the aperture.

To his everlasting credit, de Grandin did not flinch. Debonair as though at any social gathering, he bowed the monstrous creature to a chair and launched a continuous flow of conversation. All the while I could see his eyes returning again and again to the hideous countenance across the table, his keen surgeon's mind surveying the grotesque features and weighing his chances of success against the almost foregone certainty of failure.

The ordeal lasted something like half an hour, and my nerves had stretched to the snapping point when sudden diversion came.

With a wild, frantic movement the girl leaped up,

oversetting her chair, and faced us, her misdirected eyes rolling with a horrible ludicrousness in their sockets, tears of shame and self-pity welling from them and coursing down the sides of her grotesque face. Her wide, cavernous mouth opened obliquely and she gave scream after scream of shrill, tortured anguish. "I know; I know!" she cried frenziedly. "Don't think you've fooled me by taking all the mirrors from the house, Father! Remember, I go about the woods at will, and *there are pools of quiet water in the woods!* I know I'm hideous; I know I'm so repulsive that even the servants who wait on us must be blind! I've seen my face reflected in the moat and the swamp; I saw the horror in your eyes when you first looked at me, Dr. de Grandin; I noticed how Dr. Trowbridge couldn't bear even to glance at me just now without a shudder! Oh, God of mercy, why haven't I had courage to kill myself before? — Why did I live till I met strangers and saw them turn from me with loathing? Why—"

"*Mademoiselle*, be still!" de Grandin's sharp, incisive command cut through her hysterical words and stung her to silence. "You lament unnecessarily," he continued as she turned her goggling toad-eyes toward him. "*Monsieur*, your father, bids you come to us for a specific purpose; namely, that I inspect your countenance and give him my opinion as a surgeon concerning the possibility of cure. Attend me: I tell you I can so reshape your features that you shall be completely beautiful; you shall grace the salons of Washington, of New York, of Paris, and you shall have young men to do you honor and lay their kisses thick upon your hands and lips, and breathe their tales of love into your ears; you—"

A shriek of wild, incredulous laughter silenced him. "I? I have admirers — lovers? Dear God — the bitterness of the mockery! I am doomed to spend my life among the snakes and toads, the bats and salamanders of the swamps, a thing as hideous as the ugliest of them, cut off from all my kind, and—"

"Your fate may be a worse one, unless I can prevent it," Ducharme broke in with an odd, dry croaking voice.

We turned on him by common consent as he rasped his direful prophecy. His long, goat-like face was working spasmodically; I could see the tendons of his thin neck contracting as he swallowed nervously, and the sad, bitter lips beneath the drooping gray mustache twisted into a smile that was more than half a snarl as he gazed at de Grandin and his daughter in turn.

"You wondered why I greeted you with suspicion when you came asking food and shelter last night, gentlemen?" he asserted rather than asked, looking from the Frenchman to me. "This is why:

"As I told you last night, the Ducharmes have lived here since long before the first English colony was planted in

Virginia. Although our plantation has been all but eaten up by the swamps, the family wealth holds out, and I am what is counted a rich man, even in these days of swollen fortunes. It was the custom of our family for generations to send their women to a convent at Rheims for education; the young men were sent to Oxford or Cambridge, Paris or Vienna, occasionally to Louvain or Heidelberg, and their training was completed by the grand tour.

“I followed the family tradition and studied at the Sorbonne when my undergraduate work at Oxford was completed. It was while I lived in Paris I met Inocencia. She was an *Argentina* — a native of the Argentine, a dancer in a cabaret, and as lovely a creature as ever set a man’s blood afire. All the students were mad about her, but Ruiz, a fellow-countryman of hers, and I were the most favored of her coterie of suitors.

“Leandro Ruiz was a medical student, the son of an enormously wealthy cattleman, who took to surgery from an innate love of blood and suffering rather than from any wish to serve humanity or earn a livelihood, for he already had more money than he could ever spend, and as for humanitarianism, the devil himself had more of it.

“One night as I sat studying, there came a terrified rapping at my door, and Inocencia fell, rather than ran, into my rooms. She had struggled through the raging sleet-storm from Montmartre, and Ruiz was hot behind her. He had accosted her as she left the café, and demanded that she come forthwith and consort with him — there never was an honorable thought in the scoundrel’s mind, and what he could not buy he was accustomed to take by force.

“I had barely time to lock and bar the door when Ruiz and three hired bullies came clamoring up the stairs and battered on the panels like werewolves shut out from their prey. Ha, I left my mark on him that night! As he stooped down to bawl obscenities through the keyhole I thrust, a sword-cane through the lock and blinded him in one eye. Despite his wound he hung around the door nearly all night, and it was not till two gendarmes threatened him and his companions with arrest for public disturbance that they slunk away.

“Next morning Inocencia and I arranged to be married, and as soon as the formalities of French-law could be complied with, we were wed and made a tour of Europe for our honeymoon. When we returned to Paris we heard Ruiz had contracted pneumonia the night he raged outside my quarters in the sleet, and had died and been buried in St. Sulpice. Ha, you may be sure we shed no tears at the news!

“I was nearly thirty, Inocencia barely twenty, when we married. It was not till ten years later that Clarimonde was born, and when at last we had a child to crown our union we thought our cup of joy was surely overflowing. God!” He paused, poured himself a goblet of wine and drained it to the bottom before continuing:

“No hired *bonne* was good enough to take our darling out; Inocencia herself accompanied her on every outing and filled the afternoons with recitals of the thousand cunning things our baby did and said while toddling in the park.

“One day they did not return. I was frantic and set the entire gendarmerie by the ears to search for them. Nowhere could we find a trace till finally my wife’s dead body, partly decomposed, but still identifiable, was rescued from the Seine. Police investigation disclosed she had been murdered — her throat severed and her heart cut out, but not before a hundred and more disfiguring wounds had been inflicted with a knife.

“My baby’s fate was still unknown, and I lived for weeks and months in a frenzy of mingled despair and hope till—” Again he paused; once more he filled and drained a wine-glass. Then: “At last my fears were set at rest. At daylight one morning the thin, pitiful wailing of a little frightened child sounded at my door, and when the *concierge* went to investigate she found Clarimonde lying there in a basket. Clarimonde, my Clarimonde, her mother’s sole remaining souvenir, dressed in the baby garments she had worn the day she vanished, positively identified by the little, heart-shaped birthmark on the under side of her left arm, but, my God, how altered! Her face, gentlemen, was as you see it now, a dreadful, disfigured, mutilated mask of horror, warped and carved and twisted almost out of human semblance, save as the most grotesque caricature resembles the thing it parodies. And with her was a letter, a letter from Leandro Ruiz. The fiend had caused the report of his death to be given us, and bided his time through all the years, always studying and experimenting in plastic surgery that he might one day carry out his terrible revenge, watching Inocencia and Clarimonde when they least suspected it, familiarizing himself with their habits and ways so that he might best set his *apaches* on them and kidnap them when the time was ripe for his devil’s vengeance. After dishonoring and torturing Inocencia, he killed her slowly — cut her heart from her living breast before he slashed her throat. The next three months he spent carefully disfiguring the features of our baby, adding horror on horror to the poor, helpless face as though he were a sculptor working out the details of a statue with slow, painstaking care. At last, when even he could think of nothing more to add to the devastation he had made, he laid the poor, mutilated mite on my doorstep with a note describing his acts, and containing the promise that all his life and all his boundless wealth would be devoted to making his revenge complete.

“You wonder how he could do more? Gentlemen, you can not think how vile humanity can be until you’ve known Leandro Ruiz. Listen: When Clarimonde reaches her twenty-first year, he said he would come for her. If death had taken him meanwhile, he would leave a sum of money

to pay those who carried out his will. He, or his hirelings, would come for her, and though she hid behind locked doors and armed men, they would ravish her away, cut out her tongue to render her incapable of speech, *then exhibit her for hire in a freak show* — make my poor, disfigured baby girl the object of yokels' gawking curiosity throughout the towns and provinces of Europe and South America!

"I fled from Paris as Lot fled from Sodom, and brought my poor, maimed child to Ducharme Hall. Here I secured Minerva and Poseidon for servants, because both were blind and could not let fall any remarks which would make Clarimonde realize her deformity. I secured blind teachers and tutors; she is as well educated as any seminary graduate; every luxury that money could buy has been given her, but never has there been a mirror in Ducharme Hall, or anything which could serve as a mirror, since we came here from Paris.

"Now, gentlemen, perhaps you understand the grounds for my suspicions? Clarimonde was twenty-one this month."

Jules de Grandin twisted the fine, blond hairs of his diminutive mustache until they stood out in twin needle-points each side of his mouth, and fixed a level, unwinking stare upon our host. "*Monsieur*," he said, "a moment hence I was all for going to the North; I would have argued to the death against a moment's delay which kept me from performing the necessary work to restore Mademoiselle Clarimonde's features to their pristine loveliness. Now, *parbleu*, five men and ten little boys could not drag me from this spot. We shall wait here, *Monsieur*, we shall stay here, rooted as firmly as the tallest oak in yonder forest, until this Monsieur Ruiz and his corps of assassins appear. Then" — he twisted the ends of his mustache still more fiercely, and the lightning-flashes in his little, round eyes were cold as arctic ice and hot as volcanic fire — "then, by damn, I think those seventy-six-thousand-times accursed miscreants shall find that he who would step into the hornet's nest would be advised to wear heavy boots. Yes; I have said it."

From that night Ducharme Hall was more like a castle under siege than ever. In terror of abduction Clarimonde no longer roamed the woods, and Mr. Ducharme, de Grandin or I was always on lookout for any strangers who might appear inside the walled park. A week, ten days passed quietly, and we resumed our plans for returning North, where the deformed girl's face could receive expert surgical treatment.

"I shall give Mademoiselle Clarimonde my undivided attention until all is accomplished," de Grandin told me as we lay in bed one evening while the October wind souged and moaned through the locust-trees bordering the avenue and a pack of tempest-driven storm clouds harried the moon like hounds pursuing a fleeing doe. "With your permission

I shall leave your house and take up residence in the hospital, Friend Trowbridge, and neither day nor night shall I be beyond call of the patient. I shall—

"*Attendez, voilà les assassins!*" Faintly as the scuffing of a dried twig against the house, there came the gentle sound of something scratching against the rubble-stone of the wall.

For a moment the Frenchman lay rigid; then with bewildering quickness he leaped from the bed, bundled the sheets and pillows together in simulation of a person covered with bedclothes, and snatched down one of the heavy silken cords binding back the draperies which hung in mildewed festoons, between the mahogany posts. "Silence!" he cautioned, tiptoeing across the chamber and taking his station beside the open casement. "No noise, my friend, but if it is possible, do you creep forward and peer out, then tell me what it is you see."

Cautiously, I followed his instructions, rested my chin upon the wide stone window-sill and cast a hurried glance down the wall.

Agilely as a cat, a man encased in close-fitting black jersey and tights was scaling the side of the house by aid of a hooked ladder similar to those firemen use. Behind him came a companion, similarly costumed and equipped, and even as I watched them I could not but marvel at the almost total silence in which they swarmed up the rough stones.

I whispered my discovery to de Grandin, and saw him nod once understandingly. "*Voleurs de nuit* — professional burglars," he pronounced. "He chose expert helpers, this one. Let us await them."

A moment later there was a soft, rubbing sound as a long steel hook, well wrapped in tire-tape, crept like a living thing across the window-sill, and was followed in a moment by a slender and none too clean set of fingers which reached exploringly through the casement.

In another instant a head covered by a tight-fitting black jersey cowl loomed over the sill, the masked eyes peered searchingly about the candlelit room; then, apparently satisfied that someone occupied the bed and slept soundly, the intruder crept agilely across the sill, landed on the stone floor with a soft thud and cleared the space between bed and window in a single feline leap.

There was the glint of candlelight on sharpened steel and a fiendish-looking stiletto flashed downward in a murderous arc and buried itself to the hilt in the pillow which lay muffled in the blankets where I had lain two minutes before.

Like a terrier pouncing on a rat de Grandin leaped on the assassin's shoulders. While awaiting the intruder's advent he had looped the strong curtain cord into a running noose, and as he landed on the other's back, driving his face down among the bedding and effectively smothering outcry, he slipped the strangling string about the burglar's throat, drew it tight with a single dexterous jerk, then crossed its ends

and pulled them as one might pull the draw-string of a sack. “Ha, good *Monsieur le Meurtrier*,” he whispered exultantly, “I serve you a dish for which you have small belly, *n’est-ce-pas?* Eat your fill, my friend, do not stint yourself, Jules de Grandin has plentiful supply of such food for you!

“So!” He straightened quickly and whipped the cord from his captive’s throat. “I damnation think you will give us small trouble for some time, my friend. Attention, Friend Trowbridge, the other comes!”

Once more he took his place beside the window, once more he cast his strangling cord as a masked head protruded into the room. In a moment two black-clad, unconscious forms lay side by side upon the bed.

“Haste, my friend, *dépêchez vous*,” he ordered, beginning to disrobe our prisoners as he spoke. “I do dislike to ruin Monsieur Ducharme’s bedding, but we must work with what we have. Tear strips from the sheets and bind these unregenerate sons of pigs fast. There is no time to lose; a moment hence and we must don their disguises and perform that which they set out to do.”

We worked feverishly, tying the two desperadoes in strip after strip of linen ripped from the sheets, gagging them, blindfolding them; finally, as an added precaution, lashing their hands and feet to the head — and footposts of the bed. Then, shedding our pajamas, we struggled into the tightfitting jerseys the prisoners had worn. The stocking-like garments were clammy wet and chilled me to the marrow as I drew them on, but the Frenchman gave me no time for complaint. “*Allons, en route*, make haste!” he ordered.

Leaving the unconscious thugs to such meditations as they might have upon regaining consciousness, we hastened to Ducharme’s chamber.

“Fear not, it is I,” de Grandin called as he beat imperatively on our host’s door. “In our chamber repose two villains who gained entrance by means of scaling ladders — from the feel of their clothes, which we now wear, I should say they swam your moat. We go now to lower the drawbridge and let the master villain in. Do you be ready to receive him!”

“*Holà!*” he called a moment later as we let ourselves out the front door and lowered the drawbridge. “Come forth, all is prepared!”

Two men emerged from the darkness beyond the moat in answer to his hail, one a tall, stoop-shouldered fellow arrayed in ill-fitting and obviously new clothes, the other small, frail-looking, and enveloped from neck to high-heeled boots in a dark mackintosh or raincoat of some sort which hung about his spare figure like the cloak of a conspirator in a melodramatic opera. There was something infinitely wicked in the slouching truculent swagger of the big, stoop-shouldered bully, something which suggested brute strength, brute courage and brute ferocity; but there was something

infinitely more sinister in the mincing, precise walk of his smaller companion, who advanced with an odd sort of gait, placing one foot precisely before the other like a tango dancer performing to the rhythm of inaudible music.

“Judas Iscariot and Company,” de Grandin whispered to me as the queerly assorted couple set foot on the draw-bridge; then with an imperative wave of his hand he beckoned them toward the house and set off up the driveway at a rapid walk. “We must not let them get close enough to suspect,” he whispered, quickening his pace. “All cats are gray in the dark, and we much resemble their friends at a distance, but it is better that we take no chances.”

Once or twice the other two called to us, demanding to know if we had encountered resistance, but de Grandin’s only answer was another gesture, urging them to haste, and we were still some ten feet in the lead when we reached the door, swung it open and slipped into the house, awaiting the others’ advent.

The candles burned with a flickering, uncertain light, scarcely more than staining the darkness flooding the big stone hall as the two men trailed us through the door. By the table, the candlelight falling full upon her mutilated face, stood Clarimonde Ducharme, her hideously distorted eyes rolling pathetically in their elongated sockets as she turned her head from side to side in an effort to get a better view of the intruders.

A shrill, cackling laugh burst from the smaller man. “Look at that; Henri,” he bade, catching his breath with an odd, sucking sound. “Look at that. That’s *my* work; isn’t it a masterpiece?”

Mockingly, he snatched the wide-brimmed soft black-felt hat from his head, laid it over his heart, then swept it to the floor as he bowed profoundly to the girl. “*Señorita hermosa, yo beso sus manos!*” he declared, then burst into another cackle of cachinnating laughter. As he removed his headgear I observed he was bald as an egg, thickly wrinkled, and wore a monocle of dark glass in his right eye.

His companion growled an inarticulate comment, then turned toward us with an expectant look. “Now?” he asked. “Shall I do it now and get it over?”

“*Si, como no?* — certainly, why not? the smaller man lisped. “They’ve served their purpose, have they not?”

“Right,” the big man returned. “They did the job, and dead men tell no tales—”

There was murderous menace in every movement of his big body as he swaggered toward de Grandin. “Come, little duckie,” he bade mockingly in *gamin* French, “come and be killed. We can’t have you running loose and babbling tales of what you’ve seen tonight the first time you get your hide full of *vin ordinaire*. Say your prayers, if you know any; you’ve precious little time to do it. Come, duckie—” As he

advanced he thrust his hand beneath his ill-fitting jacket and drew a knife of fearsome proportions, whetting it softly against the heel of his hand, smiling to himself as though anticipating a rare bit of sport.

De Grandin gave ground before the other's onslaught. Two or three backward running steps he took, increasing the distance between them, then paused.

With a flick of his left hand he swept the disguising hood from his features and smiled almost tenderly at the astonished bully. "*Monsieur,*" he announced softly, "it sometimes happens that the weasel discovers the duck he hunts to be an eagle in disguise. So it would seem tonight. You have three seconds to live; make the most of them. *Un — deux — trois!*" The spiteful, whip-like report of pistol sounded sharp punctuation to his third count, and the bravo stumbled back a step, an expression of amazement on his coarse face, a tiny bruised-looking circle almost precisely bisecting the line of heavy, black brows which met above his nose.

"Wha — what?" the smaller villain began in a strangled, frightened scream, wheeling on de Grandin and snatching at a weapon beneath his cloak.

But George Ducharme leaped out of the darkness like a lion avenging the slaughter of its mate and bore him, screaming madly, to the floor. "At last, Leandro Ruiz — at last!" he shouted exultantly, fastening his fingers on the other's thin, corded neck and pressing his thumb into the sallow, flaccid flesh. "At last I've got you! You killed my wife you deformed my baby, you've made me live in a hell of fear for eighteen years; but now I've got you — *I've got you!*"

"*Eh bien,* have a care, *Monsieur,* you are unduly rough!" de Grandin protested, tapping Ducharme's shoulder gently, "Be careful I implore you!"

"What?" George Ducharme cried angrily, looking up at the diminutive Frenchman, but retaining his strangling hold on his foeman's throat. "D'ye mean I'm not to treat this dog as he deserves?"

The other's narrow shoulders rose nearly level with his ears in an eloquent shrug. "I did but caution you, my friend," he answered mildly. "When one is very angry one easily forgets one's strength. Be careful, or you kill him too swiftly.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge, the night is fine outside. Let us admire the view."

The prisoners in the bedroom were only too glad to take their departure without stopping to inquire concerning their late employer. From remarks they dropped while we hunted clothing to replace the conspicuous black tights of which we had relieved them, I gathered they had distrusted Ruiz's good faith, and insisted on payment in advance. That

Monsieur Ruiz had left, leaving no address, and consequently would not be in position to extort return of his fee with the aid of the gigantic Henri was the best possible news we could have given them, and they took speedy farewell of us.

The following day de Grandin and I set out for the North, accompanied by the Ducharmes. Clarimonde traveled closely veiled, and we occupied a drawing-room suite on the B. & O. fast train which bore us from Washington to Harrisonville. The first night in New Jersey was spent at my house, Clarimonde keeping closely to her room, lest Nora McGinnis, my faithful but garrulous Irish household factotum, behold her mutilated features and spread news of them along the kitchen-door telegraph line.

A suite of rooms at Mercy Hospital was engaged the following day, and true to his promise, de Grandin took up residence in the institution, eating sleeping and passing his entire time within half a minute's walk of his patient.

What passed in the private operating-room Ducharme's money made possible for his daughter's case I did not know, for the press of my own neglected practise kept me busy through most of the daylight hours, and de Grandin performed his work unassisted except by three special nurses who, like him, spent their entire time on duty in the special suite secured for Clarimonde.

Nearly three months passed before my office telephone shrilled one bright Sunday morning and de Grandin's excited voice informed me he was about to remove the bandages from his charge. Ten minutes later, out of breath, with haste, I stood in the comfortably furnished sitting-room of Clarimonde's suite, and stared fascinated at the little Frenchman who posed and postured beside his patient like a lecturer about to begin his discourse.

"My friends," he announced, sweeping the circle composed of Ducharme, the nurses and me with twinkling eyes, "this is one of the supreme moments of my life. Should my workmanship be successful, I shall proceed forthwith to get most vilely, piggishly intoxicated. If I have failed" — he paused dramatically, then drew a small, silver-mounted automatic pistol from his pocket and laid it on the table beside him — "if I have failed, Friend Trowbridge, I beseech you, write in the death certificate that, my suicide was induced by a broken heart. *Allons.*"

With a pair of surgical scissors he slit the outermost layer of bandages about the girl's face and began unwinding the white gauze with slow, deliberate movements.

"*A-a-ah!*" The long-drawn exclamation came unbidden from all of us in chorus.

The wrinkled, blotched, leather-like skin which had covered the girl's face had, by some alchemy employed by de Grandin, been bleached to an incredibly beautiful shade of light, suntanned *écru*, smooth as country cream and

iridescent as an alloy of gold and platinum. Above a high, straight brow of creamy whiteness her soft auburn hair was loosely dressed in a gleaming diadem of sun-stained metallic luster. But it was the strange, exotic molding of her features which brought our hearts into our eyes as we looked. Her high, straight forehead continued down into her perfectly formed nose without the slightest indication of a curve — like the cameo-fine formation of the most beautiful faces found on recovered artistic treasures of ancient Greece. With consummate skill the Frenchman had made the enlargement of her eyes an ally in his work, for while he had somewhat decreased the length of the cuts with which Ruiz had mutilated the girl's eyes, he had left the openings larger than normal and raised them slightly at the outer corners, imparting to the face which would have otherwise been somewhat too severe in its utter classicism a charming hint of Oriental piquancy. The mouth was still somewhat large, but perfect in its outline, and the lips were thin, beautifully molded lines of more than usual redness, in repose presenting an expression of singular sweetness,

retracting only slightly when she smiled, giving her face an expression of languid, faint amusement which was as provocative in its appeal as the far-famed smile of Mona Lisa.

“My God — Clarimonde, you're *beautiful!*” Ducharme cried brokenly, and stumbled across the floor to drop kneeling before his daughter, burying his face in her lap and sobbing hysterically.

“*Pipe d'une souris!*” de Grandin pocketed his pistol and bent above his patient. “Jules de Grandin and none other shall have the first kiss from these so beautiful lips!” He placed a resounding salute upon the girl's scarlet mouth, then turned toward the adjoining room.

“Behind that door,” he announced, “I have secreted several pints of the hospital's finest medicinal brandy, Friend Trowbridge. See to it, if you please, that I am not disturbed until I say otherwise. For the next four and twenty hours Jules de Grandin shall be delightfully engaged in acquiring the noblest case of delirium tremens the institution's staff has ever treated!”

Children of Ubasti

JULES DE GRANDIN regarded the big red-headed man entering the breakfast room with a quick, affectionate smile. "Is it truly thou, *mon sergent*?" he asked. "I have joy in this meeting!"

Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello grinned somewhat ruefully as he seated himself and accepted a cup of steaming, well-creamed coffee. "It's me, all right, sir," he admitted, "an' in a peck o' trouble, as I usually am when I come botherin' you an' Dr. Trowbridge at your breakfast."

"Ah, I am glad — I mean I grieve — no, *pardieu*, I mean I sorrow at your trouble, but rejoice at your visit!" the little Frenchman returned. "What is it causes you unhappiness?"

The big Irishman emptied his cup at a gigantic gulp and wrinkled his forehead like a puzzled mastiff. "I dunno," he confessed. "Maybe it's not a case at all, an' then again, maybe it is. Have you been readin' the newspaper accounts of the accident that kilt young Tom Cableson last night?"

De Grandin spread a bit of butter on his broiled weakfish and watched it dissolve. "You refer to the mishap which occurred on the Albemarle Pike — the unfortunate young man who died when he collided with a tree and thrust his face through his windshield?"

"That's what they say, sir."

"Eh? 'They say?' Who are they?"

"The coroner's jury, when they returned a verdict of death by misadventure. Strictly speaking, it wasn't any of my business, but bein' on the homicide squad I thought I'd just drop round to the morgue and have a look at the body, an' when I'd seen it I came over here hot-foot."

"And what was it you saw that roused your suspicions, *mon vieux*?"

"Well, sir, I've seen lots of bodies of folks killed in motor accidents, but never one quite like young Cableson's. The only wound on him was a big, jagged gash in the throat — just one, d'ye mind — an' some funny-lookin' scratches on his neck —" He paused apologetically, as if debating the wisdom of continuing.

"*Cordieu*, is it a game of patience we play here?" de Grandin demanded testily. "Get on with thy story, great stupid one, or I must twist your neck!"

I laughed outright at this threat of the sparrow to chastise the turkey cock, and even Costello's gravity gave way to a grin, but he sobered quickly as he answered. "Well, sir, I did part of me hitch in China, you know, and once one of our men was picked up by some bandits. When we finally come to him we found they'd hung him up like a steer for th' slaughter — cut his throat an' left him danglin' by th' heels

from a tree-limb. There wasn't a tin-cupful o' blood left in his pore carcass.

"That's th' way young Cableson looked to me — all empty-like, if you get what I mean."

"*Parfaitement*. And —"

"Yes, sir, I was comin' to that. I went round to th' police garage where his car was, and looked it over most partic'lar. That's th' funny part o' th' joke, but I didn't see nothin' to laugh at. There wasn't half a pint o' blood spilled on that car, not on th' hood nor instrument board, nor upholstery, an th' windshield which was supposed to have ripped his throat open when he crashed through it, that was clean as th' palm o' my hand, too. Besides that, sir — did ye ever see a man that had been mauled by a big cat?"

"A cat? How do you mean —"

"Lions an' tigers, an' th' like o' that, sir. Once in th' Chinese upcountry I seen th' body of a woman who'd been kilt by a tiger, one o' them big blue beasts they have there. There was something about young Cableson that reminded me of —"

"*Mort d'un rat rouge*, do you say so? This poor one's injuries were like those of that Chinese woman?"

"Pre-*cise*-ly, sir. That's why I'm here. You see, I figure if he had died natural-like, as th' result o' that accident, his car should 'a' been wringin' wet with blood, an' his clothes drippin' with it. But, like I was sayin' —"

"*Parbleu*, you *have* said it!" de Grandin exclaimed almost delightedly. "Come, let us go at once." He swallowed the remaining morsel of his fish, drained his coffee cup and rose. "This case, he has the smell of herring on him, *mon sergent*."

"Await me, if you please," he called from the hall as he thrust his arms into his topcoat sleeves. "I shall return in ample time for Madame Heacoat's *soirée*, my friend, but at present I am burnt with curiosity to see this poor, unfortunate young man who died of a cut throat, yet bled no blood. *A bientôt*."

A little after eight o'clock that night he came into my bedroom, resplendent in full evening dress. "Consider me, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded. "Behold and admire. Am I not superb, magnificent? Shall I not be the pride of all the ladies and the despair of the men?" He pirouetted like a dancer for my admiration.

To do him justice, he was a sight to command a second look. About his neck hung the insignia of the Legion of Honor; a row of miniature medals including the French and

Belgian war crosses, the *Médaille Militaire* and the Italian Medal for Valor decorated the left breast of his faultless evening coat; his little wheat-blond mustache was waxed to needle sharpness and his sleek blond hair was brushed and brilliantined until it fitted flat against his shapely little head like a skullcap.

“Humpf,” I commented, “if you behave as well as you look I suppose you’ll not disgrace me.”

“*O, la, la!*” He grinned delightedly as he patted the gardenia in his lapel with gentle, approving fingers. “Come, let us go. I would arrive at Madame Heacoat’s before all the punch is drunk, if you please.” He flung his long, military-cut evening cape about him with the air of a comic-opera conspirator, picked up his lustrous top hat and silver-headed ebony cane and strode debonairly toward the door.

“Just a moment,” I called as the desk ’phone gave a short, chattering ring.

“Hullo, Trowbridge, Donovan speaking,” came a heavy voice across the wire as I picked up the instrument. “Can you bring that funny little Frog friend of yours over to City Hospital tonight? I’ve got a brand new variety of nut in the psychopathic ward — a young girl sane as you or I — well, anyhow, apparently as sane as you, except for an odd fixation. I think she’d interest de Grandin —”

“Sorry,” I denied. “We’re just going to a shindig at Mrs. Heacoat’s. It’ll be a frightful bore, most likely, but they’re valuable patients, and —”

“Aw, rats,” Dr. Donovan interrupted. “If I had as much money as you I’d tell all the tea-pourin’ old ladies to go fry an egg. Come on over. This nut is good, I tell you. Put your toad-eater on the ’phone, maybe he’ll listen to reason, even if you won’t.”

“*Hélas*, but I am desolated!” the Frenchman declared as Donovan delivered his invitation. “At present Friend Trowbridge and I go to make the great whoopee at Madame Heacoat’s. Later in the evening, if you please, we shall avail ourselves of your hospitality. You have whisky there, yes? *Bon*. Anon, my friend, we shall discuss it and the young woman with the *idée fixe*.”

Mrs. Heacoat’s was the first formal affair of the autumn, and most of the élite of our little city were present, the men still showing the floridness of golf course and mountain trail, sun-tan, painfully acquired at fashionable beaches, lying in velvet veneer on the women’s arms and shoulders.

Famous lion-huntress that she was, Mrs. Heacoat had managed to impound a considerable array of exotic notables for her home-town guests to gape at, and I noted with amusement how her large, pale eyes lit up with elation at sight of Jules de Grandin. The little Frenchman, quick to understand the situation, played his rôle artistically. “Madame,” he bent above our hostess’s plump hand with

more than usual ceremony, “believe me, I am deeply flattered by the honor you have conferred on me.”

What would have been a simper in anyone less distinguished than Mrs. Watson Heacoat spread over the much massaged and carefully lifted features of Harrisonville’s social arbiter. “So sweet of you to come, Dr. de Grandin. Do you know Monsieur Arif? Arif Pasha, Dr. Jules de Grandin — Dr. Trowbridge.”

The slender, sallow-skinned young man whom she presented had the small regular features, sleek black hair and dark, slumbrous eyes typical of a night club band leader, or a waiter in a fashionable café. He bowed jerkily from the hips in continental fashion and murmured a polite greeting in stilted English. “You, I take it, are a stranger like myself in strange company?” he asked de Grandin as we moved aside for a trio of newcomers.

Further conversation developed he was attached to the Turkish consulate in New York, that he had met Mrs. Heacoat in England the previous summer, and that he would be exceedingly glad when he might bid his hostess good night.

“*Tiens*, they stare so, these Americans,” he complained. “Now, in London or Paris —”

“Monsoor and Modom Bera!” announced the butler, his impressive, full-throated English voice cutting through the staccato of chatter as the booming of the surf sounds through the strains of a seaside resort band.

We turned casually to view the newcomers, then kept our eyes at gaze; they were easily the most interesting people in the room. Madame Bera walked a half-pace before her husband, tall, exquisite, exotic as an orchid blooming in a New England garden. Tawny hair combed close to a small head framed a broad white brow, and under fine dark brown brows looked out the most remarkable eyes I had ever seen. Widely separated, their roundness gave them an illusion of immensity which seemed to diminish her face, and their color was a baffling shade of greenish amber, contrasting oddly with her leonine hair and warm, maize-tan complexion. From cheek to cheek her face was wide, tapering to a pointed chin, and her nostrils flared slightly, like those of an alert feline scenting hidden danger. Her evening dress, cut rather higher than the prevailing mode, encased her large, supple figure with glove tightness from breast to waist, then flared outward to an uneven hem that almost swept the floor. Beneath the edge of her sand-colored chiffon gown her feet, in sandals of gold kid, appeared absurdly small for her height as she crossed the room with a lithe, easy stride that seemed positively pantherine in its effortless grace.

Older by a score of years than his consort, Monsieur Bera yet had something of the same feline ease of movement that characterized her. Like hers, his face was wide from cheek

to cheek, pointed at the chin and with unusually wide nostrils. Unlike his wife's, his eyes were rather long than round, inclined to be oblique, and half closed, as if to shade them from the glitter of the electric lights. Fast-thinning grey hair was combed back from his brow in an effort to conceal his spreading bald spot, and his wide mouth was adorned by a waxed mustache of the kind affected by Prussian officers in pre-Nazi days. Through the lens of a rimless monocle fixed in his right eye he seemed to view the assemblage with a sardonic contempt.

"*Ye Allah!*" the young Turk who stood between de Grandin and me sank his fingers into our elbows. "*Bism' allah ar-rahman ar-rahim!* Do you see them? They look as if they were of *that people!*"

"Eh, you say what?" whispered Jules de Grandin sharply.

"It is no matter, sir; you would not understand."

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*, I understand you very well, indeed. Some little time ago I had to go to Tunis to make investigation of a threatened uprising of the tribesmen. Disguised as a *Père Blanc* — and other things — I mingled with the natives. It was vile — I had to shave off my mustaches! — but it was instructive. I learned much. I learned, by example, of the djinn that haunt the ruins of Carthage, and of the strange ones who reside in tombs; a weird and dreadful folk without a name — at any rate, without a name which can be mentioned."

Arif Pasha looked at Jules de Grandin fearfully. "You have seen them?" he asked in a low breath.

"I have heard much of them, and their stigmata has been described to me. Come, let us seek an introduction to *la belle Bera*."

"Allah forbid," the young Turk denied, walking hastily away.

The lady proved gracious as she was beautiful. Viewed closely, her strange eyes were stranger still, for they had a trick of contracting their pupils in the light, bringing out the full beauty of their fine irises, and expanding in shadow till they seemed black as night. Too, I noted when she smiled her slow wide smile, all four canine teeth seemed over-prominent and sharp. This, perhaps, accounted for the startling contrast between her crimson lips and her perfect dentition. Her hands were unusual, too. Small and fine they were, with supple, slender fingers but unusually wide palms, and the nails, shaped to a point and brightly varnished, curved oddly downward over the fingertips; had they been longer or less carefully tended they would have suggested talons. Her voice was a rich heavy contralto, and when she spoke slow hesitant English there was an odd purring undertone beneath her words.

The odd characteristics which seemed somehow exotically attractive in his wife were intensified in Monsieur Bera. The over-prominent teeth which lent a kind of piquant

charm to her smile were a deformity in his dun-lipped mouth; the overhanging nails that made her long fingers seem longer still were definitely claw-like on his hands, and the odd trick of contracting and expanding his pupils in changing lights gave his narrow eyes a furtive look unpleasantly reminiscent of the eyes of a dope-fiend or a cruel, treacherous cat.

"Madame, I am interested," de Grandin admitted with the frankness only he could employ without seeming discourteous. "Your name intrigues me. It is not French, yet I heard you introduced as Monsieur and Madame —"

The lady smiled languidly, showing pearly teeth and crimson lips effectively. "We are Tunisians," she answered. "Both my husband and I come from North Africa."

"Ah, then I am indeed fortunate," he smiled delightedly. "Is it by some great fortune you reside in this city? If so I should greatly esteem permission to call —"

I heard no summons, but Madame Bera evidently did, for with another smile and friendly nod she left us to join Mrs. Heacoat.

"Beard of a small blue man!" de Grandin grinned wryly as we rejoined the young Turk, "it seems that Jules de Grandin loses his appeal for the sex. Was ever the chilled shoulder more effectively presented than by *la charmante Bera*?"

"Come, *mes amis*," he linked his hands through our elbows and drew us toward the farther room, "women may smile, or women may frown, but champagne punch is always pleasant to the taste."

We sampled several kinds of punch and sandwiches and small sweet cakes, then made our adieux to our hostess. Outside, as Arif Pasha was about to enter his taxi, de Grandin tapped him lightly on the shoulder. "If we should hear more of them, I can find you, my friend?" he asked cryptically.

The young Turk nodded. "I shall be ready if you call," he promised.

"Would you guys like a spot o' proletarian whisky to take the taste of all that champagne out o' your mouths?" asked Dr. Donovan as we joined him in his office at the hospital.

"A thousand thanks," de Grandin answered. "Champagne is good, but whisky, as your saying puts it so drolly, hits the spot. By all means, let us indulge.

"You are not drinking?" he asked as Donovan poured a generous portion for him, and a like one for me.

"Nope, not on duty. Might give some o' my nuts bad ideas," the other grinned. "However, bottoms up, you fellers, then let's take a gander at my newest curio.

"It was early this morning, half-past four or so, when a state constabulary patrol found her wandering around the woods west of Mooreston with nothing but a nightdress on.

They questioned her, but could get nowhere. Most of the time she didn't speak at all, and when she did it was only to slobber some sort o' meaningless gibberish. According to Hoyle they should have taken her to the State Hospital for observation, but they're pretty full over there, and prefer to handle only regularly committed cases, so the troopers brought her here and turned her over to the city police.

"Frankly, the case has my goat. Familiar with dementia præcox, are you, Doctor?" he turned questioningly to de Grandin.

"Quite," the Frenchman answered. "I have seen many poor ones suffering from it. Usually it occurs between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, though most cases I have observed were in the early thirties. Wherever I have seen it the disease was characterized by states of excitement accompanied by delusions of aural or visual type. Most patients believed they were persecuted, or had been through some harrowing experience — occasionally they posed, gesticulated and grimaced."

"Just so," agreed Donovan. "You've got it down pat, Doctor. I thought I had, too, but I'm not so sure now. What would be your diagnosis if a patient displayed every sign of ataxic aphasia, couldn't utter a single intelligent word, then fell into a stupor lasting eight hours or so and woke up with a case of the horrors? This girl's about twenty-three, and absolutely perfect physically. What's more, her reflexes are all right — knee-jerks normal, very sensitive to pain, and all that, but —" He looked inquiringly at de Grandin.

"From your statement I should suggest dementia præcox. It is well known that such dements frequently fall into comatose sleeps in which they suffer nightmares, and on awaking are so mentally confused they cannot distinguish between the phantoms of their dreams and their waking surroundings."

"Precisely. Well, I had a talk with this child and heard her story, then gave her a big dose of codeine in milk. She slept three hours and woke up seemingly as normal as you or I, but I'm damned if she didn't repeat the same story, chapter and verse, that she gave me when she first came out of her stupor. I'd say she's sane as a judge if it weren't for this delusion she persists in. Want to come up now and have a look at her?"

Donovan's patient lay on the neat white-iron hospital cot, staring with wide frightened eyes at the little observation-grille in the unlocked door of her cell. Even the conventional high-necked, long-sleeved muslin bed-gown furnished by the hospital could not hide her frail prettiness. With her pale smooth skin, light short hair and big violet eyes in which lay a look of perpetual terror, she was like a little frightened child, and a wave of sympathy swept over me as we entered her room. That de Grandin felt the same I could tell by the kindly smile he gave her as he drew a chair to her

bedside and seated himself. He took her thin blue-veined hand in his and patted it gently before placing his fingers on her pulse.

"I've brought a couple of gentlemen to see you, Annie," Dr. Donovan announced as the little Frenchman gazed intently at the tiny gold watch strapped to the underside of his wrist, comparing its sweep second hand with the girl's pulsation. "Dr. de Grandin is a famous French detective as well as a physician; he'll be glad to hear your story; maybe he can do something about it."

A tortured look swept across the girl's thin face as he finished. "You think I'm crazy," she accused, half rising from her pillow. "I know you do, and you've brought these men here to examine me so you can put me in a madhouse for always. Oh, it's dreadful — I'm not insane, I tell you; I'm as sane as you are, if you'd only listen —"

"Now, Annie, don't excite yourself," Donovan soothed. "You know I wouldn't do anything like that; I'm your friend —"

"My name's not Annie, and you're *not* my friend. Nobody is. You think I'm crazy — all you doctors think everyone who gets into your clutches must be crazy, and you'll send me to a madhouse, and I'll really go crazy there!"

"Now, Annie —"

"My name's not Annie, I tell you. Why do you keep calling me that?"

Donovan cast a quick wink at me, then turned a serious face to the girl. "I thought your name was Annie. I must have been mistaken. What is it?"

"I've told you it's Trula, Trula Petersen. I used to live in Paterson, but lost my place there and couldn't get anything to do, so I came to Harrisonville looking for work, and —"

"Very good, Friend Donovan," de Grandin announced, relinquishing the girl's wrist, but retaining her fingers in his, "when first this young lady came here she could not tell her name. Now she can. *Bon*, we make the progress. Her heart action is strong and good. I think perhaps we shall make much more progress. Now, Mademoiselle," he gave the girl one of his quick friendly smiles, "if you will be so good as to detail your adventures from the start we shall listen with the close attention. Believe me, we are friends, and nothing you say shall be taken as a proof of madness."

The girl's smile was a pitiful, small echo of his own. "I do believe you, sir," she returned, "and I'll tell you everything, for I know I can trust you."

"When the Clareborne Silk Mills closed down in Paterson I lost my place as timekeeper. Most of the other mills were laying off employees, and there wasn't much chance of another situation there. I'm an orphan with no relatives, and I had to get some sort of work at once, for I didn't have more than fifty dollars in bank. After trying several places

with no luck I came to Harrisonville where nobody knew me and registered at a domestic servants' agency. It was better to be a housemaid than starve, I thought.

"The very day I registered a Mrs. d' Afrique came looking for a maid, and picked two other girls and me as possibilities. She looked us all over, asked a lot of questions about our families, where we were born, and that sort of thing, then chose me because she said she preferred a maid without relatives or friends, who wouldn't be wanting to run out every evening. Her car was waiting outside, and I had no baggage except my suitcase, so I went along with her."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured. "And she did take you where?"

"I don't know."

"Hein? How do you say?"

"I don't know, sir. It was a big foreign car with a closed body, and she had me sit in the tonneau with her instead of up front with the chauffeur. When we'd started I noticed for the first time that the windows were of frosted glass, and I couldn't see where we went. We must have gone a long way, though, for the car seemed traveling very fast, and there were no traffic stops. When we finally stopped we were under a porte-cochère, and we entered the house directly from the car, so I couldn't get any idea of surroundings."

"Dites! Surely, in the days that followed you could look about?"

A look of terror flared in the girl's eyes and her pale lips writhed in a grimace of fear. "The days that followed!" she repeated in a thin scream; "it's the days that followed that brought me *here!*"

"Ah? Do you say so?"

"Now we're gettin' it!" Donovan whispered in my ear with a low chuckle. "Go ahead and ask her, de Grandin; you tell him, Annie. This is goin' to be good."

His voice was too low for de Grandin and the girl to catch his words, but his tone and laugh were obvious. "Oh!" the patient wailed, wrenching her hand from de Grandin's and putting it to her eyes. "Oh, how cruel! You're all making fun of me!"

"Be silent, *imbécile*," de Grandin turned on Donovan savagely. "*Parbleu*, cleaning the roadways would be more fitting work for you than treating the infirm of mind! Do not attend him, Mademoiselle." He repossessed himself of the girl's hand and smoothed it gently. "Proceed with your narrative. I shall listen, and perhaps believe."

For a moment the little patient shook as with an ague, and I could see her grip on his fingers tighten. "Please, *please* believe me, Doctor," she begged. "It's really the truth I'm telling. They wanted — they wanted to —"

"Did they so, *pardieu?*" de Grandin replied. "Very good, Mademoiselle, you escaped them. No one shall hurt you

now, nor shall you be persecuted. Jules de Grandin promises it. Now to proceed."

"I was frightened," she confessed, "terribly frightened from the moment I got into the car with Mrs. d' Afrique and realized I couldn't look out. I thought of screaming and trying to jump out, but I was out of work and hungry; besides, she was a big woman and could have overpowered me without trouble.

"When we got to the house I was still more terrified, and Mrs. d' Afrique seemed to notice it, for she smiled and took me by the arm. Her hands were strong as a man's — stronger! — and when I tried to draw away she held me tighter and sort of chuckled deep down in her throat — like a big cat purring when it's caught a mouse. She half led, half shoved me down a long hall that was almost bare of furniture, through a door and down a flight of steps that led to the basement. Next thing I knew she'd pushed me bodily into a little room no bigger than this, and locked the door.

"The door was solid planking, and the only window was a little barred opening almost at the ceiling, which I couldn't reach to look through, even when I pushed the bed over and stood on it.

"I don't know how long I was in that place. At first I thought the window let outdoors, but the light seemed the same strength all the time, so I suppose it really looked out into the main basement and what I thought weak sunlight was really reflected from an electric bulb somewhere. At any rate, I determined to fight for my freedom the first chance I had, for I'd read stories of white slavers who kidnaped girls, and I was sure I'd fallen into the hands of some such gang. If I only had!

"How they timed it I don't know, but they never opened that door except when I was sleeping. I'd lie awake for hours, pretending to be asleep, so that someone would open the door and give me a chance to die fighting; but nothing ever happened. Then the moment I grew so tired I really fell asleep the door would be opened, my soiled dishes taken out and a fresh supply of food brought in. They didn't starve me, I'll say that. There was always some sort of meat — veal or young pork, I thought — and bread and vegetables and a big vacuum bottle of coffee and another of chilled milk. If I hadn't been so terribly frightened I might have enjoyed it, for I'd been hungry for a long time.

"One night I woke up with a start. At least, I suppose it was night, though there was really no way of telling. There were voices outside my door, the first I'd heard since I came there. 'Please, please let me go,' a girl was pleading sobbingly. 'I've never done anything to you, and I'll do anything — *anything* you ask if you'll only let me go!'

"Whoever it was she spoke to answered in a soft, gentle, purring sort of voice, 'Do not be afraid, we seek only to have a little sport with you; then you are free.'

“It was a man’s voice, I could tell that, and I could hear the girl sobbing and pleading in terror till he took her upstairs and closed the basement door.

“I didn’t know what to think. Till then I’d thought I was the only prisoner in the house, now I knew there was at least one more. ‘What were they doing to her — what would they do to me when my turn came?’ I kept asking myself. I’d read about the white-slave stockades of Chicago where young girls were ‘broken in’ by professional rapists, and when I heard the sound of several people running back and forth in the room right above me I went absolutely sick with terror. It seemed to me that several people were running about in tennis shoes or bare feet, and then there was a scream, then more running, and more screams. Then everything was still, so still that I could hear my heart beating as I lay there. I kept listening for them to bring her back; but they never did. At last I fell asleep.”

De Grandin tweaked the waxed ends of his little blond mustache. “This Madame d’Afrique, what did she look like, *ma pauvre?*”

“She was a big woman — tall, that is, sir, with lots of blond hair and queer-looking brown-green eyes and odd, long nails that turned down over her finger-tips, like claws. She —”

“Name of an intoxicated pig, they are undoubtedly one and the same! Why did I not recognize it at once?” de Grandin exclaimed. “Say on, my child. Tell all; I wait with interest.”

The girl swallowed convulsively and gave her other hand into his keeping. “Hold me, Doctor, hold me tight,” she begged. “I’m afraid; terribly afraid, even now.

“I knew something dreadful was going to happen when he finally came for me, but I hadn’t thought how terrible it would be. I was sound asleep when I felt someone shaking me by the shoulder and heard a voice say, ‘Get up. We’re going to let you go — if you can.’

“I tried to ask questions, to get him to wait till I put on some clothes, but he fairly dragged me, just as I was, from the bed. When I got upstairs I found myself in a big bare room brightly lighted by a ceiling chandelier, and with only a few articles of furniture in it — one or two big chairs, several small footstools, and a big couch set diagonally across one corner. It was night. I could see the rain beating on the window and hear the wind blowing. In the sudden unaccustomed light I saw a tall old man with scant white hair and a big white mustache held me by the shoulder. He wore a sort of short bathrobe of some dark-colored cloth and his feet were bare. Then I saw the woman, Mrs. d’Afrique. She was in a sort of short nightgown that reached only to her knees, and like the man she, too, was barefooted. The man shoved me into the middle of the room, and all the time the woman stood there smiling and eyeing me hungrily.

“‘My wife and I sometimes play a little game with our guests,’ the old man told me. ‘We turn out the lights and enjoy a little romp of tag. If the guest can get away in the darkness she is free to go; if she can not —’ He stopped and smiled at me — the cruellest smile I’ve ever seen.

“‘Wh — what happens if she can not?’ I faltered.

“He put his hand out and stroked my bare arm. ‘Very nice,’ he murmured, ‘nice and tender, eh?’ The woman nodded and licked her red lips with the tip of her red tongue, while her queer green eyes seemed positively shining as she looked at me.

“‘If the guest can not get away,’ the man answered with a dreadful low laugh, then he looked at the woman again. ‘You have eaten well since you came here,’ he went on, apparently forgetting what he’d started to say. ‘How did you like the meat we served?’

“I nodded. I didn’t know what to say. Then: ‘Why, it was very nice,’ I whispered, fearing to anger him if I kept silent.

“‘Ye-es, very nice,’ he agreed with another laugh. ‘Very nice, indeed. That meat, dear, tender young lady — that meat was the guests who couldn’t get away!’

“I closed my eyes and thought hard. This couldn’t be true, I told myself. This was just some dreadful dream. They might be going to maul and beat me — even kill me, perhaps — to satisfy their sadistic lust, but to kill and *eat* me — no, such things just couldn’t happen in New Jersey today!

“It was a lucky thing for me I’d closed my eyes, for while I stood there swaying with nauseated horror I heard a faint click. Instantly I opened my eyes to find the light had been shut off and I was standing alone in the center of the great room.

“‘How’d you know you were alone if the light had been shut off?’ demanded Donovan. “‘You say the room was pitch-dark.’”

The girl never turned her head. Her terrified eyes remained steadily, pleadingly, on de Grandin’s face as she whispered:

“*By their eyes!*”

“The woman stood at one end of the room, the man had moved to the other, though I’d heard no sound, and in the darkness I could see their eyes, like the phosphorescent orbs of wild jungle-beasts at night.

“The steady, green-gleaming eyes came slowly nearer and nearer, sometimes moving in a straight line, sometimes circling in the darkness, but never turning from me for an instant. I was being stalked like a mouse by hungry cats — the creatures could see in the dark!

“I said a moment ago it was fortunate for me I’d closed my eyes. That’s all that saved me. if they’d been open when the lights went out I’d have been completely blinded by the sudden darkness, but as it was, when I opened them the

room was just a little lighter than the absolute darkness of closed eyes. The result was I could see their bodies like moving blotches of shadow slightly heavier than that of the rest of the room, and could even make out the shapes of some of the furniture. I could distinguish the dull-grey of the rain-washed window, too.

“As I turned in terror from one creeping shadow-thing to the other the woman let out a low, dreadful cry like the gradually-growing miaul of a hunting cat, only deeper and louder. The man answered it, and it seemed there was an undertone of terrible, half-human laughter in the horrible catawaul.

“It seemed to me that all the forces of hell were let loose in that great dark room. I heard myself screaming, praying, shrieking curses and obscenities I’d never realized I even knew, and answering me came the wild, inhuman screeches of the green-eyed things that hunted me.

“Scarcely knowing what I did I snatched up a heavy footstool and hurled it at the nearer pair of eyes. They say a woman can’t throw straight, but my shot took effect. I saw the blurred outline of a body double up with an agonized howl and go crashing to the floor, where it flopped and contorted like a fish jerked from the water.

“With a shrill, ear-splitting scream the other form dashed at me, and I dropped to my knees just in time to avoid a thrashing blow it aimed at me — I felt my nightdress rip to tatters as the long sharp nails slashed through it.

“I rolled over and over across the floor with that she-devil leaping and springing after me. I snatched another hassock as I rolled, and flung it behind me. It tripped her, and for a moment she went to her knees, but her short dress offered no hindrance to her movement, and she was up and after me, howling and screaming like a beast, in another second.

“I’d managed to roll near the window, and as I came in contact with another stool I grasped it and hurled it with all my might at the panes. They shattered outward with a crash, and I dived through the opening. The ground was scarcely six feet below, and the rain had softened it so it broke my fall almost like a mattress. An instant after I’d landed on the rain-soaked lawn I was on my feet and running as no woman ever ran before.”

“Yes, and then —?” de Grandin prompted.

The girl shook her slim, muslin-clad shoulders and shuddered in the ague of a nervous chill. “That’s all there is to tell, sir,” she stated simply. “The next thing I knew I was in this bed and Dr. Donovan was asking me about myself.”

“That’s letter-perfect,” Donovan commented. “Exactly the way she told it twice before. What’s your verdict, gentlemen?”

I shook my head pityingly. It was all too sadly evident the poor girl had been through some terrifying experience and

that her nerves were badly shaken, but her story was so preposterous — clearly this was a case of delusional insanity. “I’m afraid,” I began, and got no farther, for de Grandin’s sharp comment forestalled me.

“The verdict, *mon cher* Donovan? What can it be but that she speaks the truth? But certainly, of course!”

“You mean —” I began, and once again he shut me off.

“By damn-it, I mean that the beauteous Madame Bera and her so detestably ugly spouse have overreached themselves. There is no doubt that they and the d’Afrique are one and the same couple. Why should they not choose that name as a *nom de ruse*; are they not from Tunis, and is Tunis not in Africa? But yes.”

“Holy smoke!” gasped Donovan. “D’ye mean you actually believe this bunk?”

“*Mais certainement*,” de Grandin answered. “So firmly do I believe it I am willing to stand sponsor for this young lady immediately if you will release her on parole to accompany Friend Trowbridge and me.”

“Well, I’m a monkey’s uncle, I sure am,” declared Dr. Donovan. “Maybe I should have another room swept out for you an’ Trowbridge.” He sobered at the grim face de Grandin turned on him. “O.K. if that’s the way you want it, de Grandin. It’s your responsibility, you know. Want to go with these gentlemen, Annie?” He regarded the girl with a questioning smile.

“Yes! I’ll go anywhere with him, he trusts me,” she returned; then, as an afterthought, “And my name’s not Annie.”

“All right, Annie, get your clothes on,” Donovan grinned back. “We’ll be waitin’ for you in the office.”

As soon as we had reached the office de Grandin rushed to the telephone. “I would that you give this message to Sergeant Costello immediately he arrives,” he called when his call to police headquarters had been put through. “Request that he obtain the address given by Monsieur and Madame d’Afrique when they went to secure domestic help from Osgood’s Employment Agency, and that he ascertain, if possible, the names and addresses of all young women who entered their employ from the agency. Have him take steps to locate them at once, if he can.

“*Très bon*,” he nodded as Trula Petersen made her appearance dressed in some makeshift odds and ends of clothing found for her by the nurses. “You are not *chic*, my little one, but in the morning we can get you other clothes, and meantime you will sleep more comfortably in an unbarred room. Yes, let us go.”

A little after four o’clock next afternoon Costello called on us. “I got some o’ th’ dope you’re wantin’, Dr. de Grandin,” he announced. “Th’ de Africays hired four girls from Osgood’s about a week apart; but didn’t seem to find any of ’em satisfactory. Kept comin’ back for more.”

“Ah? And these young women are now where, if you please?”

“None of ’em’s been located as yet sir. It happens they was all strangers in town, at least, none of ’em had folks here, an’ all was livin’ in furnished rooms when they was hired. None of ’em’s reported back to her roomin’ house or applied to Osgood’s for reëmployment. We’ll look around a bit more, if you say so, but I doubt we’ll find out much. They’re mostly fly-by-nights, these girls, you know.”

“I fear that what you say is literally true,” de Grandin answered soberly. “They have flown by night, yes flown beyond all mortal calling, if my fears are as well grounded as I have reason to believe.

“And the address of Monsieur and Madame Ber — d’Afrique? Did you ascertain it from the agency?”

“Sure, we did. It’s 762 Orient Boulevard.”

“Good. I shall go there and —”

“Needn’t be troublin’ yourself, sir. I’ve been there already.”

“*Ah bah*; I fear that you have spoiled it all. I did not wish them to suspect we knew. Now, I much fear —”

“You needn’t; 762 Orient Boulevard’s a vacant lot.”

“Hell and ten thousand furies! Do you tell me so?”

“I sure do. But I got something solid for us to sink our teeth into. I think I’ve uncovered a lead on th’ Cableson case.”

“Indeed?”

“Well, it ain’t much, but it’s more’n we knew before. He wasn’t alone when he died; least wise, he wasn’t alone a few minutes before. I ran across a pair o’ young fellers that saw him takin’ a lady into his coupé on th’ Albermarle Pike just a little way outside Mooreston late th’ night before he was found dead with his car jammed up against a tree.”

“*Chapeau d’un bouc vert*, is it so? Have you a description of the lady of mystery?”

“Kind of, yes, sir. She was big and blond, an’ wrapped in some sort o’ cloak, but didn’t wear a hat. That’s how they know she was a blonde, they saw her hair in th’ light o’ th’ car’s lamps.”

The little Frenchman turned from the policeman to our guest. “My child,” he told her, “the good God has been most kind to you. He has delivered those who harried you like a brute beast into the hands of Jules de Grandin.”

“What are you going to do?” I asked, wondering.

“Do?” His waxed mustaches quivered like the whiskers of an irritable tom-cat. “Do? *Parbleau*, should one slap the face of Providence? *Mille nons*. Me, I shall serve them as they deserve, no less. May Satan fry me in a saucepan with a garnish of mushrooms if I do not so!”

A moment later he was thumbing through the telephone directory. “Ah, Madame Heacoat,” he announced when the lady finally answered his call, “I am unhappy, I am

miserable; I am altogether desolate. At your charming soirée I met the so delightful Monsieur and Madame Bera, and we discovered many friends in common. Of the goodness of their hearts they invited me to call, but *hélas* I have misplaced my memorandum of their address. Can you — ah, *merci bien; merci bien une mille fois* — a thousand thanks, Madame!

“My friends,” he turned on us as he laid down the ’phone, “we have them in a snare. They are the clever ones, but Jules de Grandin is more clever. They dwell near Mooreston; their house abuts upon the Albermarle Pike. To find them will be a small task.

“Trowbridge, my old and rare, I pray you have the capable Nora McGinnis, that queen among cooks, prepare us a noble dinner this night. There is much to be done, and I would do it on a well-fed stomach. Meantime I shall call that Monsieur Arif and request his presence this evening. It was he who first roused my suspicions; he deserves to be here at the finish.”

A little before dinner a special messenger from Ridgeway’s Hardware Store arrived with a long parcel wrapped in corrugated paper which de Grandin seized and bore to his room. For half an hour or more he was engaged in some secret business there, emerging with a grin of satisfaction on his face as the gong sounded for the evening meal.

He took command at table, keeping up a running fire of conversation, most of it witty, all of it inconsequential. Stories of student days at the Sorbonne, droll tales of the War, anecdotes of travel in the far places of the world — anything but the slightest reference to the mystery of Monsieur and Madame Bera he rattled off like a wound-up gramophone.

Finally, when coffee was served in the drawing room, he lighted a cigar, stretched his slender patent-leather-shod feet to the blazing logs and regarded Trula Petersen and me in turn with his quick, birdlike glance. “You trust me, *ma petite*?” he asked the girl.

“Oh, yes.”

“*Très bon*. We shall put that trust to the test before long.” He smiled whimsically, then:

“You have never hunted the tiger in India, one assumes?”

“Sir? No! I’ve never been anywhere except Norway where I was born, and this country, where I’ve lived since I was ten.”

“Then it seems I must enlighten you. In India, when they would bring the striped one within gunshot, they tether a so small and helpless kid to a stake. The tiger scents a meal, approaches the small goat; the hunter, gun in hand, squeezes the trigger and — *voilà*, there is a tigerskin rug for some pretty lady’s boudoir. It is all most simple.”

"I—I don't think I understand, sir," the girl faltered, but there was a telltale widening of her eyes and a constriction of the muscles of her throat as she spoke.

"Very well. It seems I must explain in detail. Anon our good friend Arif Pasha comes, and with him comes the good Sergeant Costello. When all is ready you are to assume the same costume you wore when they brought you to the hospital, and over it you will put on warm wrappings. Thereafter Friend Trowbridge drives us to the house of Monsieur Bera, and you will descend, clad as you were when you fled. You will stagger across the lawn, calling pitifully for help. Unless I am much more mistaken than I think one or both of them will sally forth to see who cries for help in the night. Then —"

"O-o-o-oh, *no!*" the girl wailed in a stifled voice. "I couldn't! I wouldn't go there for all the money in the world—"

"It is no question of money, my small one. It is that you do it for the sake of humanity. Consider: Did you not tell me you woke one night to hear the odious Bera leading another girl to torture and death? Did not you thereafter hear the stamping of feet which fled and feet which pursued, and the agonized scream of one who was caught?"

The girl nodded durably.

"Suppose I tell you four girls were hired by these beast-people from the same agency whence you went into their service. That much we know; it is a matter of police record. It is also a matter of record that none of them, save you, was ever seen again. How many other unfortunate ones went the same sad road is a matter of conjecture, but unless you are willing to do this thing for me there is a chance that those we seek may escape. They may move to some other place and play their infernal games of hide-and-seek-in-the-dark with only the good God knows how many other poor ones.

"Attend me further, little pretty one: The night you escape by what was no less than a miracle a young man named Thomas Cablesen — a youth of good family and position — young, attractive, in love; with everything to live for, drove his coupé through Mooreston along the Albermarle Pike. A short distance from Mooreston he was accosted by a woman — a big, blond woman *who sought for something in the roadside woods.*

"In the kindness of his heart he offered her a ride to Harrisonville. Next morning he was found dead in his motor. Apparently he had collided with a roadside tree, for his windshield was smashed to fragments, and through the broken glass his head protruded. But nowhere was there any blood. Neither on the car nor on his clothing was there any stain, yet he had bled to death. Also, I who am at once a physician and an observer of facts, examined his poor, severed throat. Such tears as marred his flesh might have been made by teeth, perhaps by claws; but by splintered

glass, never. What happened in that young man's car we cannot know for certain, but we can surmise much. We can surmise, by example, that a thing that dotes on human flesh and blood had been thwarted of its prey and hunted for it in those roadside woods. We can surmise that when the young man, thinking her alone upon the highroad, offered her a ride, she saw an opportunity. Into his car she went, and when they were come to a lonely spot she set upon him. There was a sudden shrill, inhuman scream, the glare of beast-eyes in the dark, the stifling weight of a body hurled on unsuspecting shoulders, and the rending of shrinking flesh by bestial teeth and claws. The car is stopped, then started; it is run against a tree; a head, already almost severed from its body, is thrust through the broken windshield, and — the nameless horror which wears woman's shape returns to its den, its lips red from the feast, its gorge replenished."

"De Grandin!" I expostulated. "You're raving. Such things can't be!"

"Ha, can they not, *parbleu?*" he tweaked the ends of his diminutive mustache, gazing pensively at the fire a moment, then:

"Regard me, my friend. Listen, pay attention: Where, if you please, is Tunis?"

"In northwest Africa."

"*Précisément.* And Egypt is where, if you please?"

"In Africa, of course, but —"

"No buts, if you please. Both lie on the same dark continent, that darksome mother of dark mysteries whose veil no man has ever completely lifted. Now, regard me: in lower Egypt, near Zagazig, are the great ruins of Tell Besta. They mark the site of the ancient, wicked city of Bubastis, own sister of Sodom and Gomorrah of accursèd memory. It was there, in the days of the third Rameses, thirteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, that men and women worshiped the cat-headed one, she who was called Ubasti, sometimes known as Bast. Yes. With phallic emblems and obscenities that would shock present-day Montmartre, they worshipped her. Today her temples lie in ruins, and only the hardest stones of her many monuments endure.

"But there are things much more enduring than granite and brass. The olden legends tell us of a race apart, a race descended from the loins of this cat-headed one of Bubastis, who shared her evil feline nature even though they wore the guise of women, or, less often, men.

"The fellaheen of Egypt are poor, wretchedly poor, and what the bare necessities of living do not snatch from them the tax-collector does; yet not for all the English gold that clings and jingles at Shepard's Hotel in Cairo could one bribe a fella to venture into the ruins of Tell Besta after sunset. No, it is a fact; I myself have seen it.

"For why? Because, by blue, that cursèd spot is ghoul-

haunted. Do not laugh; it is no laughing matter; it is so.

“The ancient gods are dust, and dust are all their worshippers, but their memories and their evil lives after them. The fellaheen will tell you of strange, terrible things which dwell amid the ruins of Bubastis; things formed like human creatures, but which are, as your own so magnificent Monsieur Poe has stated,

“... neither man nor woman,
... neither brute nor human
They are ghouls!”

“Yes, certainly. Like a man’s or woman’s, their faces are, so too are their bodies to some extent; but they see in the dark, like her from whom they are whelped, they wear long nails to seize their prey and have beast-teeth to tear it, and the flesh and blood of living men — or dead, if live be not available — they make their food and drink.

“Not only at Tell Besta are they found, for they are quick to multiply, and their numbers have spread. In the ruined tombs of all North Africa they make their lairs, awaiting the unwary traveler. Mostly they are nocturnal, but they have been known to spring on the lone voyager by day. The Arabs hate and fear them also, and speak of them by indirection. ‘That people,’ they call them, nor does one who has traveled in North Africa need ask a second time what the term connotes.

“Very well, then. When our friend Arif Pasha first showed fright, like a restive horse in the presence of hidden danger, at sight of those we know as Monsieur and Madame Bera, I was astonished. Such things might be in darker Africa, perhaps in Persia, or Asiatic Turkey, but in America — New Jersey — *non!*

“However, Jules de Grandin has the open mind. I made it a duty to meet this so strange couple, to observe their queer catlike eyes, to note the odd, clawlike nails of their hands, but most of all to watch their white, gleaming teeth and hear the soft, purring intonation of their words.

“‘These are queer folk, Jules de Grandin,’ I say to me. ‘They are not like others.’

“That very night we visited the City Hospital and listened to our little Trula tell her fearsome story. What she had to say of those who hired her and would have hunted her to death convinced me of much I should otherwise not have believed.

“Then came Sergeant Costello’s report of the four girls hired by this Madame d’Afrique, whom we now know to be also Madame Bera — girls who went but did not return. Then comes the information of the strange woman who rode with the young Cablesen the night he met his death.

“‘Jules de Grandin,’ I tell me, ‘your dear America, the place in which you have decided to remain, is invaded. The very neighborhood of good Friend Trowbridge’s house, where you are to reside until you find yourself a house of

your own, is peopled by strange night-seeing things.’

“‘It is, *hélas*, as you have said, Jules de Grandin,’ I reply.

“‘Very well, then, Jules de Grandin,’ I ask me, ‘what are we to do about it?’

“‘*Mordieu*,’ I answer me, ‘we shall exterminate the invaders. Of course.’

“‘*Bravo*, it are agreed.’

“Now, all is prepared. Mademoiselle Trula, my little pretty one, my small half orange, I need your help. Will you not do this thing for me?”

“I — I’m terribly afraid,” the girl stammered, “but I — I’ll do it, sir.”

“Bravely spoken, my pigeon. Have no fear. Your guardian angel is with you. Jules de Grandin will also be there.

“Come. Let us make ready, the doorbell sounds.”

Arif Pasha and Costello waited on the porch, and de Grandin gave a hand to each. “I haven’t any more idea what th’ pitch is than what th’ King o’ Siam had for breakfast this mornin’,” Costello confessed with a grin when introductions had been made, “but I’m bankin’ on you to pay off, Dr. de Grandin.”

“I hope your confidence is not misplaced, my friend,” the Frenchman answered. “I hope to show you that which killed the poor young Cablesen before we’re many hours older.”

“What’s that?” asked the detective. “Did you say ‘that,’ sir. Wasn’t it a person, then? Sure, after all our bother, you’re not goin’ to tell me it was an accident after all?”

De Grandin shrugged. “Let us not quibble over pronouns, my old one. Wait till you have seen, then say if it be man or woman, beast or fiend from hell.”

Led by de Grandin as ceremoniously as though he were escorting her to the dance floor, Trula Petersen ascended the stairs to don the ragged bedgown she wore the night she fled for life through the shattered window. She returned in a few moments, her pale childish face suffused with blushes as she sought to cover the inadequate attire by wrapping de Grandin’s fur-lined overcoat more tightly about her slim form. Above the fleece-lined bedroom slippers on her feet I caught a glimpse of slender bare ankle, and mentally revolted against the Frenchman’s penchant for realism which would send her virtually unclothed into the cold autumn night.

But there was no time to voice my protest, for de Grandin followed close behind her with the corrugated cardboard carton he had received from Ridgeway’s in his arms. “Behold, my friends,” he ordered jubilantly displaying its contents — four magazine shotguns — “are these not lovely? *Pardieu*, with them we are equipped for any contingency!”

The guns were twelve-gauge models of the unsportsman-

like “pump” variety, and the barrels had been cut off with a hack-saw close to the wood, shortening them by almost half their length.

“What’s th’ armament for, sir?” inquired Costello, examining the weapon de Grandin handed him. “Is it a riot we’re goin’ out to quell?”

The little Frenchman’s only answer was a grin as he handed guns to Arif Pasha and me, retaining the fourth one for himself. “You will drive, Friend Trowbridge?” he asked.

Obediently, I slipped into a leather windbreaker and led the way to the garage. A minute later we were on the road to Moorseton.

He had evidently made a reconnaissance that afternoon, for he directed me unerringly to a large greystone structure on the outskirts of the suburb. On the north was the dense patch of second-growth pine through which the autumn wind sougled mournfully. To east and west lay fallow fields, evidently reservations awaiting the surveyor’s stake and the enthusiastic cultivation of glib-tongued real estate salesmen. The house itself faced south on the Pike, on the farther side of which lay the grove of oak and chestnut into which Trula had escaped.

“Quiet, my friends, *pour l’amour d’un rat mort!*” de Grandin begged. “Stop the motor, Friend Trowbridge. *Attendez, mes braves. Allons au feu!*”

“Now, my little lovely one!” With such courtesy as he might have shown in assisting a marchioness to shed her cloak, he lifted the overcoat from Trula Petersen’s shivering shoulders, bent quickly and plucked the wool-lined slippers from her feet, then lifted her in his arms and bore her across the roadway intervening between us and the lawn, that gravel might not bruise her unshod soles. “Quick, toward the house, *petite!*” he ordered. “Stagger, play the drunken one — cry out!”

The girl clung trembling to him a moment, but he shook her off and thrust her almost roughly toward the house.

There was no simulation in the terror she showed as she ran unsteadily across the frost-burnt lawn, nor was the deadly fear that sounded in her wailing, thin-edged cry a matter of acting. “Help, help — please help me!” she screamed.

“*Excellent; très excellent,*” applauded from his covert behind a rhododendron bush. “Make ready, *mes amis*, I damn think they come!”

A momentary flash of light showed on the dark background of the house as he spoke, and something a bare shade darker than the surrounding darkness detached itself from the building and sped with pitiless quickness toward the tottering, half-swooning girl.

Trula saw it even as we did, and wheeled in her tracks with a shriek of sheer mortal terror. “Save me, save me, it’s he!” she cried wildly.

Half a dozen frenzied, flying steps she took, crashed blindly into a stunted cedar, and fell sprawling on the frosty grass.

A wild, triumphant yell, a noise half human, half bestial, came from her pursuer. With a single long leap it was on its quarry.

“*Mordieu, Monsieur le Démon*, we are well met!” de Grandin announced, rising from his ambush and leveling his sawed-off shotgun.

The leaping form seemed to pause in midair, to retrieve itself in the midst of its spring like a surprised cat. For an instant it turned its eyes on de Grandin, and they gleamed against the darkness like twin spheres of phosphorus. Next instant it pounced.

There was a sharp click, but no answering bellow of the gun. The cartridge had missed fire.

“*Secours*, Friend Trowbridge; *je suis perdu!*” the little Frenchman cried as he went down beneath an avalanche of flailing arms and legs. And as he fought off his assailant I saw the flare of gleaming green eyes, the flash of cruel strong teeth, and heard the snarling beastlike growl of the thing tearing at his throat.

Nearer than the other two, I leaped to my friend’s rescue, but as I moved a second shadowy form seemed to materialize from nothingness beside me, a battle-cry of feline rage shrilled deafeningly in my ears, and a clawing, screaming fury launched itself upon me.

I felt the tough oiled leather of my windbreaker rip to shreds beneath the scoring talons that struck at me, looked for an instant into round, infuriated phosphorescent eyes, then went down helpless under furious assault.

“There is no power nor might nor majesty save in Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!” Arif Pasha chanted close beside me. “In the glorious name of Allah I take refuge from Shaitan, the stoned and rejected!” A charge of BB shot sufficient to have felled a bear tore through the clawing thing above me, there was a sharp snapping of metal, and a second blaze of searing light as the riot gun roared again.

The ear-piercing scream of my assailant diminished to a growl, and the growl sank to a low, piteous moan as the form above me went limp, rolled from my chest and lay twitching on the frosted earth.

I fought unsteadily to my knees and went faint at the warm stickiness that smeared the front of my jerkin. No need to tell a doctor the feel of blood; he learns it soon enough in his grim trade.

Costello was battering with his gunstock at the infernal thing that clung to de Grandin, not daring to fire for fear of hitting the struggling Frenchman.

“Thanks, friend,” the little fellow panted, wriggling from beneath his adversary and jumping nimbly to his feet. “Your help was very welcome, even though I had already slit his

gizzard with this —” He raised the murderous double-edged hunting knife with which he had been systematically slashing his opponent from the moment they grappled.

“Good Lord o’ Moses!” Costello gasped as de Grandin’s flashlight played on the two forms quivering on the grass. “’Tis Mr. an’ Mrs. Bera! Who’d ’a’ thought swell folks like them would —”

“Folks? *Parbleu*, my friend, I damnation think you call them out of their proper name!” de Grandin interrupted sharply. “Look at this, if you please, and this, also!”

Savagely he tore the black-silk negligee in which the woman had been clothed, displaying her naked torso to his light. From clavicle to pubis the body was covered with coarse yellowish hair, curled and kinky as a bushman’s wool, and where the breasts should have been was scarcely a perceptible swelling. Instead, protruding through the woolly covering was a double row of mammillae, unhuman as the dugs of a multiparous beast.

“For the suckling of her whelps, had she borne any, which the good God forbid,” he explained in a low voice. He turned the shot-riddled body over. Like the front, the back was encased in yellowish short hair, beginning just below the line of the scapulae and extending well down the thighs.

A quick examination of the male showed similar pelage, but in its case the hair was coarser, and an ugly dirty grey shade. Beneath the wool on its front side we found twin rows of rudimentary teats, the secondary sexual characteristics of a member of the multiparæ.

“You see?” he asked simply.

“No, I’m damned if I do,” I denied as the others held silence. “These are dreadful malformations, and their brains were probably as far from normal as their bodies, but —”

“*Ah bah*,” he interrupted. “Here is no abnormality, my friend. These creatures are true to type. Have I not already rehearsed their history? From the tumuli of Africa they come, for there they were pursued with gun and dog like the beast-things they are. In this new land where their kind is unknown they did assume the garb and manners of man. With razor or depilatories they stripped off the hair from their arms and legs, and other places where it would have been noticeable. Then they lived the life of the community outwardly. Treasure from ravished tombs gave them much money; they had been educated like human beings in the schools conducted by well-meaning but thickheaded American missionaries, and all was prepared for their invasion. America is tolerant — too tolerant — of foreigners. More than due allowance is made for their strangeness by those who seek to make them feel at home, and unsuspected, unmolested, these vile ones plied their dreadful trade of death among us. Had the she-thing not capitulated to her appetite for blood when she slew young Cablesen, they might have gone for years without the danger of suspicion. As it was” — he raised his shoulders in a shrug — “their inborn savageness and Jules de Grandin wrought their undoing. Yes, certainly; of course.

“Come, our work is finished. Let us go.”

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

*The Curse of the House
of Phipps
By Seabury Quinn*

Stories by
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and others

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The Curse of the House of Phipps

JULES DE GRANDIN drew a final long puff from his cigarette, ground its butt against the bottom of the ash tray and emitted a tapering cone of smoke from his pursed lips, regarding our visitor with narrowed eyes. “And your *gran’père*, also, Monsieur?” he asked.

“Yes, sir; and my great-great-grandfather, and his father. Not a man of my branch of the family since old Joshua Phipps has lived to see his children. Joshua fell dead across the threshold of his wife’s room ten minutes after she became a mother. Elijah, the son whom Joshua never saw, died in the last assault on Cornwallis’ works at Yorktown. News travelled slowly those days, but when the company returned to Massachusetts they told his widow of their captain’s death. All agreed he was shot through the lungs a little after ten in the morning. Half an hour earlier his wife had given birth to a son. That son died at Buena Vista the same day his son was born, and that son, my great-grandfather, was shot in the draft riots in New York during the Civil War. His twin children, a son and daughter, were born the same night. My grandfather died at San Juan Hill with Teddy Roosevelt the same day my father was born. I was born June 6, 1918 —”

“*Mordieu*, the day that your so glorious Marines met the *boche* at Château-Thierry —”

“Precisely, sir. I was born a little after noon. My father went down shortly after one o’clock, full o’ machine gun bullets as a pudding is of plums.

“Call it superstition, coincidence — anything you like — but I can’t shake off the thought of it —”

“*Parfaitement*,” the little Frenchman agreed. “The remembrance of these so strange deaths has bored into your inner consciousness like a maggot in a cheese. You are — how do you say in American? *Sans bouc* — goatless?”

“Exactly,” the other smiled wanly. “If it were something I could sink my hands in — something tangible that I could shoot or stick a bayonet into — I’d stand up to it and say, ‘You be damned!’ but it’s not. The men of my family — except old Joshua, perhaps — seem to have been pretty decent fellows. They fought their country’s battles; they paid their debts; they were good to their wives, but — there it is. The birth of a child is the death warrant of every Phipps descended from Joshua of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and I don’t mind admitting that it’s got my goat. I’ve been more than ordinarily successful in my work — I’m an architect, you know — I’ve several good commissions right now, but I just can’t seem to get my mind on ’em. I’ve as much to live for as most men — work, achievement,

possibly a woman’s love and children; but there’s this constant threat eating into me like a canker-worm, walking at my elbow, lying down to sleep with me and rising with me in the morning. I can’t shake it any more than I can my skin. It hangs on like Sinbad’s Old Man of the Sea. I’ve consulted half a dozen of these so-called occultists, even went to a clairvoyant and a couple of mediums.”

He gave a short, hard laugh. “Did they help? Like hell! They all say, ‘Fear nothing; evil from without cannot prevail against the good within!’ or some such fiddle-faddle. I’m not after fairy-tale comfort, Dr. de Grandin; I want some assurance of safety, if it’s to be had.

“Once I tried a psychoanalyst. He wasn’t much better than the other quacks. Used a lot of learned-sounding double-talk about relative subconsciousness, fear complexes and inhibitions, then assured me it was all in my mind — but you can damned well bet he couldn’t explain why all my male ancestors died as soon as they became fathers, and he didn’t attempt it. Now” — the young man looked almost challengingly into de Grandin’s thoughtful eyes — “they tell me you’ve an open mind. You don’t slop over about the spirits of the departed, but you don’t pooh-pooh any intimation of the supernatural. The mediums and occultists I’ve been to were a lot of ignorant charlatans. The psychoanalyst didn’t seem to grasp the idea that there’s something more than the merely natural behind all this — he waved aside everything that couldn’t be recorded on one of his instruments or hadn’t been catalogued by Freud. I believe that you can help if anybody can. If you can’t do something for me, God have mercy. His mercy didn’t seem to help my ancestors much.”

“I appreciate your confidence and frankness, Monsieur,” de Grandin answered. “Also, I concur in the pious wish that you may have the assistance of Deity. It may be true, as you say, that heaven’s mercy did little or nothing for your ancestors, but then in olden days Providence was not assisted by Jules de Grandin. Today the case is different.

“Suppose, now, we commence at the commencement, if you please. You have, perhaps, some intimation concerning the untimely taking-off of your forebears? You have heard some plausible reason why your so distinguished ancestor *Monsieur Josué* found death’s grinning countenance where he thought to look upon the features of his first-born?”

“Yes!” young Phipps answered tersely, a slight flush mounting to his face. “You’ll probably call it a lot o’ nonsense, but I’m convinced it’s — it’s a family curse!”

“U’m?” de Grandin thoughtfully selected a long black

cigar from the humidor, bit its end and struck a match. "You interest me, Monsieur. Who cursed your family, and why, if you please?"

"Here," Phipps drew a small brown-leather volume from his pocket and thrust it into the Frenchman's hand, "you'll find the history of it there. Obediah, Joshua's younger brother, wrote it in his diary way back in 1755. Start reading there; I've checked the pertinent entries in red," he indicated a dog-eared page of ancient, porous paper closely barred with fine writing in faded logwood ink. "Obediah's comments may seem melodramatic in the cold light of the Twentieth Century; but when we remember how Joshua fell strangled with blood at the entrance of his wife's chamber, and how his son and his son's sons died without seeing their children, it doesn't seem so overdrawn, after all. Something else: every man jack of 'em died in such a way that his mouth was smeared with blood. Oh, the old curse has been carried out to the letter, whether by coincidence or not!"

"U'm?" de Grandin repeated noncommittally, taking the slender book in his hand and examining its binding curiously.

It was a cap octavo volume, bound in beautifully tanned leather carved with scrolls, *oeils-de-boeuf* and similar ornaments dear to Eighteenth Century bookbinders. Across the back was stamped in gold:

OBEDIAH PHIPPS
HYS JOURNALL

"Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin rushed quickly through the book's yellowed leaves, then passed it to me, "have the kindness to read us what old Monsieur Obediah set down in the long ago. Me, I understand the barbarities of your language passably, but I think we shall get the fuller effect by hearing you read aloud. I should make sad hash of the old one's entries. Read on, my friend, like Monsieur Balaam's ass, I am all ears."

Adjusting my pince-nez I moved nearer the desk lamp, glanced hastily at the indicated page, then, bending closer, for the once-black ink had faded to pale sepia with the passage of two hundred years, I read:

"3d. Sep. 1775 — This day came the trained band from fighting with the French; Joshua my brother looking mighty fine and soldier-like in his scarlet coat and the long sword which swung from his baldric. With them are come a parcel of prisoners of war, holden at the King his Majesty's pleasure. Mostly children and young folk they be, and though they are idolaters and not of our Christian faith, I find it in my heart to pity their hard lot, for from this day they must be bearers of burdens, hewers of wood and drawers of water, bound to menial service to our people that the Commonwealth's substance be not eaten up in keeping them in idleness.

"What is it I say? Obediah, it is well you are for Harvard College and the law, for the sternness of the soldier's trade or

the fiery Gospel of the Lord of Hosts are things too hard for thee, meseemeth. And yet, while none shall hear me murmur openly against the fate of these poor wretches, I pity them with all my soul.

"One among them rouses my compassion most. A lissome chit of girl, she, with nut-brown hair and eyes as grey as the sea, and such a yearning in her pale, frightened child-face as might wring compassion from a stone. I hear tell she will be put on the block on Wednesday next, though it is understood that Brother Joshua shall have her for his household drudge in part requital of his valiant work against the Frenchmen and the Indians. If this be so, God pity the poor wench, for Joshua is a hard man and passionate, never sparing of himself or others, and prodigal with fist and whip to urge his servants unto greater diligence."

"*Eh bien, Monsieur,*" remarked de Grandin as I sought the next marked sage in the diary, "it seems this Monsieur Joshua of yours was the very devil of a fellow."

"Huh, you haven't got to first base yet," Phipps answered with a grimness of expression that belied the lightness of his words.

I found the second red-checked passage and began:

"29th Sep. 1755 — Have pity, gentle Saviour, for I, the meanest of thy creatures and a sinful man, harbor thoughts of blood and death against mine own kin. On Lord's Day I visited my brother, and as I made to enter at the kitchen did behold Marguerite DuPont, the Popish serving wench, bearing water from the well. A brace of heavy buckets, oaken-staved and bound with brass, she staggered under, and their weight was like to bear her down, had not I hastened to her succor.

"A look of passing wonder she gave me as I took the bucket-yoke from off her shoulders and placed it on mine own, and, '*Merci beaucoup, M'sieu*', she whispered, with the words dropping me a curtsy as though she were a free woman and mine equal in station.

"Her hands are red and rough with toil, but small and finely made, and in die greyness of her eyes dwells that to make a man's heart beat the faster. Perchance she is a witch, like most of the idolaters, as Parson did expound at meeting that same morning. Howbeit, she is very fair to look on, nor do I take shame to myself for that I took her burden on me.

"'*C'est le sabbat, n'est-ce-pas, M'sieu*'?" she asks me as I set the buckets down beside the doorstep, and when I nodded she looked at me so sadly I was like to weep for very pity.

"Then from the bodice of her gown she drew a tiny cross-shaped thing, a bit of sinful vanity shaped like the cross whereon our Lord suffered for the vileness of mankind, and would have raised the symbol to her lips.

"'What means this heathenry, ye Papist slut?' bellows Brother Joshua, bursting from the house-door like a watchdog from his kennel at scent of a marauder. 'What means this demonry in a Christian man's house?'" with which he struck the fond thing from her hand and caught her such a cuff upon the ear that down she fell beside it.

"The lass picked up the cross and would have hid it in her dress again, but Joshua was quicker, and ground it under heel,

well-nigh crushing her frail hand therewith.

"She sprang up like a pantheress, her mild eyes all aflame, and defied him to his face.

"Thou harlot's brat, I'll learn ye to act so to your betters!" raged he, and struck her on the mouth with his clenched hand, so that the blood flowed down her chin and onto her kirtle.

"Nay, brother," I opposed, 'entreat her not thus spitefully. 'Tis Lord's Day, and she, of all the townfolk, labours. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy ... thou and thy manservant and thy maidservant..." As for her vanity, bethink you that her faith, mistaken though it be, is dear to her as ours is to us.'

"Now, as the Lord liveth," swear Brother Joshua, 'meseemeth thou art half a Papist thyself, Obediah. Whence comes this sudden courage to champion the Popish bitch? The Sabbath Day, quotha? at knoweth she of sabbaths, save those wherein the witches and warlocks make merry? Rest and meditation on the Sabbath are for the Lord's elect, not such as she. Now go thy ways, and quickly, lest I forget thou art my brother, and do thee injury.'

"Lord Christ, forgive! In that wild moment I could have slain him where he stood, nor had a thought of guilt for doing it. In will, if not in act, I am another Cain!"

"2d. Nov. '55," the next marked entry read. "At college, hard at work upon the middle voice of Greek, yet making sorry business of it.

"*Mea culpa*, — I have sinned. Into my heart hath crept a lustful and unhallowed love for Marguerite DuPont, the kitchen-drudge.

"What boots it is she be a bondmaid and a servant of the Antichrist? What matter though she be joined to her idols like Ephraim of old? Surely, though we approach God through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, or through His maid-mother Mary, the goal we seek is still the same, however different be our roads. And yet I may not tell her of my love; I dare not clip her in mine arms and whisper 'dear-meats to her. She is my brother's thing and chattel, bound even as his blackamoors and Indians are bound, though by the letter of the law she is a war-captive and subject to release on ransom or exchange. Woe me, that I have loved a Hagar in the tents of Abraham!"

"Name of a small blue man, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin tweaked the ends of his diminutive mustache, "I think I sniff the odour of romance here. Read on, I pray. I burn, I itch, I am consumed with curiosity."

"9th June, '56," I read, turning to the next marked entry. "O Lord Christ, fill me plenteously with Thy love, for love of woman never shall be mine! This day sennite Marguerite gave birth to a man-child. She holds her peace right stubbornly, though many of the goodwives, and even Parson himself, have urged her to declare her partner in iniquity that he may stand his trial with her for adultery. Anon, when she is taken from her bed, she must make recompense for her sin, and if her paramour be not discovered, must bear the scarlet symbol of concupiscence alone upon her bosom to her life's end.

"Brother Joshua shows strange kindness for one so stern and upright. The child is cared for by his orders, and he has even

visited the wretched mother in the outhouse where she lies. Forgive me, brother, I did wrong thee when I said thy heart was flint.

"The child is dark, unlike its mother, and well favoured withal. 'Tis pity it must go through life as *filius nullius*, according to the lawmen's phrase."

"5th Dec. '56," the next entry was headed. "My brother builds a house without the town. Foundations are already digged, and soon the chimneys will be raised. The idea likes me much, for when the building is completed he will take Marguerite and the child there, and she shall thus have respite from the townfolk's jeers.

"11th Dec. '56 — My brother's charity is interpreted. 'Twas passing strange that he who would have rayed a flea for hide and tallow should have spent his substance on a bond-woman's brat. Her bastard? Nay, his own! The child she bore was his, and he who calls himself a man of war and valiant battler for the Lord, has taken refuge from his shame behind a woman's petticoat, and left her lonely to bear calumny, while she for very loyalty to her child's sire forbore to name him to the elders, however much they pressed her to declare her paramour.

"25th. Dec. 1756 — O Marguerite, my Marguerite, how fondly have I loved thee! I had e'en thought of asking thee for wife and giving my name to thy brat, but now it is too late — have pity, Heaven! — too late!

"Marguerite is no more, and on my brother's brow is graved indelibly the brand of Cain. From Cujo his blackamoor slave I have the tale, and though I may not denounce him, for I have but my own word, sith word of slave may not be taken in the court against the master, I here and now brand him a murderer. Joshua my brother, *Thou art the man!*

"Together with his black slaves and his Indians, as precious a crew of cut-throats as ever hanged in chains, my brother went to his new house to lay the hearth, and with him went the child and Marguerite. In the darkness of the night they heard her singing to the babe as she gave suck, a wanton song wherewith the Popists greet the Christmas-tide, '*Venite adoremus.*'

"What means this heathenry within a half-built Christian house?" asks Brother Joshua, and catches her a smart cuff on the ear so that the child fell down upon the floor, and as it set up a wailing he spurned it with his foot. Thereat my Marguerite rose up and snatched a dagger from her dress and wounded him full sore, for she was like a she-bear when it sees its cub threatened.

"By Abraham and Isaac, and by the Joshua whose name I bear, I'll lay the hearthstone of my house according to the ancient rites!" my brother swears. "My house shall have to guard it that which none other in the colony can boast!"

"And then they digged a great hole in the earth before the fireplace, and laid her bound therein, and rolled the hearth-slab forward to cement it over her.

"So when she knew her end was come, and all hope fled, she cursed him in the English tongue she scarce could frame to form aright.

"Wo to thee, soiler of the innocent and hider of thy shame," she told him. 'The wrath of God be on thy head and countenance, and on thy sons and thy sons' sons from generation unto generation. May thou and thy descendants drink blood in the day thy first-born is delivered. May thou and thy seed never

look upon the faces of thy children or on thy wives in motherhood, and may this curse endure while hatred lasts!”

“What more she would have said they know not, for even Joshua paled before her maledictions, and gave the signal for the stone to be put in its place.”

De Grandin was leaning forward, his little round blue eyes fixed on me in a set, unwinking stare as I turned to the next entry. Young Phipps, too, sat rigidly, and it seemed to me the very air of my peaceful study was pregnant with the presence of those tragic actors in the old New England tragedy.

“3rd. Mar. ’58,” I read. “Joshua this day intermarried with Martha Partridge.”

The next item was the last in the book, and seemed much later than the others, for the ink retained some semblance of its original blackness.

“25th Dec. 1758 — The curse has fallen. This night Martha my brother’s wife, who hath been gravid, was delivered of a son whom they will call Elijah. Joshua sate before the fire in his great chair, gazing into the flames and on the hearth-stone which hides the evidence of the filthy act he wrought two little years ago, and thinking the Lord God only knows what thoughts. Did you see Marguerite’s pale face in the flames, brother; did the wind in the chimney recall her pleading voice as you waited the midwife’s summons to ascend the stairs?”

“Anon they came and said he had a son, and straightaway he rose up and went to look on him. But at the entrance of the chamber he fell down like Sisera of old when Jael smote him. And in that moment salt and bitterness were in his mouth, for from his lips gushed forth a bloody spate that dyed his beard and stained the oaken planking of the floor. He never saw the features of his lawful first-born son.

“Have pity, Jesu!”

It was dead-still in the study as I closed the little book. The soft hiss of a pine log in the fireplace sounded through the shadows, and the hooting of a motor horn outside came to us like a doleful period to the tale of futile love and stark tragedy.

“It sounds fantastic to me,” I commented as I returned the book to young Phipps. “I remember the Arcadians were expatriated by the New England colonists during King George’s War — Longfellow tells the story in *Evangeline* — but I never heard the poor devils were made virtual slaves by the New Englanders, or that they —”

“Many unpleasant things concerning our histories we forget easily, my friend,” de Grandin reminded with a slightly sarcastic smile. “Your Monsieur Whittier the realist takes up the tale where Monsieur Longfellow the romanticist leaves off. However” — he raised his shoulders in a shrug — “why hold resentment? The crimes the ancestors committed against New France was nobly atoned for by

their descendants. Did not your soldiers from New England pour out virile young blood like water in two vast transfusions — twice in one generation, by blue! when *la belle France* bled white with the *sale boche’s* bayonet wounds? At Cantigny and Château-Thierry and in the Argonne and on the beaches of Normandy they died all gloriously, while the descendants of those very Arcadians rested comfortably at home, enjoying the protection of Britain’s arm, making no move to help the land whence they had sprang — *parbleu*, I damn think they had sprang too far!”

“But that other,” I protested. “Burying a live woman under a hearthstone — why, it’s incredible. They might have done such things in heathen times, but —”

“*Hélas*, Friend Trowbridge, your ecclesiastical learning is little better than your knowledge of history,” de Grandin cut in. “Those old ones, Christian as well as pagan, laid the foundations of their houses, forts and even churches in blood. Yes.

“Saint Columba, founder of the abbey of Inona, inhumed one of his monks named Oran alive beneath the walls because he feared the demons of the earth might tear the holy structure down unless appeased by human sacrifice. Later historians have endeavored to sugar-coat the facts — later writers have revised the tale of *Chaperone Rouge* to make the little girl and her *gran’mère* come forth alive from the wolf’s belly, also.

“Again, no later than 1885, was found another evidence of such deeds done by Christians. That year the parish church of Holsworthy, in north Devonshire, England, was restored. In the southwest angle-wall the workmen found a human skeleton interred; its mouth — and nose-places were stopped with mortar. The evidence was plain; it was a live-burial designed to make the walls stand firm because of human sacrifice to the earth-demons. Once more: In tearing down an ancient house in Lincolnshire the workmen found a baby’s skeleton beneath the hearth. Yes, my friends, such things were done, doubtlessly, in olden days, and our Monsieur Joshua was but reviving a dead-but-not-forgotten custom of the past when he declared he’d lay the hearthstone of his house according to the ancient rites.”

“H’m,” I reflected, “it hardly seems possible such bigotry could have obtained so late, though. Just think, the Revolutionary War began only fifteen years later, yet here was a man so intolerant that —”

“*Eh bien*, again you do forget, my friend,” the little Frenchman chuckled. “Your war of revolution had been fought and won, also your second war with England, and our so glorious Revolution was a *fait accompli* while yet the Catholics burned Protestant and Jew with fine impartiality. It was not till the year that Andrew Jackson held New Orleans from the British — 1814 — that the last *auto da fé*

had been held in Spain. And not till 1829 were Catholics granted civil rights in England. Until that time they could not vote or hold a public office — yet the legislation to enfranchise them met with violent, bloody opposition. The soldiers had to be called out to put down ‘anti-Papist’ mobs. But we indulge in reminiscence unduly. It is with Monsieur Phipps’ problem we must deal.

“Tell me,” he turned to the visitor, “is this house of blood and sorrow where your wicked ancestor met death still standing, and if so, where?”

“Yes,” Phipps replied. “I’ve never been there, but it’s still owned by the family, though it’s been unoccupied for twenty-five years or more. I’m told it’s in remarkably good condition. It stands just outside the present city of Woolwich, Massachusetts.”

De Grandin drummed thoughtfully on the desk top. “I think it would be well for us to go there, my friend.”

“What, out to that old ruin, now?”

“*Précisément*. When water is polluted one seeks the source of the stream. It seems to me the fountainhead of the doom resting on your menfolk may be that unhallowed grave where Marguerite DuPont lies buried without benefit of clergy or the tribute of a single tear, save such as your great-uncle Obediah may have shed for her in secret.”

“Cab, sir? Taxi? Take you to the best hotel in town,” a lean, lank Yankee youth challenged as we alighted from the B. & M. train and lugged our handbags from the Woolwich station.

“*Holà, mon brave*,” de Grandin challenged in his turn, “you know the country hereabouts, I doubt not — and the old landmarks, yes?”

“Ought to,” the other answered with a grin, “been here all my life.”

“*Très bon*. You are the man we seek, and none other. Can you deliver us in good condition at the old Phipps homestead — you know that place?”

An expression of blank amazement came to the Jehu’s lean, weather-stained face. The Frenchman’s request, it appeared, was comparable to that of a tourist in Naples asking to be driven to the rim of Vesuvius’ crater.

“D’ye mean ye want to go there?”

“Assuredly. It stands and may be readied, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Oh, yeah, you can *git* there a’ right, but —”

“But getting back is something else again, one is to understand? No matter. Do you transport us thither. We shall take responsibility for getting back.”

The youth led us to a dilapidated Ford which seemed in the last stages of paralysis agitans and took almost as much coaxing as a balky mule to get underway.

For half an hour we drove through wide well-kept streets and along a smooth highway, finally headed up a rutted clay

road to the cedar-pillared entrance of a weed-choked park. “This is as far’s I go,” our driver announced as he brought the limping vehicle to a halt.

“But no, it is that we desire assistance with the luggage,” de Grandin protested, only to meet with a determined shake of the head.

“Not me, Mister. I contracted to bring ye here, an’ I done it, but nothin’ was said about my goin’ into that place, an’ I ain’t a-goin’ —”

“Eh, what is it you tell me?” de Grandin tweaked the ends of his mustache. “Is it a place of evil reputation?”

“*Is* it? Say, brother, you couldn’t get th’ State Militia to camp there overnight. ’Course, I don’t believe in ghosts or nothin’ like that, but —”

“*Mais certainement*, so much is evident,” de Grandin’s features creased in one of his quick elfin smiles, “but you would not test your disbelief too strongly, is it not? Very well, we thank you for the transportation. As to that in which you disbelieve so staunchly, we shall endeavor to cope with it unaided, and with the burden of our luggage, also.”

The old Phipps mansion was, as Edwin Phipps had told us, in remarkably good repair for its age and the neglect it had suffered during the past quarter-century. The door that pierced the centre of the building was of adz-cut timber, roughly smoothed with a jack-plane and hung on massive “Holy Lord” hinges of hand-wrought iron. It seemed strong enough to withstand a siege supported by anything less than modern artillery.

Edwin produced a key of hammered brass massive enough to have locked the Bastille, fitted it to the iron-rimmed keyhole and shot back the bolts. Hardly conscious that I did so, I wondered that the lock should work so smoothly after years of disuse.

“*Entrez*,” de Grandin stood aside and waved us forward; “the great adventure is begun, my friends.”

The room we entered was like the setting of a stage. Obviously it was originally intended as both entrance-hall and living room, possibly as dining room as well. Lofty and paneled in some sort of age-darkened wood, with a fireplace large enough to drive a limousine through, it gave that impression of immensity and chill one gets in going through a Continental cathedral. A broad staircase, balustraded in hand-wrought oak, ran to a gallery whence three doors, one to the right, two to the left, gave off. There were also doors letting through the right wall of the hall, but none to the left. At the stairway’s foot, by way of newel post, stood a massive bronze cannon, muzzle down, evidently the spoil of some raid led by old Joshua against the French, for engraved on its breech were the Bourbon arms and a regal crown surmounting a flourishing capital *L*. In the centre of the hall was a great table of Flemish oak; several straight-backed

chairs, faded and mouldering with age, stood sentry against the walls. Before the monstrous fireplace, almost on the hearthstone, yawned a massive armchair upholstered in tattered Spanish leather. I wondered if this could be the “great chair” in which old Joshua sat when the midwife came to call him to his son, and to the doom pronounced on him and his by Marguerite DuPont.

De Grandin glanced about the place and shook his shoulders as if a chill more bitter than that of the December day had pierced his fur-lined greatcoat. “*Pour l’amour d’un bouc*, a little fire would help this place immensely,” he murmured. “Phipps, my friend, do you dispose our belongings as seems good to you. Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, by your leave you and I will sally forth in search of fuel for yonder fireplace.”

We had included a pair of Boy Scout axes in our outfit, and in a few minutes cut a plentiful supply of dry wood from the fallen trees in the grove behind the house.

“How is it with your nose, my friend” he asked as we stacked our forage by the rear door — the very door where Obediah Phipps had taken Marguerite DuPont’s burden on his shoulders.

“My nose?” I looked inquiringly at him.

“*Précisément*. Your nose, your proboscis; the thing with which you smell.”

“I hadn’t noticed anything wrong —”

“So? Did you detect a strange smell in the house?”

“H’m. There’s that mingling of dust and dry leather, mildew and decay you always smell in old houses, particularly those that have been shut up a long —”

“*Mais non*, it was not that. I can not quite place it, and I am puzzled. It is a sort of blending of the odours of naphtha and linseed oil —”

“About the only place you’re likely to smell that would be a printshop. Printer’s ink is made of —”

“*Mordieu!*” he slapped me on the shoulder. “*Tu parles, mon vieux! L’imprimerie* — the printing-office, yes! The place where they spread ink containing linseed oil and naphtha and the good God knows what else on the type, then wash it off with benzine. Why should there be a smell like that in this old house, I ask to know?” He eyed me fiercely, almost accusingly.

“Haven’t the slightest idea. I hadn’t noticed it. Perhaps your nose played tricks on you. These old houses are as full of strange smells as —”

“As my poor head shall be of maggots until the mystery is solved,” he supplied. “No matter; we can give it our attention in the morning. Meanwhile we have our work to do, and me, I am most vilely hungry.

“*Mille pardons*, little one,” he murmured almost humbly as he crossed the wide slate hearthstone to lay logs in the fireplace, “we do not tread upon your grave with wanton

feet.”

Dinner was a simple meal: Fried eggs and bacon and potatoes washed down with strong boiled coffee, tinned biscuit thickly spread with Camembert and a bottle of Saint Estephe which de Grandin had insisted on bringing. Camp cots were set up on the freestone floor of the great hall, and we rolled ourselves in several thicknesses of blankets before ten o’clock had sounded on de Grandin’s little travelling timepiece. “*Bonne nuit, mes braves*,” the little Frenchman murmured sleepily. “Let us sleep like the clear conscience; we have much to do tomorrow.”

The fire had died down to a sullen smouldering embers, and shadows once more held dominion in the great cold hall when I awakened with a start. Had I been dreaming, or had there been a Presence bending over me? I wondered as I opened sleepy eyes and looked about. Whatever it had been, it had not been hostile, I knew. Just for a moment I had sensed something, something white and misty, bending above me, a pleasant, comforting something like a mother soothing her child in the night — smooth, calming hands passing lightly over my features, a gentle murmuring voice, a faintly familiar scent breathed through the darkness.

“Trowbridge, *mon ami*,” de Grandin’s whisper came, “did you see — did you feel it?”

“Ye-es, I think so —” I began, but stopped abruptly at the sound from Edwin Phipps’ cot.

“*Ug — ou!*” Half exclamation, half frightened, strangling cry it was, and in the quarter-light we saw him rear upright in his blankets, wrestling with a thing invisible to us.

“It — something tried to choke me!” he gasped as de Grandin and I rushed to his aid. “I was asleep and dreamed someone — a woman, I think — bent over me, stroking my cheeks and forehead, then suddenly it — whatever it was — seemed to change, to go as savage as a lunatic, and grasped me by the throat. Lord, I thought I was a dead pigeon!”

He rose from his cot, accepted a sip of brandy from de Grandin’s flask, and felt his neck gingerly. “‘Spect it was a dream,” he murmured with a shamefaced grin, “but ‘such stuff as dreams are made on’ is mighty solid hereabouts if it were.”

I was about to make some soothing commonplace remark when de Grandin’s minatory hiss and upraised finger cut me short. Distinctly through the outside darkness came the echo of a shot, a second one, and a woman’s wailing, terrified scream, both curiously faint and far-away seeming.

We waited tensely a moment, then, as the woman’s cry repeated, de Grandin snatched up his coat and tiptoed to the front door. As he flung it open the muffled quality of the sounds was explained. While we slept before the fire a sleet-storm had come up, and though there was but little wind the icy dribble fell with a hiss almost menacing as that of a

snake.

An indistinct form blundered through the sleet-stabbed dark; it was not well-defined — a sort of something mantled in light-colored draperies weaving to and fro as if it lacked the sense of sight, or followed a zigzagging trail. Now and again it stopped with raised arms, then bowed above the ice-glazed ground and criss-crossed back and forth, clashing into shrubs, caroming from tree to bush to broken garden ornament. “What is it?” I asked uneasily. There was that about the lurching form which made me unwilling to see it at close quarters.

“*Parbleu*, it is a woman!” Jules de Grandin exclaimed, and even as he answered came the faint, exhausted hail:

“Help! Help; please help me!”

Together the Frenchman and I dashed into the storm, seized the half-fainting girl and dragged her to the shelter of the house.

“Thanks!” she gasped as we brought her into the hall. “I think I’d have been done for in another moment. If — you — hadn’t —” her voice broke, and she slumped down, an inert wet huddle on the freestone floor.

“*Grand Dieu*, Friend Trowbridge, see; it is that she is wounded!” cried de Grandin as he bent to raise her. “*Assistez-moi, s’il vous plaît.*”

On the left sleeve of her suede trench coat showed a spot of angry red, and as I helped him take away the garment I saw the leather was pierced by two small holes, one at the rear of the sleeve, the other at the front. Obviously, a bullet-wound.

Working quickly, we removed her overcoat and Fair Isle sports vest, then washed and bandaged the wound as best we could. For lack of better styptic we made a pack of boric acid powder, of which we fortunately had a small can, and crushed aspirin tablets, thus approximating Senn’s first-aid dressing. For bandages we requisitioned three clean handkerchiefs from de Grandin’s dressing-case, and tore a towel lengthwise to knot it round her neck for a sling.

“How comes it, Mademoiselle, that you flee wounded through the storm?” de Grandin asked as he lowered the glass of brandy-and-water from her lips. “What *sacré tête* has done this monstrous thing?”

The girl gave him a smile that was half grin, and wrinkled her nose at him. “I only wish I knew,” she answered. “If I could get him up my alley —” She broke off with a wince of pain, then took command of herself again.

“Joe Darnley and I were driving home from Branchmoore when this storm came down on us like a circus tent collapsing. Something went wrong with the gadget that works the jiggermacrank just as we came to the lane leading here. The storm had got us all confused, and neither of us knew just where we were, so while he got out to tinker with the thingununy in the engine I took the flash and looked for

landmarks. Just as he got the doololly fixed and we were ready to start, another car came rushing down the road — no lights, either! — and someone in it shouted for us to get the hell out o’ there. Guess we didn’t move fast enough, for they started shooting, and I felt something like a blow from a fist, then a hornet-sting, on my left arm. It hurts like fury, too!” She made a little face, then turned to de Grandin with a brave effort at a smile.

“Joe Darnley’s a swine. The contemptible thing stepped on the gas and left me there, wounded and lost. I screamed for help and started to run — not in any special direction; just run, that’s all. Presently I saw your light and — here I am.” She gave the Frenchman another friendly smile, then seemed to stiffen with sudden frightened realization.

“I say, this is the old Phipps house, isn’t it? Who — who are you? I thought this place was deserted — I’ve always heard it was haunted by —” She broke off with another effort at a smile, but it was not highly successful.

“*Eh bien*,” de Grandin chuckled, “the story is a long one, Mademoiselle. However, we are here quite lawfully, I assure you. *Permettez-moi*. This is Monsieur Edwin Phipps, one of the owners of the property; this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, of Harrisonville, New Jersey. I am Jules de Grandin of Paris and elsewhere, and all of us are at your service.”

She nodded in frank friendliness. “It’s no mere figure of speech when I say I’m glad to meet you. My name’s DuPont — Marguerite DuPont, of Woolwich, Massachusetts. I’m assistant at the public library, and very much in debt to you gentlemen for services rendered.”

“Good gracious!” I exclaimed.

“Marguerite DuPont!” young Phipps repeated in a sort of awed whisper.

“*Sacré nom d’un fromage bleu!*” swore Jules de Grandin.

She looked at us with puzzled resentment. “What’s the matter? DuPont’s a good name, isn’t it?”

“God?” de Grandin echoed. “*O, la la!* It is an excellent-good name, indeed!” Then:

“Your pardon, Mademoiselle. The name DuPont is intimately connected with the tragedy of this old house, and with the bloody doom that dogs the family that owns it. Tomorrow, or the next day, or the next day after that, when you are feeling stronger, we shall explain in detail. Now, if you please, you shall lie down and rest, and we shall take especial pains that no harm comes to one of your name in this place, of all others.”

After some good-natured argument we agreed the girl should occupy Phipps’s cot, for the identity of the charming guest’s name with that of the author of the family curse seemed to have unnerved the youngster, and he declared sleep impossible.

Nevertheless, we all dropped off after a time, de Grandin

once more rolled in his blankets like an Indian, I lying on my cot and watching the flames of the replenished fire, the girl sleeping lightly as a child, her cheek pillowed on her uninjured hand; Phipps hunched in his ancestor's great chair before the fireplace.

It was Marguerite's scream that wakened me. Bolt upright, wide awake as if sleep had not visited my lids, I looked about the great dark hall. Phipps still sat in the great armchair before the dying fire, de Grandin, apparently, slept undisturbed in his blankets; Marguerite DuPont sat erect in bed, lips parted to emit another scream.

A creak on the wide oaken stairs diverted my attention from the frightened girl. Slowly, seeming more to float than walk, a tall, white shrouded figure came toward us.

"*Conjuro te, sceleratissime, abire ad tuum locum!*" the sonorous Latin words of exorcism rang through the high-ceiled hall as de Grandin, now thoroughly awake, hurled them at the ceremented figure bearing down on us.

He paused a moment, as though testing the efficacy of the spell, and from the fluttering folds of the advancing specter's winding-sheet there came a peal of wild, derisive laughter.

I caught my breath in dismay, for the laughter seemed completely infernal, mad as a cachinnating echo from a madhouse, sounding the death-knell of sanity, but Jules de Grandin advanced on the apparition. "*Ha, so Monsieur le Fantôme*, you are not to be deterred by words? You try to make one *sacré singe* of Jules de Grandin? Perhaps you have an appetite for this?"

The speed with which he snatched the little Belgian automatic from his pocket was incredible, and the shots followed in such quick succession that they seemed like a single prolonged report.

The mocking laughter stopped abruptly as a tuned-out radio, and the sheeted thing swayed for a moment then fell head-foremost down the wide stairway.

"Good heavens!" I gasped. "I — I thought it was a — a—"

"*Un fantôme?*" de Grandin supplied with a half amused, half hysterical laugh. "Me, I think that that was the intention of the masquerade, and I damnation think they set their stage poorly. In the first dullness of awakening I also was deceived, but I heard a stair creak underneath his foot, and ghosts do not cause creaky boards to squeak. *Alors*, I turned from exorcism to execution, and" — he indicated the sheet-swathed form — "it seems I made a real ghost where there was a make-believe before. I have skill at that, my friend. Oh, yes."

Bending over the white cheesecloth-wrapped figure he drew the cerements aside. The man beneath was naked to the waist and wore a pair of corduroy trousers tucked into

Army-surplus combat boots. Six bullet-wounds, as blue as bruises and hardly bleeding at all, were pitted in his left breast in a space that could be covered by a man's hand. From the corners of his mouth twin threads of blood trickled, indicting pleural haemorrhage.

"Why, it's Claude Phipps!" the DuPont girl gasped in an awe-struck voice. Frightened almost senseless when she thought she saw a ghost, she showed only a sort of fascinated curiosity at sight of the dead body.

"Eh, what is it you say, Mademoiselle — Phipps?" de Grandin queried sharply.

"Yes, sir. Claude Phipps. He's always been a wild sort, never seemed to keep a job, but just a little while ago he started making money. Big money, too. Everybody thought he played the races. Maybe so. I wouldn't know. His family's lived in Woolwich since I don't know when, and last year he and Marcia Hopkins were married and built a lovely home over at Marrowfield. But now —"

"But now, indeed, Mademoiselle," de Grandin cut in. "One wonders. There is more here than we see. This childish masquerade of ghosts; the warning you and your unvalorous escort received, your wounding —"

"Down, my friends! *Ventre à terre!* Keep from the light!" Matching his command with performance, he flattened himself to the floor and the rest of us followed instant suit.

Nor were we a second too quick. The thunderous roar of sawed-off shotguns bellowed even as we dropped, and a shower of slugs whistled over us.

The Frenchman's little pistol barked a shrewish rejoinder, and Edwin Phipps, revolver in hand, wriggled across the floor, firing rapidly. Somebody screamed in the dark and the crash of rending wood was followed by a hurtling body striking the hall floor with a thud. The ensuing silence was almost deafening; then a whimper from the fallen man before us and a piteous groan from the balcony told us the battle was ended with all casualties on the other side.

By the light of our electric torches we examined our late foemen. The man who fell from the balcony when the balustrade gave way had shattered his left tibia and fractured his left clavicle. The man above was shot through the right shoulder and left thigh, neither wound being serious except for profuse haemorrhage.

For a few minutes, with improvised bandages and splints, de Grandin and I worked feverishly. We were rigging a crude Spanish windlass to staunch the bleeding from our late enemy's leg when Marguerite called shrilly: "Fire! The house is burning!"

"My God!" our patient begged hoarsely. "Get us out o' here, quick! There's two drums o' benzine in th' cellar, an' — Quick, Mister. There's a car hid in th' woodshed!"

No second warning was necessary. We piled the wounded men on cots and rushed them from the house, found the

Cadillac concealed in the crumbling woodshed and set the motor going. Five minutes later, with Marguerite for pilot, we started down the road for Woolwich.

We did not take our departure too soon. The house, entirely of wood save for its chimneys and hall-paving, was burning like an English village balefire on Guy Fawkes Day before we reached the highway. Before we'd travelled half a mile there came a muted detonation and showers of sparks and burning brands shot into the sleet-stabbed December night.

"That would be *le pétrole*," murmured Jules de Grandin sadly. "It seems our task is somewhat delayed by this night's business."

"How's that?" I asked.

"It is that we must wait until the embers of that wicked house have cooled — a week, perhaps — before we draw the fires of the old grudge," he replied enigmatically.

The story that the wounded men told the police surgeon to whom we turned them over was not particularly novel. Claude Phipps, ne'er-do-well descendant of the proud old family, had grown to manhood with all the vices and few, if any, of the virtues of his ancestors. His widowed mother had sufficient money to send him to art school, but not enough to support him as a dilettante, and his attempts to support himself were abortive. He was one of those who could be trained but not taught; though he could copy almost anything with photographic fidelity he had no more ability to compose a picture than his brush or palette or mahl-stick. Enraged at failure and on the brink of actual starvation, he took up engraving as a trade and had no difficulty in earning high wages, but his passion for expensive living and his frustrated snobbery made a prosperous craftsman's life distasteful. Since boyhood he had consorted with petty criminals, race touts, petty gamblers and the like, and when one of these introduced him to an ex-convict who had been a counterfeiter the result was predictable as the outcome of a motion picture mystery. He became the chief engraver of the ring, the two men we had captured were his plant-printer and assistant; the former convict and his associates distributed the product.

The evil legends of the old Phipps homestead and the fact that it had been untenanted for years provided them a cheap and relatively safe headquarters, and their plant was set up in the cellar, while the sleeping rooms upstairs provided them with a *pied-à-terre*. Once or twice neighbours had attempted half-hearted investigation of strange lights and sounds observed there after dark, but the ghost-outfit with which the unbidden tenants had provided themselves, accompanied by appropriately eerie shrieks and demoniacal laughter, discouraged amateur detectives.

Recently, however, Treasury operatives had been

becoming uncomfortably inquisitive, and "the boss" had ordered operations discontinued when one last lot of spurious bills had been printed. It was with the fear of the Secret Service in their minds that Claude and his assistants had discovered Marguerite and her escort apparently reconnoitering the approaches of the house and fired on them.

The two survivors were for shooting us at once when our presence was discovered, for they had no doubt we were Treasury operatives, but Claude prevailed on them to let him try his spectral masquerade before resorting to firearms.

"U'm," de Grandin murmured thoughtfully as the wounded man concluded his recital. "This Monsieur Claude of yours, he lived at Mallowfield, did he not? Will you be good enough to furnish us his address?"

As soon as our business with the police was concluded he rushed from the station house and hailed a taxicab. "To 823 Founders' Road, Mallowfield," he ordered, and all the way through the long drive he seemed almost like a victim of acute chorea.

A light burned in the upper front room of the pretty little suburban villa before which the taximan deposited us, and through a rear window showed another gleam of lamplight. A large closed car was parked at the curb, and as we passed it I espied the device of a Mercury's caduceus on its license plate, thus proclaiming its owner a member of the medical fraternity.

No answer came to de Grandin's sharp ring at the doorbell, and he gave a second imperative summons before a light quick step sounded beyond the white-enamelled panels. A pleasant-faced woman in hospital white opened the door and regarded us with a half-welcoming, half-inquiring smile. "Yes?" she asked.

"Madame Phipps? She is here — she may be seen?" de Grandin asked, and for once his self-assurance seemed to have deserted him.

The nurse laughed outright. "She's here, but I don't think you can see her just now. She had a little son — her first — two hours ago."

"*Sacré nom! Le sort* — the ancient curse — it still holds!" he exclaimed. "I knew it, I was certain; I was positive we should find this, but I had to prove it! Consider: Monsieur Claude the worthless, I shot him some two hours ago; he died with blood upon his mouth, and almost in that same moment his wife became the mother of his firstborn. This is no business of the monkey with which we deal, *mon ami; mille nons*; it is a matter of the utmost gravity. But certainly." He nodded solemnly.

"Nonsense!" I broke in. "It's just coincidence, a gruesome one, I'll grant you, but — Well, I still say it's just coincidence."

"You may have right," he agreed sombrely. "But men

have died with blood upon their mouths by such coincidences as this since 1758. Unless we can —”

“Can what?” I prompted as we retraced our steps toward the waiting taxi.

“No matter. Hereafter we must deal in deeds, not words, Friend Trowbridge.”

It was almost a week before the fire-ravaged ruins of the old house cooled sufficiently to permit us to rummage among charred timbers and fallen bricks. The great central chimney stood like the lone survivor of a burned forest among the blackened wreckage. The heat-blasted paving of the hall, supported by the arches of the vaulted cellar, remained intact, as did the mighty fireplace with its arch of fieldstone; otherwise the house was but a rubble of burned joists and fallen brick.

The little Frenchman had been busily engaged during the intervening time, making visits here and there, interviewing this one and that, accumulating stray bits of information from any source which offered, particularly interviewing the French Canadian priest who served the Catholic parish within the confines of which the ancient house had stood.

Beginning with a call of perfunctory politeness to inquire concerning her wound, Edwin Phipps had spent more and more time in Marguerite DuPont’s company. What they talked of as they sat before the pleasant open fire of her cottage while he assisted her with tea things, lighted her cigarette and otherwise made his two hale hands do duty for her injured member I do not know, but that their brief acquaintanceship was ripening into something stronger was evidenced by the glances and covert smiles they exchanged — silent messages intended to deceive de Grandin and me, but plainly read as hornbook type.

I was not greatly surprised when Edwin drove Marguerite up to the site of the old house late in the forenoon of the day appointed by de Grandin for “*la grande experience*.”

Beside the little Frenchman, with stole adjusted and service book open, stood Father Cloutier of the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Near the cleric, viewing the scene with a mixture of professional dignity and wondering expectation, stood Ricardo Paulo, sexton of the church and funeral director, and near him was an open casket with the white silk of its tufted lining shining in the bright December sunshine.

From a roll of burlap de Grandin produced a short, strong crowbar, inserted its wedge-end between the slate hearthstone and the pavement, and threw his weight upon the lever. “Quick, Friend Trowbridge, lend me your bulk,” he panted, bearing heavily upon the bar. “I lack the weight to budge it, me!”

I joined him, bore down on the crowbar, and wrenched the iron sidewise at the same time. The great slab came

away from its anchorage, tilted obliquely a moment, then rolled back.

Before us lay a stone-walled crypt some two and a half feet deep by four feet wide, more than six feet long, floored with a bed of sand. I am not certain just what I expected; a skeleton, perhaps; perhaps a desiccated lich, kiln-dried from long immurement in a crypt before the great fireplace.

A girl, young slim and delicate, lay on the sand that floored the catacomb. From linen cap to heavy brogans decorated with brass knuckles she was carefully arrayed as if clad to attend a town meeting of old Woolwich. True, her wrists were bound together with a rawhide thong, but the fingers of her hands lay placidly together as though folded in prayer, and her face was calm and peaceful as the faces of few who die “naturally” in bed are.

But what amazed me most was the startling resemblance between the dead girl and Marguerite DuPont who even now came timidly to look upon the features that had lain beneath the stone of sacrifice for almost two hundred years.

“A-a-ah!” de Grandin let his breath out slowly between his teeth. “*La pauvre, la pauvre belle creature!* Now, *Monsieur le Curé*, is the time —”

Something — a wisp of vapour generated by the burning of the house and confined in a cranny of the hearth-grave, perhaps — wafted from the martyred French girl’s tomb and floated lightly in the chill midwinter air. Next instant Edwin Phipps had fallen to the pavement, clawing at his neck and making uncouth gurgling noises. About him, as if his clothing were steeped in warm water, hung a steamlike wraith of fume, and at the comers of his mouth appeared twin tiny stains of blood, as though a vessel in his throat had ruptured.

“No — *no*; you shall not have him! He’s mine; *mine*, I tell you!” the cry seemed wrung from Marguerite DuPont who, on her knees beside the fallen man, was fighting frantically to drive the hovering vapour off, beating at it with her hands as if it were a swarm of summer gnats.

“To prayers, Friend Priest! *Pour l’amour d’un canard*, be about your work all quickly!” De Grandin waved imperatively to the mortician and his assistants.

“*Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy sight shall no man be justified, unless through Thee he find pardon ...*” Father Cloutier intoned.

Quickly, but with astonishingly dextrous gentleness, the funeral assistants lifted the girl’s body from its crypt and placed it in the waiting casket. There was a sharp click, and the casket lid was latched.

Like steam dissolving in the morning chill the baleful vapour hanging round young Phipps began to disappear. In a moment it was gone, and he lay panting, his head pillowed in the crook of Marguerite’s uninjured arm, while with her handkerchief she wiped the blood away from his mouth.

“*Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her ...*”

De Grandin’s sudden laugh broke through the priest’s cantillation. “*Barbe d’un ver de terre, c’est drole ça* — but it is funny, that, my friends! Me, I knew all; I have made much inquiry of late, yet never did I foresee that which has transpired. Jules de Grandin, thou great *stupide*, the good jest is on thee!

“Observe them, if you please, Friend Trowbridge,” he nodded with delight toward Phipps and Marguerite. “Is it not one excellent-good joke?”

I looked at him in wonder. Edwin was recovering under Marguerite’s ministrations, and as he opened his eyes and murmured something she bent and kissed him on the mouth.

“What’s so damn funny?” I asked.

“Forgive my seeming irreverence,” he begged as we set out for the cemetery to witness the interment of poor Marguerite DuPont’s body, “but as I said before, I knew much that is withheld from you, and might have foreseen that which has occurred had I not been one great muttonhead. Attend me, if you please:

“You have expressed surprise that Mademoiselle Marguerite shows such a strong resemblance to her whom we have but a moment since raised from her unconsecrated grave. *Parbleu*, it would be strange if it were otherwise. The one is great-great-granddaughter of the other, no less! Consider: When first the young Monsieur Phipps advised us of this so mysterious doom that overhangs his family I was greatly interested. If, as the olden Obediah recounted in his journal, poor Marguerite DuPont lay buried underneath the evil hearthstone of that wicked house, I thought perhaps the memory of an ancient grudge — resentment which held fast like death — was focused there, for where the misused body lay, I thought, there would be found the well-spring of the malediction which has dogged the house of Phipps. Therefore, I told me, we must go there, untomb the body of unfortunate one and give it Christian burial. A fervent Catholic she had lived, such, presumably, she died, though there was no priest to shrive her soul or read the burial service over her. These omissions, I told me, must be remedied, and then perhaps she should have peace and the bane of her old curse might be unloosed. You see the logic of my reasoning? *Bien*.

“So to that old and very wicked house we went and on the very night of our arrival comes Mademoiselle Marguerite the second praying shelter from the storm and those miscreants who have wounded her.

“Anon there comes that Monsieur Claude intent on frightening us away, but I am not deceived and shoot him dead as a herring. He dies, and in that same hour his son is born. Thus by accident or design the old doom falls on him.

“What I did not know at the time was that the lady we had rescued was a lineal descendant of that Marguerite DuPont whose body we have come to accord Christian burial. Remember how it is recorded that she bore a son to wicked old Monsieur Joshua. That son assumed his mother’s name, since craven cowardice had caused his father to disown him.

“At first the scandal of his birth hung on him like a dirty cloak, but those were stirring times, the freedom of a people trembled in the balance, and men were measured more by deeds than by paternity. From out the crucible of war came Joshua DuPont a hero, and later he became a leading citizen of Woolwich. His progeny retained his virtues, and the family which he founded now ranks with that from which he sprang. DuPont is now an honoured name in Woolwich.

“This much I learned by discreet inquiry; what I could not know, because my eyes were everywhere but where they should have been, was that the hatred of the ancestors offered no bar to the love of their descendants, *Parbleu*, that Monsieur Cupid, he shoots his arrows where he damn pleases, and none may say him nay!

“Today, when the last gasp of dying hatred would have overwhelmed Friend Edwin, Mademoiselle Marguerite does battle with her ancestress for the life of him she loves and — how is it the Latin poet sings? — *Amor omnia vincit* — love conquers all, including family curses. Yes. I am very happy, me.” He drew a handkerchief from his cuff and dabbed at his eyes.

* * *

Half an hour ago de Grandin and I returned from the pretty home Edwin and Marguerite Phipps have built in Harrisonville. This afternoon their first-born son, Edwin de Grandin Phipps, *aetatis* six months and five days, was christened with all the ceremony ordained by the Book of Common Prayer, with Jules de Grandin and me for godfathers. There was much to eat and more to drink attendant on the function, and I regret to say my little friend returned in a condition far removed from that approved by the good ladies of the W.C.T.U.

Seated on the bed, one patent leather shoe removed, he gazed with mournful concentration at the mauve-silk sock thus exposed. “I wonder if she sometimes thinks of me,” he murmured. “Does she dream within the quiet of her cloister of the days we wandered hand in hand beside the River Loire?”

“Who?” I demanded, and he looked up like a man awakened from a dream.

“My friend,” he answered solemnly, “*je suis ivre comme un porc* — me, I am drunk like a pig!”

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The Drums of Damballah

“AND SO, good friends, I bid you Happy New Year.” Jules de Grandin replaced his demitasse on the Indian mahogany tabouret beside his easy chair and turned his quick, elfin smile from Detective Sergeant Costello to me.

“Thanks, old chap,” I returned, taking the humidor which Costello had been eyeing wistfully ever since we adjourned to the drawing-room for coffee and passing it toward him.

The big Irishman selected one of the long, red-and-gold belted Habanas and fondled it between his thick, capable fingers. “Sure, Dr. de Grandin, sor,” he muttered, “’tis me-self that wishes th’ same to you, an’ many more of ’em, too.”

“*Eh bien*, my friend,” de Grandin bit a morsel of pink peppermint wafer and held it daintily between his teeth as he sipped a second draft of the strong black coffee, “you do not appear in harmony with the season. Tell me, are you not happy at the New Year?”

“Yeah,” Costello returned as he struck a match and set his cigar alight, “I got lots o’ cause to be happy right now, sor. Happy like it wuz me own wake I’m goin’ to. To tell ye th’ truth, sor,” he added, turning serious blue eyes on the little Frenchman, “’tis Jerry Costello that’ll be lucky if he ain’t back in uniform, poundin’ a beat before th’ New Year’s a month old.”

“*Parbleu*, do you tell me?” de Grandin demanded, his smile vanishing. “How comes it?”

Costello puffed moodily at his cigar. “There’s been hell poppin’ around the City Hall for th’ last couple o’ weeks,” he returned, “an’ they’ve got to make a example o’ someone, so I reckon old Jerry Costello’s elected.”

“Eh, you are in trouble? Tell me, my friend; I am clever, I can surely help you.”

The big detective gazed moodily at the fire. “I only wish ye could, sor,” he answered slowly, “but I’m afraid ye can’t. There’s been more devilment goin’ on in town th’ last two weeks than I ever seen in a year before, an’ there ain’t no reason for any of it. I just can’t make head nor tail of it, an’ th’ mayor an’ th’ newspapers is ravin’ their heads off about police inefficiency. Lookit this, for example: Here’s young Mr. Sherwood, just th’ slip of a lad he is, right out o’ divinity school. First thing he does when he gits ordained is to open a little chapel over in th’ East End, workin’ night an’ day amongst th’ poor folks. He gits th’ men to lay off th’ gin an’ razors, an’ even bulls some of ’em into going to work instead o’ layin’ around all day an’ lettin’ their women

support ’em. That’s th’ kind o’ lad he wuz; fine an’ good enough to be a priest — God forgive me for sayin’ it! An’ what happens? Why, just last week they find him in th’ little two-by-four room he used for a study wid his head all bashed in an’ his Bible torn to shred an’ th’ pieces layin’ all around th’ place.

“All right, sor, that’s th’ first, but it ain’t th’ last. That same night th’ little Boswell gur-rl — as pritty a bit o’ wee babyhood as ye ever seen — she disappears. Th’ nurse has her out in th’ park, ye understand, an’ is hurryin’ home, for it’s turnin’ dark, an’ right while she’s passin’ th’ soldiers’ monument, out pops someone an’ swipes her over th’ head so hard she’s laid up for three days wid concussion o’ the brain.

“We searched high an’ low for th’ little one; but never hide nor hair o’ her do we find. Rewards are posted, an’ th’ papers is full of it; but no one steps up to claim th’ money. ’Twarn’t no ordinary kidnagin’, either, for whoever stole her tried his level best to kill th’ nurse at th’ time, an’ would ’a done it, too, if she hadn’t been one o’ them old fashioned gur-rls wid long hair piled on top o’ her head, so’s th’ coil of it broke th’ force o’ the blackjack he hit her wid.

“An’ lissen here, sor: ’Twas on th’ same night some dirty bums breaks into St. Rose’s Church an’ steals a crucifix from one o’ th’ altars — bad cess to ’em!

“Now, crimes is like ’most everything else: they don’t happen just because, sor. There’s got to be some motive back of ’em. That’s what’s makin’ a monkey out o’ me in these cases. Nobody had anything agin th’ pore young preacher. He didn’t have a relative, much less an enemy in th’ world, as far as we could find out, an’ as for money, if he’d ’a had two nickels to jingle together, he’d ’a been out givin’ one of ’em to some worthless, no-account darky to buy food or coal oil, or sumpin’ like that. It couldn’t ’a been an enemy that kilt him, an’ it couldn’t ’a been robbery yet there he wuz, cold an’ still, wid his head mashed in like a busted punkin an’ his Bible all torn to scraps.”

“*Ah?*” de Grandin sat forward in his chair, his little, round eyes narrowed to slits as he gazed intently at the big policeman. “Say on, my friend; I think, perhaps, I see some sense to these so senseless crimes, after all.”

Costello gave him an astonished look as he continued: “We might set pore Mr. Sherwood’s murder down to some crazy man, sor, and we might think Baby Boswell was just kidnaped by someone who wuz holdin’ her for ransom, waitin’ till her parents gits even more discouraged before he

puts in his bid for money; but who th' devil would want to burglarize a church? An' why didn't they break open th' pore box while they wuz about it, 'stead o' stealin' just one little brass crucifix? I tell ye, sor, there ain't no reason to none of it; an' I can't make head nor tail—"

"Yo're wanted on th' tellyphone, Dr. Trowbridge, sor," announced Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, thrusting her head through the drawing-room door and casting a momentary glance of unqualified approval toward the towering bulk of Sergeant Costello.

"Dr. Trowbridge?" an agitated voice called in response to my curt "Hello?"

"Can you come over to Mrs. Sherbourne's at once, please? One of the guests has fainted, and—"

"All right," I cut in, hanging up the receiver, "I'll be right over.

"Want to come?" I called to de Grandin and Costello. "There's a fainting woman over at Sherbourne's, and they seem to need a licensed practitioner to administer aromatic ammonia. Come along, Sergeant; a drive in the air may cheer you up."

The old year was dying hard as we drove toward the Sherbourne mansion. A howling wind, straight from the bay, tore through the deserted streets, flinging sheets of razor-sharp sleet against the windshield and overlaying the pavement with a veneer of gleaming, glass-smooth ice. Though our destination was a scant quarter-mile away, we were upward of half an hour covering the course, and I swore softly as I descended from the car, feeling certain that the young woman had long since recovered from her swoon and we had had our freezing drive for nothing.

My apprehensions proved unfounded, however, for a frightened hostess met us in the hall and conducted us to the upper room where her unconscious guest lay upon the snowy counterpane, an eiderdown quilt thrown lightly over her and a badly demoralized maid struggling ineffectually to force a hastily-mixed dose of aromatic spirit between her blanched lips.

"We've tried everything," Mrs. Sherbourne twittered nervously as de Grandin and I entered the room; "aromatic spirit and sal volatile don't seem the least good, and—"

"When did the young *mademoiselle* swoon, and where, if you please?" de Grandin cut in softly, slipping out of his fur-lined greatcoat and taking the unconscious girl's thin, lath-like wrist between his fingers.

"Just before we called you," our hostess replied. "She seemed in the highest spirits all evening, singing, playing the old-fashioned games, dancing — oh, she was having an awfully good time. Just a little while ago, when Bobby Eldridge wanted someone to do the tango with him, she was the first to volunteer. The music had hardly started when she

fell over in a heap, and we can't bring her to. It wasn't till all the home-made remedies had failed that I called you, Dr. Trowbridge," she added apologetically.

"U'm," de Grandin consulted his watch, comparing its ticks with the girl's pulsation. "She has eaten unwisely this evening, perhaps?"

"No. She hasn't eaten anything. That's the queer part of it. Everyone was eating and — I'm sorry to say — drinking considerably, too. We have to serve liquor to keep the young people satisfied since prohibition, you know. But Adelaide didn't touch a thing. I asked her if she were unwell, and she assured me she wasn't, but—"

"Precisely, *Madame*," de Grandin dropped the girl's wrist and rose with a business-like gesture. "If you will be so good as to leave us alone a moment, I think we shall revive Mademoiselle Adelaide without great difficulty." To me he whispered as our hostess withdrew:

"I think it is another case of foolish pursuit of the slender figure, Friend Trowbridge. This poor one seems half starved, to me, and — *barbe d'un chat*, what is this?" As he broke off he seized my hand and guided it to the unconscious girl's solar plexus.

Beneath the flimsy chiffon of her party frock I felt the hard, unyielding stiffness of a — corset.

"*Morbleu*," de Grandin chuckled. "Not content with starving herself to the thinness of an eel, the poor foolish one must needs encase herself in a corset so tight her breath can not find room to fill her lungs. Come, let us extricate her."

Deftly as though he had served as lady's maid all his life, he undid the fastenings of the girl's frock, laid back the silken folds and leaned above her to unloose the corset-hooks which bound her torso; but:

"*Sacré nom d'un poisson aveugle*, what in damnation's name have we here?" he demanded sharply. From hips to breast the girl was tightly bound in a corselet of some coarse, fibrous substance, irritant as the hairshirt of a Carmelite nun, and sewn upon the scarifying garment was a crazy patchwork of red, black and checkered cloth, not arranged in orderly or symmetrical design, but seemingly dropped at random, then fastened where it fell.

"S-o-o-o?" the little Frenchman let his breath out slowly between his teeth. "What connection has this one with this devilish business of the monkey which has so puzzled our good friend—"

"Quick, my friend," he ordered, turning sharply to me, "bring up the good Costello, at once, right away, immediately. Do not delay; it is important."

Bewildered, I descended the stairs, hailed the sergeant from my waiting car and led him to the room where de Grandin waited.

"*Très bon*," the little Frenchman nodded as we entered.

“Do you stand by the door, *cher sergent*; display your badge prominently. Now, Friend Trowbridge, let us to work!”

Drawing a tiny gold-handled pocket-knife from his waistcoat, he slit the queer-looking corset lengthwise and drew it from the girl’s slim body, inviting my attention to the network of deep, angry scratches inflicted by the raw fiber on her tender white skin as he did so. “Now—” he put a wide-mouthed vial of smelling-salts to her nostrils, waited till her lids fluttered slightly, then seized the half filled glass of aromatic spirit and held it to her mouth.

The girl half choked as the restorative passed her lips, then put a thin, blue-veined hand up, pushing the glass from her. “I” — she stammered sleepily — “where am — oh I must have fainted. Did anyone — you *musn’t* undo my dress — you *musn’t*, I tell you! I won’t have—”

“*Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin’s usually suave voice grated unpleasantly as he cut through her hysterical words, “your gown has already been unloosed. This gentleman” — he indicated Costello with a nod — “is of the police. I have summoned him, and here he remains until you have given satisfactory answers to my questions. Upon your replies depends whether he leaves this house alone or—” He paused significantly, and the girl’s dark hazel eyes widened in terror.

“Wha — what do you want?” she faltered.

“Await us in the hall, if you please, my sergeant,” de Grandin bade; then, as the door closed behind the big policeman: “First of all, you will please tell us how comes it that you wear this so odious thing.” He touched the patchwork-covered corset with the tip of his forefinger, gingerly, as though it had been a venomous reptile.

“It — it was a bet, a silly, foolish wager,” she returned. “I wore it tonight just to prove I could stand the irritation a whole evening.” She paused looking questioningly at the Frenchman’s stern-set face to note the effect of her explanation; then, with sudden vehemence: “You’ve got to believe me,” she almost screamed. “It’s the truth, the truth, *the truth!*”

“It is a lie, and a very clumsy one, in the bargain,” de Grandin shot back. “Come, *Mademoiselle*, the truth, if you please; we are not to be trifled with.”

The girl gazed back defiantly. She was thin as almost fleshless bones could make her, yet gracefully built, and her long, oval face had that tantalizing pale olive complexion which in certain types of woman proclaims abundant health as surely as florid coloring does in others. Her deep hazel eyes, tragic with terror, turned questioningly toward the window, then the door beyond which Costello waited, and finally came to rest on de Grandin’s glowing blue orbs. “I — won’t — tell—” she began with deliberate emphasis; then, “Oh!” The interruption was half cry, half gasp, and came simultaneously with the crashing clatter of broken

glass.

Shattered to a dozen fragments, one of the small panes of the bedroom window fell inward on the margin of hardwood floor bordering the Persian rug, and the girl wilted forward as though pushed from behind, then slid back with a slow, twisting motion, one hand fluttering upward toward her breast like a wounded white bird vainly trying to regain its nest.

Two inches below and slightly to the right of the gentle swell of her left bosom the hard, polished haft of a dagger protruded, and on the flimsy chiffon of her frock there spread with terrifying rapidity a ruddy, telltale stain. She was dead before we could ease her back upon the pillows.

“On guard, *Sergent*, close the doors, permit none to enter and none to leave!” de Grandin shouted, leaping to the window and tearing open the sash. “Call the station, have a cordon of police thrown round the house — another murder has been done, but by the beard of a bullfrog, the guilty one shall not escape!”

The big Irishman took charge with characteristic efficiency. Under his energetic guidance the guests and servants were gathered in the main drawing-room; within five minutes a siren shrieked its strident warning and a police car deposited a squad of uniformed men at the Sherbourne door. Assisted by powerful hand-searchlights brought from the station house, we scoured every inch of the grounds surrounding the mansion, and while a police stenographer stood by with pencil and notebook, Costello interrogated one after another of the horrified merry-makers. Half an hour’s work convinced us we were up a blind alley. Not a hint or track of footprint showed on the hard-frozen sleet covering the lawn and encasing the tall poplar tree which stood beside the window through which the deadly missile had been hurled; not a guest at the party, nor a servant in the house, had left the building for a moment since de Grandin’s shouted warning rang through the night; nowhere was there even the shadow of a clue at which the finger of suspicion could be pointed.

“Well, I’m damned; I sure am!” Costello ruefully admitted as he completed the investigation and prepared to notify Coroner Martin. “This looks like another one o’ them cases wid no reason a-tall for happenin’, Dr. de Grandin, sor. Ye can see for yerself how it is, now. Why should anyone want to murder that pore young gur-rl like that, an—” He lapsed into moody silence, drumming silently on the polished top of the telephone table as he waited for central to make his connection with the coroner.

“H’m, one wonders,” de Grandin murmured, half to Costello, half to himself, as he snapped the mechanism of his pocket lighter and thrust the tip of an evil-smelling French cigarette into the cone of blue flame. But from the dancing lights in his small round eyes and the quick,

imitable manner in which the ends of his carefully waxed blond mustache twitched, I knew he had already formulated a theory and bided his time to put it into words. "Come, Friend Trowbridge," he urged, tugging at my elbow. "There is nothing more we can accomplish here; besides, I greatly desire drink. Let us go."

2

"*Tiens*, my friend, it seems the old year died in a welter of blood last night," de Grandin remarked the following morning as he pushed back his coffee cup and lighted an after-breakfast cigarette. "Regard this in the morning's news, if you please." He passed a copy of the *Journal* across the table, indicating the article occupying the right-hand column of the front page. Taking the paper, I read:

TORTURERS KILL GUARD IN ROBBERY

Novice Yeggs Slash Watchman
to Learn Safe Combination
He Did Not Know

The body of William Lucas, 50-year-old night watchman at the Eagle Laundry, 596 Primrose Street, was found early this morning on the company's loading platform. He had been tortured to death because he would not reveal the combination of the firm's safe. The safe had not been opened.

When found, the body had a slash on each hand, one on the sole and instep of each foot, another across the throat under the chin, and a deep knife wound in the back. In a vacant lot behind the laundry detectives found a stained paper bag containing a brace and bit, a glass cutter, a wire cutter, a metal trimmed stiletto sheath and a pair of low shoes.

The attempted safe robbery was so wholly the work of novices that police were able to reconstruct the crime in its entirety. The murderers, police said, left a multitude of clues. At least two men entered the building in Primrose Street before the last truck was parked in the sheds at nine o'clock last night. The robbers evidently knew that heavy collections were made by drivers on their final routes and that the money could not be banked until after the holiday, hence there would be a substantial amount in the office safe.

The yeggmen laid out their kit of cheap tools some time after midnight, took off their shoes and tiptoed after the watchman as he made his rounds. They found him in the rear of the building as he was punching the clock in the dynamo room, and forced him to accompany them to the office, where the torture began.

While one of the burglars tortured and questioned Lucas in vain the other turned to the safe and tampered with it. The lifted handles bear the impress of red-stained fingers.

Some time during the torture Lucas died. The coroner's physician will say today whether he died as a result of the slash in his throat, the wound in his back, or whether he bled to death from the many smaller wounds inflicted on different parts of his body.

The murderers dumped the body into a laundry basket and

dragged it through the building to the landing platform. A trail of stains led the police along the way. On the loading platform, where the body was abandoned, one of the thugs left a most incriminating clue. The floor bore the mark of a large foot with long, prehensile toes, clearly outlined in crimson. This print definitely establishes the fact that there were at least two robbers, as the low shoes found in the bundle with the burglars' tools were too small to fit the footmark. They must have belonged to the other robber, who also tiptoed in stockings or bare feet after the unfortunate watchman.

Lucas, police said, was tortured to reveal something he did not know. The combination of the safe had not been entrusted to him.

"Why," I exclaimed, "that's villainous! The idea of torturing that poor fellow! It—"

"Sure, Dr. Trowbridge, sor, 'tis bad enough, th' blessed saints know but 'tis sumpin' we can sink our teeth into, at any rate," announced Costello's heavy voice from the doorway. "'Scuse me for sneakin' in on ye like this, gentlemen," he apologized, "but it's crool cold outside this mornin' an' I thought as how ye wouldn't mind if I let meself in unannounced like, seein' th' door wuz unlocked annyhow."

"*Bien non*, by no means," de Grandin assured him, motioning to a chair. "Tell me, my friend, is this press account accurate?"

The detective nodded over the rim of the cup of steaming coffee I had poured him. "Yes, sor," he returned. "I wuz in charge at th' laundry, an' checked th' facts up wid th' reporters before they shot their stuff in. They're right this time — for a wonder. Praise be, we've got clear sailin' in a case at last. None o' yer mysterious, no-motive crimes here, sor. Just a case o' plain petermen's wor-rk, an' done be amatoors, in th' bargain. It looks open-an'-shut to me."

He fumbled in his pocket a moment, producing two narrow slips of paper. "I got a couple o' subpoenas from th' coroner for you gentlemen," he announced, handing us the summonses to appear at the inquest on the death of Adelaide Truman, "but if ye'd like to run over to th' Eagle Laundry an' look th' place over before ye tell what ye know to Coroner Martin, I'd be happy to take ye. I've got a police car waitin' outside."

"By all means," de Grandin assented eagerly. "This latest case of yours, my friend, it is a bit too obvious. It is altogether possible that someone makes the practical joke at our expense."

The dead night watchman was not a pretty sight. However inexperienced they might have been as burglars, his assassins had done their murdering with the finesse of veterans. To me the only question was whether the unfortunate man died from the gaping slash across his throat or

the deep incision which pierced his back just under the vertebral extremity of his left scapula. Either would have been almost instantly fatal.

De Grandin gave the body little more than passing notice. Instead he hastened to the office where the atrocity had been committed, and cast a fierce, searching glance about, rushed to the single window and sent the shade sailing upward with a jerk of the cord, finally dropped to his knees and began examining the floor with the nervous intensity of a terrier seeking the scent of a vanished rat.

I watched him in amazement a moment, then turned to rejoin Costello, but his sudden elated exclamation brought me to a halt. “*Voilà!*” he cried, springing to his feet. “*Triomphe*; I have found it; it is here! *Pardieu*, did I not say so? Assuredly. Behold, my friend, what the good Costello and his fellows failed to see, and would not have recognized, had they done so, was not hidden from Jules de Grandin. By no means. *Regardez-vous!*”

In the palm of his outstretched hand lay a tiny cruciform thing, two burnt matches bound together in the form of a cross with a wisp of scarlet silk.

“Well?” I demanded, for the little man’s shining eyes, quivering nostrils and excited manner indicated he placed great importance on his find.

“Well?” he echoed. “*Non*, my friend, you are mistaken; it is not well, or rather it is very well, indeed, for I now begin to understand much. Very damn much, indeed. This so detestable thing” — he indicated the crossed matches in his palm — “it is the key to much which I began dimly to perceive last night when Friend Costello strung together his so strange series of seemingly meaningless and unrelated crimes. Certainly. I now think, at least I believe—”

“All ready, gentlemen?” Sergeant Costello called. “We’ll be gittin’ over to th’ coroner’s, if ye’re all done. Th’ boys are finished wid th’ fingerprints an’ measurements, an’ they’ll be comin’ from th’ morgue for th’ pore felly out yonder before long.”

De Grandin sat wrapped in moody silence as the big police car bore us toward the coroner’s. Once or twice he made as though to speak, but appeared to think better of it, and leaned back in his seat with tightly compressed lips and knitted, thoughtful brows. At last:

“What d’ye think of it all, Dr. de Grandin, sor?” Costello asked tentatively. “Have ye formed any theory yet?”

“U’ m,” de Grandin struck a match, carefully shielding its orange flame with his cupped hands as he set his cigarette alight, then expelled a double column of smoke from his nostrils. “I shall not be greatly astonished, *mon vieux*, if the man who slew Mademoiselle Truman last night and the miscreant who did the unfortunate Lucas to death shortly afterward prove one and the same. Yes, I am almost con-

vinced of it, already, though a careful search of the poor dead ones’ antecedents must be made before we can be certain.”

“Arrah!” Costello looked his incredulity. “D’ye mean th’ felly that murdered th’ pore gur-rl an’ tried to rob th’ laundry wuz th’ same?”

“*Précisément*. Furthermore, I am disinclined to believe that any robbery was intended at the Eagle Laundry. Rather, I think, it was a carefully calculated murder — an execution, if you please — which took place there. The bloody hand-prints on the safe door, the new and wholly inadequate burglars’ tools so left that the police could not help but find them, the very obviousness of it all — it was the camouflage they made, my friend. *Mordieu*, at this very moment the miscreants lie snugly hidden and laugh most execrably at our backs. Have a care, villains, Jules de Grandin has entered the case, and you shall damn laugh on the other side of your mouths before all is done!” He struck his knee with his clenched fist, then continued more quietly: “There is much more to this case than you have seen, my Sergeant. By example, there is that patchwork corset, and the two burned matches—”

“A corset — two burnt matches!” Costello’s tone indicated rapidly waning confidence in de Grandin’s sanity.

“Exactly, precisely; quite so. In addition there is the murder of the innocent young clergyman, the stealing away of a helpless little baby, and much more devilment, which as yet we have not seen. Sergeant, my friend, these crimes without reason, as you call them, are crimes with the best — or worst — reason in the world, and this latest killing which you so stubbornly persist in thinking part of an unsuccessful burglary, it too is a link in the chain. These things are but the tail-tip of the serpent. This monstrous body we have yet to glimpse.”

“Glory be to God!” ejaculated Costello with more force than piety as he bit off an impressive mouthful of chewing tobacco and set to masticating it in methodical silence.

3

I saw but little more of Jules de Grandin that day. As soon as his brief testimony before the coroner had been concluded he excused himself and disappeared on some mysterious errand. Dinner was long over and I was preparing to turn in for some much-needed sleep when his quick step sounded in the hall and a moment later he burst into the study, eyes gleaming, mustache fairly on end with excitement. “*Mort dun bouc vert!*” he exclaimed as he dropped into a chair and seized a cigar from the humidior; “this day I have run back and forth and to and fro like a hound on the trail of a stag, my friend! Yes, I have been

most active.”

“Find out anything?” I asked.

“Assuredly yes. More than I had hoped; much more,” he declared. “Attend me: The poor Mademoiselle Truman whose so tragic death we witnessed, she was not born here. No, she was a native of Martinique. Her parents, Americans, lived in Fort de France, and she was but the merest babe when Pelée erupted so terribly in 1902, killing nearly every living being in the capital. Both her father and mother perished in the catastrophe, but she was rescued through the heroism of a native *bonne* who fled inland and found such shelter as none but she and her kind could. For the next five years the child dwelt as a native peasant among the blacks, speaking Creole, wearing native clothes, nourished by native food and — *worshiping native gods*.

“Do you know Martinique, my friend? It is most beautiful; lovely as the island where Circe dwelt to change men into swine before destroying them utterly. A curse lies on those lovely islands of the Antilles, my friend, the curse of human bondage and blood drawn by the slave-driver’s lash. Wherever Europe colonized and brought black slaves from Africa she brought also the deadly poison of the jungle Obeah. In North America it was not so. Your Negroes grew up beside the whites, a pleasant, loyal, glad-hearted race; but in the islands of the Caribbean they interbred with the savage Indians and grew into fiends incarnate. Yes. Consider how they rose against their masters, exterminating man and woman and tender, helpless babe; how they marched on the European settlements with the bodies of white infants impaled upon their pikes for standards, and slew and slaughtered — till even their insatiable blood-lust was slaked.

“Very well. That they had just cause for revolt no one can deny. It is not pleasant, even for a savage, to be stolen from his home and made to serve as slave in distant lands, and the sting of the whip is no less painful to a black back than to a white one; but the dreadful aspects of their revolts, the implacable savagery with which they killed and tortured, that is something needing explanation. Nor is the explanation far to seek. Beside their bonfires, far back amid the hills, they practised weird rites and made petition to strange and awful gods — dread, bestial gods out of darkest Africa, more savage still than the savages who groveled at their altars. It was from these black and blood-dewed altars that the insurgent slaves drew inspiration for their atrocities.

“Nor is that dread religion — *Vôdunu*, *Obeah*, or by whatever savage name it may be called — dead by any means. Today the Marines of your country fight ceaselessly to put it down in Haiti; the weak-spined Spanish government, and after it the forces of the Republic, have been powerless to stamp it out from the Cuban uplands; the Danish West Indies and the Dutch colonies turned their

faces and declared there was no such thing as Voodoo in their midst; and France has had no better luck in Martinique. No. The white man governs there; he can never hope to rule.

“Now, the aborigines of Martinique were known as the Caribs. A terrible folk they were — and are. Your very English word ‘cannibal’ comes from them, since *cariba* was what Columbus’ sailors said when referring to the abominations of the Caribs when they returned to Spain. There are those who say that the Caribs were rooted out in the war waged on them by the French in 1658. It is, *hélas*, not so. They fled back to the hills, and there they mated with the blacks, producing a race tenfold more terrible than either of its parents. These are those who keen the voodoo chant before black altars in the uplands, who burn the signal fires at night, and, upon occasion, make sacrifices of black goats, or white goats without horns, to their deities. They keep the flame of hatred for the white man undying, and it was because of that the native nurse-woman risked her life to save poor little Baby Adelaide from the volcano.

“Ha, I see your question forming. ‘Why,’ you ask ‘should she have risked her life to bear away the offspring of her master; why should she so carefully rear that little girl child when the holocaust of Pelée’s eruption was done?’ Ah, my friend, subtle revenge is sweet to the half-breed Carib as to the white man. That a child of the dominant and hated *blancs* should be reared as a Carib, taught their language, imbued with their thoughts, finally trained and initiated into their abominable religion and made to serve as priestess at their dreadful sacrificial rites — ah, that, indeed, would be a fit requital for all the woes her ancestors had undergone at the white man’s hands. Yes.

“And so it was. For five years — the formative period of her life — poor Mademoiselle Adelaide lives as a Creole. When she was at last so steeped in savage lore that never, while life should last, could she throw away the influence, the ‘faithful nurse’ returned to Fort de France with her story of having rescued and nurtured the orphaned child of her employers. Relatives in America were located by colonial authorities and the little girl brought here — and with her came her faithful *bonne*, her foster-mother, old Black Toinette of the Caribs.”

He rose abruptly, took half a turn across the study floor, then stopped and faced me almost threateningly.

“*And Toinette was a mamaloi of the voodooists!*” he fairly hissed.

“Well?” I demanded, as he continued to stand staring fixedly at me.

“‘Well’ be everlastingly burned in the lowest subcellar of hell!” he flared back. “It is not well. It is most damnably otherwise, my friend.

“Mademoiselle Adelaide was never allowed to forget that whatever gods she might pay outward homage to, the *real*

gods, the great gods, were Damballah, Legba and Ayida-Wedo. When she was but a little child she astonished her Sunday School teacher by making such an assertion in answer to a catechism question, and when she was a grown young woman, eighteen years of age, her aunt, with whom she lived, surprised her and her aged nurse fantastically dressed and making worship to an obscene thing carved in the likeness of a serpent. The old woman was instantly dismissed; though, in gratitude for her services, she was given a pension; but poor Mademoiselle Adelaide's aunt tells me her niece paid many secret visits to old Toinette's dwelling, and what went on behind the closed doors of that house can better be conjectured than described, I fear.

"Now, attend me: Those who have traveled in Haiti have often been struck by certain oddnesses of dress, sometimes exhibited by the peasant women, dresses sewn over with crazy-quilt patterns, not beautiful, but most bizarre. Such patchwork is worn as penance, sometimes sewn to a corset of irritative substance, as by example, the fiber of certain species of gourds. When so worn it is at once an evidence of penance and purification, like the hair-shirts of certain monastic orders in mediæval times. Now, undoubtedly, for some reason old Toinette ordered Mademoiselle Adelaide to wear that damnable garment of voodoo penance last night. Remember, the old nurse never for an instant lost her dominance over the poor child. No. The constant irritation of the sharp-pronged corset against her tender skin induced a fainting fit. I, who have traveled much and observed much, at once recognized the thing for what it was, and bade her tell us how it came that she wore it. She refused, but one who watched her through the window feared she was about to speak, and stopped her mouth with blood."

"Well," I cut in, "if this is so, why not go round to this old woman's house and arrest her? She can be made to talk, I suppose."

"Ah bah," he returned. "Do you think I have not considered that? You do me small courtesy, my friend. To the old one's house I went posthaste, only to find that she and her son — a hulking brute with arms as long as those of any ape — had decamped sometime during the night and none knows where they went."

He paused a moment, drawing at his cigar with short quick puffs; then: "How high would you say the lowest limb of the tree which grows beside Madame Sherbourne's house is from the ground — the tree from which an evilly disposed one might easily have hurled a dagger and slain Mademoiselle Adelaide?"

"H'm," I made a hasty mental calculation. "All of fifteen feet, I'd say. It's absurd to think anyone climbed it, de Grandin; he couldn't have reached the lowest limb without a ladder, for the trunk was literally glazed with ice, and no one could have swarmed up it. Nothing but an ape could

have climbed that tree, thrown a knife and scuttled down again before the police came, at least not without leaving some trace, and—"

"Precisely, exactly, entirely so," he agreed, nodding vigorously. "*Tu parles, mon vieux* — you have said it. No one but an ape — or an ape-man. Did you examine the bloody footprint at the laundry where the ill-fated Lucas met his death?"

"Why, no; but—"

"Of course not; but I did. It might almost have been made by a gorilla, so great and long-toed was it. Only one accustomed to going barefoot, and much accustomed to using his toes in climbing, could have made that track. It took but a single glance to tell me that the maker of that footprint has arms of most extraordinary length. Such an one could have leaped the distance from the earth to catch that tree-limb, and climbed the icy trunk without great trouble. Such an one it was, undoubtedly, who watched outside to see that Mademoiselle Adelaide made no betrayal, and who did the needful when he feared she was about to break beneath my questioning. Yes. Certainly."

"But see here," I expostulated. "Aren't you going pretty far in your assumptions? Because a man has an abnormally long foot is no sign he has unusually long arms like this hypothetical ape-man of yours."

"Do you say so?" he demanded sarcastically. "The great Alphonse Bertillon says otherwise. It was he who fathered the science of anthropometry — the science of measuring man — and it is one of his cardinal rules that the length of a man's foot from calyx to great toe-tip is the exact distance between the inner bend of his elbow and his radius. Here, let us test it!"

Reaching suddenly he snatched off one of my house slippers, and grasping my ankle bent my right foot upward to the inner side of my left arm. Dubiously I fitted the heel against the inner bend of my elbow, then stared in incredulous amazement. It was as he said. No rule could have measured my arm from wrist to elbow more accurately than my own foot!

"You see?" he asked with one of his quick smiles. The *Sûreté Général* long since adopted the Bertillon system, and the *Sûreté Général* makes no mistakes.

"Very well; to proceed with my day's discoveries: Having unearthed the poor *mademoiselle's* unhappy history, I turned my attention to the unfortunate Monsieur Lucas. Here, again, the trail of Africa's step-daughters lay across my path. In his younger days Lucas had been an American soldier, and served with distinction against the Spaniards in '98. Remaining in Cuba after peace was declared, he married a native woman and moved inland. There he became involved in certain of the less savory native mysteries, and served a term in prison. He moved to Haiti

without the formality of divorcing his Cuban wife and found another companion for his joys and sorrows. *Tiens*, I greatly fear the latter far outweighed the former. His wife, an unlettered peasant woman, was but a step removed from savagery. She initiated him into the voodoo religion, and once more he worshiped in the *Hounfor* or voodoo mystery-house.

"Anon he tired of life in Haiti and come to this country. *But so did others*. My friend, in this very city of Harrisonville, New Jersey, there is a well-organized chapter of votaries of the Snake-Goddess. What they purpose doing I do not know for sure; that it portends no good I am most abominably certain. Lucas, homesick for the days in the Carribbean, perhaps, perhaps for some other reason, sought out these voodooists, and was recognized by some of them. He attended one or more of their meetings, and was there either branded as a traitor, or refused to countenance such inimical schemes as they broached. In any event, he was considered more valuable dead than alive, nor were they slow to carry out his death sentence. Everything points that way — the multiple wounds, the torture before the *coup-de-grâce*, most of all the two crossed matches which we found. They are a sign well recognized wherever voodoo is dominant. On one occasion, as I well know, the sight of such a silly, inconsequential object in the Palace at Port-au-Prince so frightened the president of Haiti that he remained indoors for two whole days! It was a bit of bravado, leaving those matches beside the body of their victim, but then they could not know that anyone here would recognize them; they could not know that Jules de Grandin would enter the case. No.

"Undoubtlessly the murder of the poor young clergyman was another link in this sinister chain. He labored lovingly among his dusky flock; they loved him. More, they trusted him. Beyond question some of them had heard the voodoo hell-broth brewing in their midst and had consulted him. He knew too much. He is dead.

"*Alors—*"

The sharp, cachinnating chatter of the telephone bell cut through his low, earnest words. "*Allo?*" he called irritably, snatching up the instrument. "Ah, Sergeant, yes. What? Do you say it? But certainly; right away; immediately; at once.

"Friend Trowbridge," he turned to me, his eyes flashing with anticipation, "it has come. That was the good Costello. He asks that we go to him at once."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"Dr. de Grandin, sor," the little Frenchman's imitation of the big Irishman's excited brogue was a masterpiece of mimicry, "hell's broke loose over in Paradise Street. Th' blacks are shootin' th' night full o' holes an' two o' me men is hit hard, a'ready. We're nadin' a couple good doctors in a hurry, an' we 'specially made a fela as can be handy wid

the guns. Come arunnin', sor, if yo' plaze."

4

Greatly to my relief, there was no longer need of "a felly who could be handy wid th' guns" when we arrived at that dingy thoroughfare ironically labeled Paradise Street by the city fathers. Reserves from half a dozen precincts and police headquarters, armed with riot paraphernalia had drawn a cordon round the affected area, and riot guns, tear-gas bombs and automatic rifles had cowed the recalcitrant blacks by the time I drew up at the outer of line of policemen and made our errand known. De Grandin was furious as a hen under a hydrant when he saw the last patrol wagon of arrested rioters drive off. With a pair of heavy French army revolvers bolstered to the cartridge belts which crossed his womanishly narrow waist, he marched and countermarched along the sidewalk, glaring into the darkness as though challenging some disturber of the peace to try conclusions with him.

"Dam' funny thing, this," Costello remarked as he joined us. "I know these here boys, an', speakin' generally, they're an orderly enough lot o' fellies. 'Course, they shoot craps now an' agin, an' git filled up wid gin an' go off on a rampage, 'specially of a Saturday night; but they ain't never give us no serious trouble before.

"Tonight, though, they just broke out like a rash. Kelley, from Number Four, wuz poundin' his beat down the lower part o' th' street, when be noticed a strange smoke sort o' scuttlin' down th' walk, an' not likin' th' felly's looks, started after 'im. Ye know how it is, Dr. de Grandin, for ye've mingled wid th' Paris police yerself. It's just natural for boys, dogs an' policemen to chase anything that runs from 'em, so when this here dinge started to run, so did Kelley.

"Th' felly slips into a doorway, wid Kelley right behind him, when *zingo!* there comes a charge o' buckshot an' Kelley goes down wid enough lead in 'im to sink a ship.

"He sounds his whistle before he goes out, though, an' a couple o' th' boys come a-runnin', an' I'm damned if th' whole street ain't full o' bullets in less time than ye can rightly say 'Jack Robinson,' sor. Th' riot call goes out, an' we wound 'em up in pretty good shape, but three o' th' boys is hit bad, Kelley especially. He'll not pound a beat for many a long day, I'm thinkin'."

"H'm, de Grandin took his narrow chin between his thumb and forefinger and gazed thoughtfully at the snow-covered pavement, "did Monsieur Kelley, by any happy chance, describe the man he pursued before he was so villainously assaulted?"

"Only partly, sor. 'Twas a shortish sort o' felly, wid

extra-ordinary long arms, accordin' to Kelley, an'—

"A thousand maledictions! I did know it!" de Grandin shouted. "It is the ape-man, Friend Trowbridge; the one who slew Mademoiselle Adelaide, and poor Lucas, the watchman; undoubtedly the one who killed the clergyman, as well. *Nom d'un chameau*, we must find him! He and his twenty-times accursed dam are the keys of this whole so odious business or Jules de Grandin is a perjured liar!"

"Would ye be after givin' me an' a couple o' th' boys a lift, Dr. Trowbridge, sor?" Costello asked as de Grandin and I prepared to depart. "Th' doin's here is about over; an' I'd like to git back an' report before I hit th' hay."

With Costello behind me, and two uniformed men standing on the running board, I set out for police headquarters, choosing the wide, unfrequented roadway of Tuscarora Avenue in preference to the busier thoroughfares. Although it was not late the darkened avenue had a curiously deserted aspect as I drove slowly beneath the bare-limbed trees, and the sudden appearance of a hatless man, waving his arms excitedly, stung my startled nerves almost like the detonation of a shot in the quiet night.

"Police!" the stranger cried. "Is that a police car?"

"Well, sor, it is an' it ain't," Costello responded, "There's a load o' bulls ridin' in it; but ye couldn't rightly call it a departmental vehicle. What's on yer mind? I see yer hat ain't."

"My daughter," the other answered, almost sobbing, "My daughter Marrien — she's disappeared!"

"Ouch, has she now?" the detective soothed. "Sure, that's too bad. How long's she been gone — a week maybe?"

"No — *no*; now, just a few minutes ago!"

"Arrah, sor, how d'ye know she ain't gone to th' movies, or visitin' a friend, or sumpin'? Don't ye go gittin'—"

"Be quiet!" the distraught man cut in. "I'm Josephus Thorndyke; I think you know me; by name, at least."

We did. Everybody knew the president of the First National Bank of Harrisonville and director of half the city's financial enterprises. Costello's bantering manner dropped from him like a cloak as he jumped from the car. "Tell us about it, sor," he urged deferentially.

"She was complaining of a headache," Thorndyke replied, "and went to her room half an hour or so ago. I went up to ask if I could do anything, and found her door locked. She never did that — never. I knocked and got no answer. I went away, but came back in ten minutes and found her door still locked, though the light was burning. I had a pass the key, and when I couldn't get an answer I let myself in. Before I could unlock the door, I had to push key out; her door was locked on the inside — get that."

"I'm listenin'," Costello assured him. "Go on, sor."

"Her room was empty. She'd undressed, but hadn't

changed her clothes — the window was open, and her room was empty. I ran down the back stairs and asked the cook, who'd been in the kitchen all the time, if Miss Marrien had gone through. She hadn't. Then I ran outside and looked on the ground, fearing she might have been seized with faintness and fallen from the window. It's a thirty-foot drop to the ground, and if she'd fallen she'd have been killed or so badly injured that she couldn't have moved, but there was no sign of her outside. I know she didn't come down the front stairs, for I was reading in the hall, and I've searched the house from top to bottom; but she's not there. There's not a piece of her clothing missing; but she's gone — vanished!"

"U'm, an' did ye call th' precinct, sor?"

"Yes, yes; they told me all the men were out on riot duty, and they'd send someone over in the morning. In the morning! Good God! Do you realize my child's gone — faded into the night, apparently? And they talk of sending someone round tomorrow!"

"Sure, it's lucky ye saw us when ye did," Costello muttered. Then: "This is right in your line, Dr. de Grandin; will ye be after goin' in wid me an' takin' a look around?"

"Assuredly, by all means, yes," the Frenchman agreed. "Lead on, my old one; I follow close behind."

The tall, hatchet-faced man with the mane of iron-gray hair who had accosted us seemed to take a fresh grip on his self-control as he led the way toward the house. "It may seem queer that I should be so positive about my daughter's not having changed her clothes," he suggested as we filed up the path toward the oblong of orange light which marked the mansion's open door, "but the fact is Marrien and I are nearer to each other than the average father and daughter. Her mother died when she was a wee baby — only three years old — and I've tried to be both father and mother to her since. There isn't a dress or hat, hardly a pair of gloves or hose, in her whole wardrobe that I don't know by sight, for she consulted me before buying anything. I've studied women's magazine and fashion books and even trailed round to dressmakers salons with her in order to keep posted on such things and be able to discuss clothes intelligently with her. She's the speaking image of her sainted mother when I married her thirty years ago, and — she's all I've got to love in the world; all I have to think of or live for!"

"Now you understand," he added simply, as he led us to the white-enameled door of a spacious bedroom on the second floor and stood courteously aside to let us enter.

We glanced quickly about the apartment. The scent of gardenias lay heavy in the air; a crimson Spanish shawl, embroidered in brilliant silk, which trailed across the back of a carved Italian chair, was redolent with the perfume. A cheval-glass in a gilded frame reflected the ivory walls and

the ormolu dressing-table set with ivory and gold toilet articles. Above the ivory-tiled fireplace where piled beech logs snapped and crackled cheerfully on polished brass firedogs, there hung a magnificent life-sized copy of Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, the closed eyes and parted, yearning lips of the figure suggesting, somehow, the motherless girl's vague, half-understood longings. On the bed's white counterpane lay a long-skirted evening gown of rose tulle and satin; a pair of tiny silver-kid sandals lay beneath an ivory slipper chair, one standing on its sole, the other lying on its side, as though discarded in extremist haste. A pair of moonlight-gray gossamer silk stockings lay crumpled wrong side out beside the shoes. It was a lovely, girl-woman's room, as expressive of its owner as a Sargent portrait; but empty now, and desolate as a body from which the soul has fled.

Unconsciously, instinctively, de Grandin bowed quickly from the hips in his quaint foreign manner as he entered this atmosphere supercharged with femininity; then, with Gallic practicality, he began a swift appraisal of the place.

The window was open a few inches from the bottom — a cat would have had difficulty in creeping through the opening — and, as Thorndyke had told us, there was no other exit from the room, save the door by which we entered, for the adjoining bath was without window, light and air coming from a skylight with adjustable sideslats that pierced the ceiling. "U'm; you are positive the door was locked on the inside when you made entrance, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked turning to the distraught father.

"Of course I am. I had to push the key—"

"Be gob, there's a drain-pipe runnin' down th' house widin three feet o' th' windy," Costello interrupted, drawing back from his inspection of the outside walls, "but it's crusted wid ice a quarter-inch thick. 'Twould take a sailor to slip down it an' a gorilla or sumpin' to climb it, I'm thinkin'."

"Ha?" de Grandin paused in his stride across the room and joined the detective at the window. "Let me see — quickly. Yes, you have right, my friend; the most athletic of young women could not have negotiated that descent. Yet—" He paused in silent thought a moment, then shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Let us proceed," he ordered.

We searched the house from cellar to ridgepole, questioned the servants, confirmed Thorndyke's assertion that the back stairs could not be descended without the user being seen from the kitchen. At length, with such lame assurances as we could give the prostrated father, we prepared to leave.

"You have, perhaps, a picture of Mademoiselle Marrien for the *Sûreté's* information?" de Grandin asked as we paused by the drawing-room door.

"Yes; here's one," Thorndyke replied, taking a silver-framed portrait from a console table and extending it to the Frenchman. "Be careful of it; it's the only—"

"*A-a-ah?*" the sharp, rising note of de Grandin's exclamation cut short the caution.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

"Mother o' Moses; would ye look a' that?" Costello added.

As mirrored likeness counterfeits the beholder, or twin resembles twin, the photograph of Marrien Thorndyke simulated the fine-cup, delicate features of Adelaide Truman, whose tragic death we had witnessed not twenty-four hours earlier.

Moving nearer the light to examine the picture, de Grandin paused in midstride, his sensitive nostrils contracting as he glanced sharply at a corsage bouquet of pale-lavender orchids, occupying a silver vase on a side table. Cautiously, as though approaching some living thing of uncertain temper, he lowered his nose toward the fragile, fluted-edged blossoms, then drew back abruptly. "These flowers, *Monsieur*; they came from where, and when, if you please?" he demanded, regarding Thorndyke with one of his fixed, unwinking stares.

Our host smiled sadly. "We don't know," he returned. "Some unknown admirer sent them to Marrien this evening; they came just before dinner. Queer thing; there was no card or message with them, and nobody saw the messenger who delivered them. The bell rang, and when Parnell answered it, there was an unmarked flower-box waiting in the vestibule, but no sign of any messenger. That struck me as especially odd; those chaps usually hang around in hope of a tip."

The little Frenchman's shrewd eyes had lost their direct, challenging look. He was staring abstractedly toward the drawing-room wall with the expression of one attempting to recall a forgotten bar of music or a half-remembered line of verse. "It is," he muttered to himself, "it is — *parbleu*, but certainly!" Of Thorndyke he demanded:

"You say *Mademoiselle* your daughter went to her chamber complaining of *mal de tête* shortly after dinner?"

"Yes; as a matter of fact we hadn't quite finished when she excused herself. It struck me as strange at the time, too, for she hardly ever suffers with headache. I think—"

"*Précisément, Monsieur*; so do I. I think this whole business has the odor of deceased fish on it. Sergeant" — he turned to Costello — "your suggestion concerning the difficulty of ascending that drain-pipe was well made."

"How's that, sor? D'ye mean—"

"I mean the yokel finding a rib buried here, a vertebra interred there, and a clavicle hidden elsewhere in the earth would say, 'Behold, I have found some bones,' while the skilled anatomist finding the same things would declare,

“Here we have various parts of a skeleton. My friends” — he swept us with a quick, challenging stare — “we are come to the door of a most exceedingly dark closet in which there rattles a monstrous skeleton. No matter, Jules de Grandin is here; he will turn the light upon it; he will expose the loathsome thing. *Parbleu*, he will drag it forth and dismember it piece by piece, or may the devil serve him as mincemeat pie at next Thanksgiving dinner!

“*Bon soir, Monsieur*,” he bowed to Thorndyke, “I know not the location of your vanished daughter; but I can damnation guess the sort of place where she lies hidden.

“Come, my friends,” he motioned Costello and me before him, “there are thoughts to think, plans to make, and afterward, deeds to do. Let us be about them.”

Once more in my study, he fell to pacing the floor with long, silent strides, soft-footed and impatient as a prisoned panther. “*Cordieu*,” he murmured; and, “*Morbleu*, they were clever, those ones. They used the psychology in baiting their trap. Yes.”

“What the dickens are you talking about?” I demanded.

“Of Mademoiselle Marrien and her orchids,” he replied, pausing in his restless walk. “Consider, my friend: When Monsieur Thorndyke gave us his daughter’s picture and I moved to examine it beneath the light, my nose was assailed by a so faint, but reminiscent odor. I looked about for its source. Such a smell I have found upon the lips of those drugged that their houses might be robbed — once, even, I discerned it on certain fowls which had been stolen without making outcry. This was in Guiana. I recognized that smell, but at first I could not call it by name. Then I perceived the orchids, and bent to smell them. It was there. I am ‘warm,’ as the children say when they play their hide-away game. I ask to know concerning the bouquet. What do I learn? That they have come all mysteriously for Mademoiselle Marrien, none knows whence, or by whom brought. Thereupon I see everything, all quickly, like a flash in the dark. Being a woman, Mademoiselle Marrien can not help but thrust her nose into those flowers, even though she knows that orchids possess no perfume. It is a woman’s instinctive act. Very good. The ones who sent those orchids traded on this certainty, and dusted the petals of those flowers with a powder made from the seeds of the *datuna stramonium*. These seeds are rich in atropine and scopolamine. Taken internally, in sufficient quantity, they cause headache, giddiness, nausea, unconsciousness, finally death. Inhaled in the form of powder, they adhere to the mucous membrane of the nose and throat, and within a short time cause violent headache, even unconsciousness, perhaps. That is sufficient for the miscreants’ purposes. They would not slay Mademoiselle Marrien — yet. No. Beside roadway she must tread, the path into the grave would be a thoroughfare of

joy.”

“You’re raving!” I assured him. “Granting your fantastic theory, how did Marrien Thorndyke manage to evaporate from her room and leave the door locked on the inside?”

For a long moment he stared at me; then: “How does the fledgling, which can not fly, manage to leave its nest when the serpent goes ravaging among the tree-tops?” he returned as he pivoted on his heel and departed for bed.

5

It was something after five o’clock next evening when my office telephone rang. “Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, come at once, immediately, this instant!” de Grandin’s excited voice commanded. “She is found, I have located her!”

“She? Who?”

“Who but Mademoiselle Marrien, *par l’amour d’un bouc*?” he returned. “Come, I await you at police headquarters.”

Quickly as possible I made my way to City Hall, wondering, meanwhile, what lay behind the little Frenchman’s excited announcement. All day he had been off on some mysterious business of his own, a note beside my plate informing me he could not wait for breakfast, and would not return “until I do arrive.”

In the guardroom at headquarters I found him, smoking furiously, talking excitedly, gesturing strenuously; obviously in his element. Beside him were Sergeant Costello, four plainclothes men and a dozen uniformed patrolmen, armed with an imposing assortment of gas bombs, riot guns and automatic rifles.

“*Bienvenu, mon brave!*” he greeted. “But now, I was telling the good Costello of my cleverness. Wait, you too shall hear: All day I have haunted the neighborhood of Paradise Street, searching, looking, seeking a sign. But an hour since I chanced to spy a *conjun* store, and—”

“A *what*?” I asked.

“A *conjun* shop — a place where charms are sold. By example, they had there powdered bones of black cats; they are esteemed most excellent for neutralizing an enemy’s curse. They had also preserved bat wings, love potions, medicines warranted to make an uncongenial wife or husband betake himself elsewhere with greatest celerity — all manner of such things they had.

“I engaged the proprietor in talk. I talked of many things, and all the while I looked about me. The street was well paved and cleanly swept before the shop, there was not patch of muddy earth about the neighborhood, yet the fellow’s boots and trouser-knees, even his hands, were stained with new, fresh clay. ‘*Parbleu*,’ I say to me, ‘this will bear investigating!’

“Forth from that shop I went, and walked quickly up the alley which runs behind it. The rear of the yard was fenced, but, *grâce a Dieu*, the fence contained a knothole, and to it I did glue my eye. Nor was my patience unrewarded. No. Anon I saw the dusky dispenser of charms come from his back door and scuttle across his *paved* back yard, entering a tiny shed of rough boards which stood near the rear of his lot. There was no chance for his feet to become muddied that way, my friend.

“I wait for him to emerge. My watch counts fifteen minutes, but still he does not come. ‘Has he died in there?’ I ask me. At last it is no longer to be endured. All silently I leap the fence and cross the yard, then peer into the little house. *Pardieu*, what do I see? A hole, my friend: a great, gaping hole, like the open top of a newly digged well, and leading into it there is a ladder. Nothing less.

“Into that hole I lower myself, and when I reach the bottom I find the end is not yet. No; by no means. From the hole there runs a tunnel through the earth, and Monsieur the Black Man, whom I have followed, is nowhere to be seen. ‘Very well,’ I tell me, ‘where he has gone, I, too, may go.’ And so I do.

“That tunnel, my friend, it leads me across the street to the cellar of an old, long-disused house, a house whose doors have been boarded up and which has apparently been so long unused that even the newest of the many ‘For Sale’ signs which decorate its façade is quite illegible.

“*Tiens*, I look into that cellar, but I do not long remain to see what is there, for to be surprised in that place is to bid a swift *adieu* to life, and I have no desire to die. But in the little while I squat there like a toad-frog I hear and see so much that I can guess much more.

“I do not wait, not I; instead I come here with all speed and gather reinforcements. *Voilà*.

“Sergeant, the sun has set, already there is that beginning to commence which needs our early intervention. Friend Trowbridge and I will go first — it is a matter for no gossip where doctors go — do you and several of your men come shortly afterward, and guard the exits to the old, dark house. Anon, let the machine-gunners come, and take position all round the premises. When I whistle, or you hear a shot, come, and come quickly, for there will be great need of you.”

“We are arrived, my friend,” he whispered as he led the way up a particularly malodorous alley and paused before a rickety board fence. “Come, let us mount.”

We scaled the creaking barrier and dropped as quietly as possible to a brick-paved yard scarcely larger than an areaway. Guided entirely by memory, for we dared not show a light, de Grandin led the way to a wooden outhouse, paused a moment then began to descend a flimsy ladder

reaching down a ten-foot hole in the earth.

For some distance we crept along a narrow, clay-floored tunnel, and finally came to a halt as the faint, reflected glow of a wavering light reached us. And with the light came the unmistakable acrid odor of crowded, sweating humanity, raw, pungent gin and another faint, indefinable stench, foul, nauseating, somehow menacing, as though, itself unrecognized, it knocked upon the long-forgotten door of a dim ancestral memory — and fear.

Inch by cautious inch we crept forward until at last we looked through a jagged opening into a low-ceiled, brick-walled cellar, illuminated by the smoke-dimmed rays of a single swinging oil lantern.

About the room in crescent-formation were ranged, four or five deep, eighty or more men and women. They differed from each other in both kind and degree, heavy-featured, black-skinned full-bloods crouching cheek by jowl with mulattoes, coarsely clothed laborers huddled beside dandified, oily-haired “sheiks,” working-women herded in with modishly dressed she-fops of the dance halls and restaurants. Only in the singleness of purpose, the fixed intentness of their concentrated stares, did they seem held together by any sort of bond.

At the far side of the cellar was erected a grotesque parody of an altar. On it were saucers containing meal, salt and whole grains of corn, a bottle of square-face gin, a roughly carved simulacrum of a half-coiled snake, several tin cups, a machete honed to a razor edge and, turned upside down, a heavy, beaten brass crucifix. With a start I recalled Costello’s story of the ravished church and the cross which had so strangely disappeared.

But I had no time for reflection, for my attention was quickly drawn to the group before the altar; two men and a woman squatting cross-legged before wide-topped kettle-drums, an aged and unbelievably wrinkled Negress arrayed in gaudy, tarnished finery resembling the make-up of a gypsy fortune-teller, and a young white woman, nude save for the short kilt of scarlet cloth belted about her waist, the turban of a bandanna tied round her head and the inane, frivolous bands of crimson ribbon, which circled her wrists and ankles.

She was squatted tailor-fashion facing the drums, and swayed slightly from the hips as the musicians kept up a constant thrumming rumble — a sort of sustained, endlessly long-drawn note — by beating lightly and with incredible quickness on the parchment drumheads with the padded drumsticks. There was something curiously unlife-like in the way her hands were folded in her scarlet lap, a sort of tired listlessness wholly out of keeping with the strained, taut look on her face.

The aged Negress was whispering to her with cracked, toothless sibilance, and, though I could not catch the words,

I knew she urged some act which the girl stubbornly refused, for time and again the old hag wheedled, argued, cajoled, and as often the girl shook her head slightly but doggedly, as though her nerves and body were almost worn to the point of yielding, but her spirit struggled doggedly on.

But each time the crone repeated her request the drummers increased the volume of their racket ever so little, and, it seemed to me, the very persistence of sustained vibration was wearing the girl's resistance down. Certainly she was already in a state bordering on hypnosis, or else bound fast in the thrall of some potent drug; every line of her flaccid, unresisting body, the droop of her bare white shoulders, the very passivity with which she crouched upon the chill, bare earth proclaimed it.

At length the tempo of the drums increased and the volume of the rumble rose till it shook back low yet deafening echoes from the walls. The girl gave one final stubborn headshake, then nodded slowly, indifferently, as though too tired to hold her chin up for another instant. Her head sank forward, as though she napped, and her sloping shoulders drooped still further. The concentrated thought of the circling audience, the ceaselessly repeated importunities of the hag and the never-ending rumble of the drums had worn down her resistance; her psychic strength was broken, and she was but a mute and helpless tool, a helpless, mindless instrument without conscience or volition.

A quick, sharp order from the aged hag, who now assumed the rôle of priestess or mistress of ceremonies, and the girl rose slowly to her feet, put forth her hand and lifted the hinged top of a small square box reposing underneath the altar. As she turned her profile toward us I felt my heart stand still, for she was the counterpart of Adelaide Truman, the girl from Martinique. More, she was the original of the picture Thorndyke showed us, the missing Marrien!

A frightened squawk sounded as her groping hands explored the opened box. Next instant she straightened to her fullest height, two game cocks, one black, the other red, held firmly by the feet in her outstretched hands. For a moment she swayed, like a reed shaken in the wind, then, with a sinuous, side-stepping, sliding motion, described a narrow circle before the altar.

From its place before the reversed cross the ancient Negress snatched the machete, the blade flashed once, twice, in the lantern light, and the fowls beat the air tumultuously with their wings as their heads fell to the earthen floor.

And now the girl whirled and pirouetted frenziedly, the flapping rooster in her hands showering her with blood from their severed necks, so that her white shoulders and breast, even her cheeks and lips, were red as the flaunting cloth of her scanty costume.

The old high priestess snatched the dying cockerels from

her hierophant's hands and held their spurting necks above a tin cup, pressing on their breasts and sides to force the flow of blood as one might press a leather water-bottle. When the last drop of blood was emptied in the cup, the gin bottle was uncorked and its fiery contents mingled with the chickens' gore.

Then followed a sort of impious travesty of communion. From hand to hand the reeking cup was passed, men and women sucking at it eagerly, slopping its ruddy contents on their clothes, smearing their faces with the sanguine mixture.

The drink drove them to frenzy. White eyes rolled madly, jaws dropped, lips slavered, as they swayed drunkenly from side to side. "*Coq blanc, le coq blanc* — the white cock!" they screamed. A young girl half rose from her seat on the floor, clutched her dress with both hands and ripped the garment down the front, exposing her bronze bosom, then fell to the floor again, rolling over and over, gibbering inarticulately, foaming at the mouth like a rabid she-dog. The drums roared and thundered, men howled and shouted hoarsely, women screamed or groaned in a perfect ecstasy of neuro-religious fervor — the bestial, unreasoning hysteria which sent the Sudanese fanatics fearlessly into Kitchener's shrapnel barrages at Khartoum. "*Coq blanc — coq blanc,*" the cry rose insistently.

The blood-spattered girl ceased her rhythmic whirling a moment and reached once more into the covered box. Again she straightened before the lines of frantic blacks, and in her up-stretched hands she held displayed for all to see a trembling white rooster — the *coq blanc* for which they clamored.

Once more the machete flashed in the lantern light, and the poor bird struggled convulsively in its death spasm between her upraised hands, its blood douching her hair, brow and cheeks as she turned her face to bathe it in the gory cataract.

A pause fell on the crowd as she flung the cockerel's corpse contemptuously behind her — and wheeled about until her outstretched finger tips all but touched the altar's edge. So stiff it was that the labored nasal breathing of the audience rasped gratingly as we lay in our covert, wondering what new obscenity was next.

The drums halted their sullen muttering and the withered hag began a high-pitched, singsong chant of invocation.

From a door at the farther side of the cellar shambled the vilest thing I had ever seen in human form. Short, hardly more than five feet tall, he was, but with a depth of chest and breadth of shoulder like those of a gorilla. Like a giant ape's too, were his abnormally long-toed feet and his monstrous arms, which hung so far below his knees that it seemed he might have touched his knuckles to the earth; yet

he scarcely stooped an inch to do so. Slope-headed, great-mouthed, half beast, half human he seemed as he advanced with a rolling gait and paused before the altar, then, bending quickly, dragged forth a heavy wooden chest bound round with iron reinforcement. I did not need de Grandin's nudge to call attention to the dozen or more augur-holes piercing the top and ends of the box; I saw them at first glance, and in the same moment my nostrils caught the strengthened odor of that stench which had first appalled me as we crept along the tunnel.

The drums began again, and with their rhythmic mutter came the muted moaning of the audience, a sound half fearful, half eloquent of adoration, but wholly terrifying.

The girl before the altar crouched and genuflected, her head bowed low, her arms uplifted, as though she were a postulant bending to receive the veil which makes her sacrosanct from the world and undis severable bride of the Church. And from the iron-bound chest the hideous ape-man dragged forth a squirming, white-bellied snake, a loathsome, five-inch-thick reptile with wicked, wedge-shaped head and villainous, unwinking eyes, *and laid it like a garland round the girls uncovered shoulders!*

Sluggishly, as though but partially aroused from a torpor, the monstrous reptile coiled its length — it was all of fifteen feet — about the bare arms of its holder, slid its twining bulk about her breast and torso, its tail encircling her slender waist, its head protruding underneath her left arm and swinging pendulously from side to side as its evil, changeless eyes glared viciously in the lantern light and its forked tea-colored tongue flickered lamently.

So heavy was the serpent's weight the girl was forced to plant her naked feet apart as she smoothed the dull, gleaming scales with her taper finger tips and massaged the white-armored throat gently as slowly, slowly, she forced the horrid face upward, turned it toward her face and — my stomach retched at the sight — *kissed it on the mouth!*

The throng of worshipers went wild. Men and women clung together in strangling embraces and rolled and wallowed on the floor. Some rose erect and tossed their arms aloft, screaming peals of triumphant laughter or unmentionable obscenities. "She has kissed the Queen! She kisses the Queen! The prophecy is fulfilled!" I heard one votary shout, and, mingled with the drums' unceasing roar came cries of "*Ybo, lé, lé; Ybo, c'est l'heure de sang—*"

I almost screamed aloud as de Grandin's elbow struck me in the ribs. The ape-man had left the room, returning with a burlap sack flung across his shoulder, a sack in which something tiny moved and struggled and whimpered with the still, small voice of a little child in fear and pain. He tossed the sack upon the floor and, grinning horribly, turned toward the girl, handling the noisome reptile with the skill of an adept as he uncoiled it from her white body and placed

it, wound into a writhing knot, upon the altar by the desecrated cross.

Into the girl's hands he put the gleaming, razor-edged machete, then turned once more to the struggling, whimpering something in the sack.

"*Le bouc, le bouc sans cornes — le bouc blanc sans cornes* — the goat without horns — the white goat without horns!" howled the congregation frenziedly. "*Le blanc sans cornes—*"

"My friend," de Grandin whispered, "I damn think the time is come!"

A crashing double report shattered the atmosphere as his heavy army revolvers bellowed almost in unison. There was a scream from the region of the altar, a yell of apprehension from the congregation, and the sharp tinkle of broken glass as a bullet smashed the chimney of the lantern illuminating the place, plunging us into instant impenetrable darkness.

Sharp as acid, piercing as a knife-thrust, de Grandin's shrill whistle sounded through the dark, followed by the deafening roar of his pistols as he fired point-blank into the milling mass of humanity in the darkened cellar.

A crash like all the thunders of heaven let loose at once roared over us, followed by the tramping of heavy-soled boots on the empty floors of the old house, then the pounding of hurrying feet upon the cellar stairs. Costello, with unerring efficiency, had hurled two hand grenades at the outer door of the house, then charged through the opening thus created, taking no chances of delay while his men battered down the stout oak panels.

"Are ye there, Dr. de Grandin, sor?" he shouted as half a dozen powerful bull's-eye lanterns lighted the place. "Are ye all right, sor?"

A choking, rasping gurgle beside me answered. Turning sharply I saw the little Frenchman struggling frantically in the coils of the monster snake. With reptilian instinct the thing had crawled from the altar when darkness came, and made for the tunneled exit, encountering de Grandin in its course, and wrapping itself about him.

I snatched the machete from the altar and aimed a blow at the creature's head, but:

"The tail, Friend Trowbridge, strike off its tail!" he gasped.

The keen steel sheared through the reptile's tail, leaving eight inches of it wrapped about a ceiling beam, and with a writhing crash the great, gray-spotted tubular body unloosed its hold upon the Frenchman's trunk and slipped twisting to the earth like a monstrous spring released from its tension.

Half consciously, half instinctively, I realized the wisdom of de Grandin's advice. Had I lopped off the serpent's head, muscular contraction would have tightened its coils about him, and he would inevitably have been crushed to pulp. By striking off its tail I had deprived it of its grip on the ceiling

beam, which it used as a fulcrum for its hold, and thereby rendered it impotent to tighten itself about his body.

The little Frenchman's execution had been terrible. Four of the snake-worshippers lay stark and dead upon the floor, four more were nursing dreadful wounds, and the rest were huddled together in abject terror and made no resistance as Costello's men applied the handcuffs.

In a crumpled heap before the altar lay Marrien Thorn-dyke, her eyes fast closed, her respiration so light I had to listen a second time at her blood-smeared breast before I could detect the faintest murmur of her heart.

"An overcoat for her, Friend Costello, if you please, or she will surely take pneumonia," de Grandin ordered. "Wrap her warmly and bear her to the hospital. By damn, I greatly fear her nerves have had a shock from which they will not soon recover, but she is in better case than if we had not arrived in time. At the worst she will recover from her illness and live; had we not found her, I greatly fear there would not have remained enough for *l'entrepreneur des pompes funèbres* to bury."

"The *entrepreneur des pompes funèbres* — the undertaker?" I demanded. "Do you mean she would have been killed?"

"No less," he returned shortly, then:

"*Holà*, my little cabbage, is it hide-and-go-seek you play in there?" he cried as from the rough sack he lifted a tiny morsel of pink, baby flesh and folded it against his bosom. "Ha, my little goatling," he chuckled, "it is better that I find you thus than that you serve as 'the goat without horns' for these abominations. Attend me, Sergeant. Wrap this one warmly and see that she is given milk to drink, then bid Monsieur and Madame Boswell come to police headquarters to see what they shall see. Name of a cannon, but I think the sight of this one will surely stop their eyes from weeping!"

"Now" — he turned to survey the cellar with a fierce glance as he reached again for his heavy pistols — "where is that misbegotten *sacré bête*, that ape in half-human shape? Is it possible I missed him with my first shot?"

It was not. Stretched on his back, his short, bandy legs and long, monkey-like arms twisted grotesquely, lay the ape-man, a gaping wound in his temple telling eloquently of the accuracy of de Grandin's marksmanship. The creature's shattered head was pillowed in the lap of the aged hag, who bent above him, dropping tears upon his ugly countenance and wailing, "*A-hé, a-hé, mon beau, mon beau brave fils; mort, mort; mort!*"

De Grandin looked uncertainly at the weeping crone a moment, then removed his hat. "Mourn for your Caliban, Sycorax," he bade, not ungently, and, turning to Costello:

"Leave her a little while with her dead before you make her arrested, my friend," he begged. "Ill-favored as an ape he was, and wicked as the foul fiend's own self, but he was

her son, and to a mother every son is dear, and beautiful, though he be ugly as a pig and vicious as a scorpion.

"*Précisément, exactement, quite so,*" the Frenchman agreed with a serious nod of his head.

6

"No, no, my friend," Jules de Grandin shook his head in vigorous denial, "it was but the ability to recognize what I did behold which enabled me to lead us to the snake-worshippers' den. When Sergeant Costello mentioned the ravishing away of the blessed cross from the church was when I first began to suspect what now we know to be the facts. Consider, if you please—" he checked the items off upon his fingers:

"First comes the murder of the excellent young clergyman, a murder without motive, it appears, and most cruelly executed. That meant little; a madman might have done it.

"Then we have the stealing of little Baby Boswell; by itself that, too, meant little; again a maniac might be to blame.

"Next comes the stealing of a part of the sanctified furniture from the altar. Once more our hypothetical crazy man may be responsible; but would the same lunatic commit all three crimes, or would three separate madmen decide to act so near together? Possibly, but not likely.

"Considered separately, these are but three motiveless crimes; viewed as connected links in a chain of misdemeanors, they begin to show some central underlying motivation. 'Let us suppose,' I say to me, 'the same man have done all these things — he have slain Monsieur Sherwood who is influential for good among the blacks; he have stolen away a baby girl; he have desecrated the sanctuary of a church. What sort of people do so?'

"All quickly I think; all quickly I remember. In voodoo-ridden Haiti, during the reign of the tyrant Antoine-Simone, he and his daughter Célestine, who were reputed to be *grande mamaloi* of the island — a sort of female pope of the voodooists — those two did actually succeed in hoodwinking Monseigneur the Archbishop of Haiti to bless and almost bury in consecrated ground the carcass of a slaughtered he-goat which they had substituted for the corpse of one of the palace suite. What they desired of the cadaver of a stinking goat which had been blessed with bell, book and candle only God, the Devil and they knew, but the fact remains they wanted it, and but for a fortunate accident would have succeeded in obtaining it.

"This I recalled when the good Costello told of the ravishment of the church, and so I thought, perhaps, I saw one tiny, small gleam of light amid the darkness of these

many so strange crimes.

“Then like a confirmation of my theory comes the discovery of the patchwork corset — pure voodoo, that — upon the body of a white girl. ‘Ha,’ I say to me, ‘here are a new angle of this devil’s business.’

“Her murder follows quickly; a murder obviously committed to stop her mouth with blood. We search for the killer; but nowhere can we find him. Only the apes of Tarzan could have gained a vantage-point to hurl the fatal knife, then effect escape from immediately beneath our noses.

“Comes then the killing of Monsieur Lucas, the watchman. When I see his dead corpse all mutilated I tell me, ‘This is no ordinary killing; this is the ritual murder of some most vile secret society.’ And even as I come to that conclusion what do I find but the two burnt matches which mean that voodoo vengeance has been wreaked upon a backslider. *Voilà!* The mystery is a mystery no more. And the so long footprint marked in blood at the murder-scene — *there* is the track of my ape-man, the one who could have murdered Mademoiselle Adelaide because of his peculiar ability to climb that ice-encrusted tree beside the room where we interviewed her. Yes, the same one have undoubtedly done both murders.

“All quickly I investigate her unhappy past, and likewise that of the murdered watchman. I have told you what I found. Undoubtedly this old nurse of the murdered girl, this old Toinette, is a voodoo *mamaloï*, or high priestess; she have settled here, she have made many unfortunate Negroes her dupes; aided by the ape-man, she have planned the supreme revenge upon the white oppressor — she has raised up a white girl to serve the snake-goddess of Obeah, to perform the sacrifice not of a goat, as is done at ordinary ceremonies, but of ‘*the goat without horns*’ — a human infant, and a white one, at that. Thus is explained the kidnaping of little Baby Boswell.

“‘Jules de Grandin,’ I tell me, ‘we must work fast if we are to circumvent this abominable abomination.’

“Then comes the riot when the police are defied with guns, an occurrence without parallel, the good Costello declared. It are most significant. I recall that the bloody massacre which drove the French from Haiti was plotted round a voodoo watch-fire on August 14, 1791, by rebellious slaves led by one Doukman, a voodoo *papaloï*, or priest. Impossible as it seems, a disordered brain had conceived the possibility of waging war against the law here in New Jersey, America. Only alcohol, drugs or religious frenzy, perhaps a mixture of them all, could nurture such an insane plan.

“Quickly on the riot’s heels comes the abduction of Mademoiselle Marrien. I see her remarkable resemblance to the dead Mademoiselle Adelaide; I observe the headache-

producing powder on the mysteriously delivered orchids; once more the trail of voodoo cunning lies across my path. Her room was inaccessible to any but an ape; yet she is gone. Ha, but there is an ape-man dodging back and forth between all the happenings in this so mysterious chain of circumstances; once more I think I see his handiwork. Yes, it is unquestionably so.

“‘These wicked ones, they will not be denied their triumph,’ I tell me. ‘Having deprived themselves of the priestess they so carefully trained from childhood, they steal another, as like her in appearance as possible, and by means of drugs and drums, and *le bon Dieu* only knows what sort of foul magic, they break her will in pieces and force her to serve in place of her they slew.

“‘I seek a likely place for them to congregate; by great good luck and more than ordinary intelligence, I find it. Forthwith I come to Friend Costello for reinforcements. The rest we know.’

“‘But see here, de Grandin,’ I asked, ‘in the voodoo temple tonight you said something about Marrien Thorn-dyke being in peril of her life. Would the same thing have applied to Adelaide Truman? D’ye think old Toinette would have risked her life in the Martinique earthquake to save the child, only to have her slaughtered in the end?’

“‘*Mais certainement,*’ he assented. ‘Does not the shepherd repeatedly risk his life for his flock, only that they may at last be driven to the shambles?’

“‘But she was a priestess, a being regarded almost as divine,’ I insisted. ‘Surely they would not have harmed her after electing her to celebrate their rites. Why—’

“‘Why, of a certitude, they would,’ he interrupted. ‘The sacrifice of the priest or priestess, even of the god’s own proxy, is no strange thing in many religions. The priest of Dionysus at Potmice was sacrificed following the performance of his priestly office; the Phrygian priests of Attis were of old destroyed when they had done serving their god; a man impersonating Osiris, Sun God of Egypt, was first worshiped with all fervor, then ruthlessly slain in commemoration of the murder of Osiris by Set; and among the ancient Aztecs, Chicomecohuatl, the Corn Goddess, was likewise impersonated by a beauteous maiden who afterward was butchered and flayed in public. Yes, there is nothing strange in the slaughter of a venerated priestess by her worshippers, my friend.’

“‘Well, annyway, Dr. de Grandin, sor, ye sure ran th’ murtherin’ divils down an’ settled that ape-felly’s hash in tidy order,’ Costello interrupted. ‘Good thing ye did, too. He sure deserved killin’, but we’d never ‘a’ convinced a jury he kilt pore little Miss Truman or even the Eagle Laundry’s watchman, Lucas.’

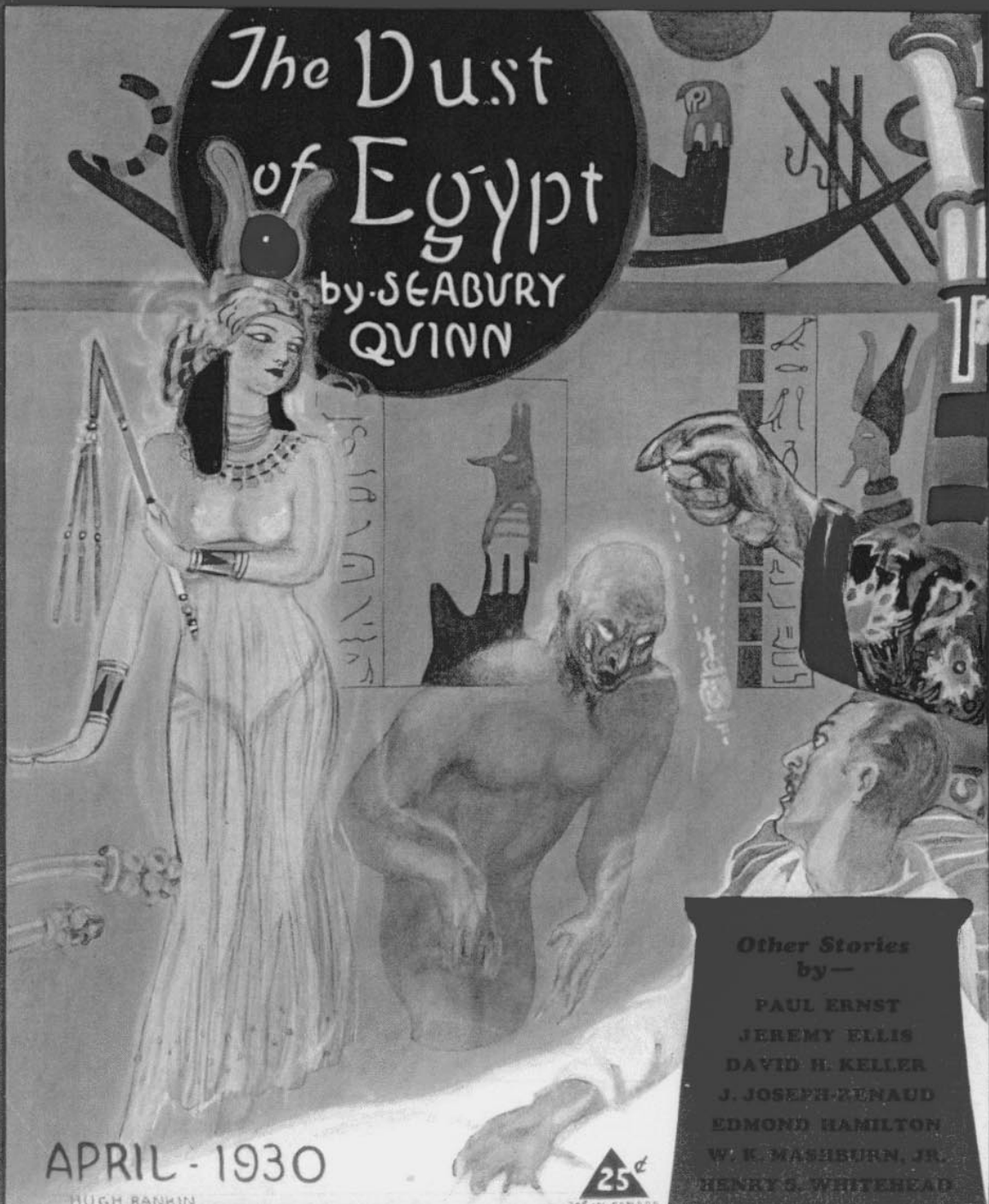
“‘*Eh bien,* my friend,’ de Grandin cast one of his quick, elfin smiles at the big Irishman, ‘all that which ends well

ends satisfactorily, as Monsieur Shakespeare remarks. The motiveless, meaningless crimes which threatened your tranquillity will trouble you no more; neither will the criminals.

“Trowbridge, Costello, good friends” — he filled three glasses with amber cognac and passed us each a bumper — “let us leave off this business as we began it; I bid you Happy New Year.”

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



The Dust
of Egypt
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APRIL - 1930

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The Dust of Egypt

IT WAS an odd couple Nora McGinnis ushered into my drawing room that snowy February night. The man was good-looking, extraordinarily so, with fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, broad forehead and deep, greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath brows of almost startling blackness. His chest was deep and well developed, and his wide, square shoulders told of strength and stamina beyond the usual. Yet he was scarcely more than five feet tall, and the trousers of his well-tailored dinner suit hung baggily on limbs shriveled to mere skeletal proportions. His right knee bent awkwardly at a fixed, unchanging angle which made his walk little more than a lurching, painful hobble, and the patent leather oxfords on his feet were almost boyish in their smallness. Obviously, poliomyelitis had ravaged his once splendid body hideously, leaving a man half-perfect, half-pitiable wreck.

The woman, apparently almost of an age with her companion — somewhere near twenty-five, I judged — was in everything but deformity his perfect feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap of black satin her manishly shingled, jetty hair lay against her small, well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to be almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry; her walk was one of those smooth, undulant gaits which announce a nervous balance and muscular co-ordination not often found in this neurotic age. A sleeveless evening frock of black net and satin fell in graceful folds almost to her narrow, high-arched insteps, and the tiny emerald buttons decorating her black-satin pumps were matched by the emerald studs set in the lobes of her small ears and, oddly, by the greenish lights in her black-fringed hazel eyes. She was devoid of makeup, save the vivid scarlet of her lips.

I examined the two small oblongs of cardboard Nora had handed me before admitting the visitors. “Mr. Monteith?” I asked tentatively.

“I am he,” the young man answered with a quick smile which lighted his somber, brooding countenance with a peculiar charm, “and this is my sister, Louella.” He paused a moment, as though embarrassed, then:

“We’ve been told you have a friend, a Dr. de Grandin, who occasionally interests himself in matters which have, or seem to have, a supernatural aspect. If you would be good enough to tell us how we might get in touch with him—”

“*Avec beaucoup de félicité!*” Jules de Grandin interrupted with a laugh. “Stretch forth your hand, and touch, *mon ami*; I am he whom you seek!”

“Ah?” young Monteith stared at the little Frenchman,

scarcely knowing how to acknowledge the unusual introduction. “Ah—”

“*Précisément,*” de Grandin assented as he waved the callers to a seat upon the fireside lounge. “We are very well met, I think; this had promised to be a dull evening. Now, regarding this seemingly so supernatural matter concerning which you would consult Jules de Grandin—” he raised his narrow, black brows till they described twin Saracenic arches and paused expectantly.

Young Monteith ran his hand over his smoothly brushed black hair and directed a look almost of appeal at the little Frenchman. “I hardly know how to begin,” he confessed, then cast a puzzled glance about the room, as though seeking inspiration from the Dresden figurines on the mantelpiece.

“Why not at the beginning?” de Grandin suggested pleasantly as he drew out his slim gold cigarette case, courteously proffered it to the visitors, then held his pocket lighter for them to set the tobacco alight.

“The case concerns my uncle — our uncle’s — death,” Mr. Monteith replied as he expelled a cloud of fragrant gray smoke from his nostrils. “It may have been natural enough — the death certificate read heart failure, and there were no legal complications — but both my sister and I are puzzled, and if you can spare the time to investigate it, we’d — here,” he broke off, drawing a thin packet of papers from his inside pocket, “this is a copy of Uncle Absalom’s will; we might as well start with it as anything.”

The little Frenchman took the sheets of foolscap with their authenticating red seals and held them to the light.

“In the Name of God, Amen,” he read: “I, Absalom Barnstable” — Barn-stable, *mon Dieu*, what a name! — “being of sound and disposing mind and memory and in full bodily vigor, yet being certain of the near approach of unescapable and inevitable doom, do hereby make, publish and declare this, my last will and testament, hereby revoking any and all other will or wills by me at any time heretofore made.

“First — I commend my spirit to the keeping of God my Savior, and my body to be buried in my plot in Vale Cemetery.

“Second—”

“You can skip the second, third and fourth paragraphs,” Mr. Monteith interrupted; “the fifth is the only one bearing further on our problem.”

“Very well,” de Grandin turned the page and continued: “Fifth— And it is my will and desire that my said nephew

and niece, David and Louella Monteith, aforesaid, do take up residence in my house near Harrisonville, New Jersey, as soon as they shall be apprized of the provisions hereof, and shall there remain in residence for the full term of six months, and at the end of that time, *unless intervening occurrences shall have prompted them to take such action earlier*, or unless it shall have become physically impossible so to do, they shall remove from the said house the mummy of the Priest Sepa and see it safely transported overseas and buried in the sands of the Egyptian desert; and I do especially make the faithful carrying-out of these injunctions conditions precedent to their succession to the residuum of my estate."

De Grandin finished reading and glanced from the brother to the sister with his odd, unwinking stare.

"We are the residuary legatees of Uncle Absalom's estate," David Monteith explained. "It amounts to something like \$300,000."

"*Parbleu*, for half that sum I should undertake the interment of all the shriveled mummies in the necropolis of Thebes!" the Frenchman returned. "But where is the *outré* feature of your case, my friends? True, your estimable uncle seems to have been peculiar, but eccentricity is the privilege of age and wealth. Why should you not make yourselves comfortable in his late dwelling for half a year, then bury the so long dead Egyptian gentleman with fitting honors and thereafter enjoy yourselves in any manner seeming good to you?"

It was the girl who answered. "Dr. de Grandin," she asked in a charmingly modulated contralto voice, "didn't you notice the odd phraseology in the opening paragraph of Uncle Absalom's will? If he had said 'being certain of the near approach of unescapable and inevitable death' we should have paid little attention to it, for he was past eighty years old, and even though he seemed strong and active as a man of sixty, death couldn't have been so far away in the natural course of things; but he didn't say 'death', he said 'unescapable and inevitable doom'."

"*Exactement*," de Grandin agreed calmly, but the sudden light which shone in his little round blue eyes betrayed awaking interest. "*Précisément, Mademoiselle*; what then?"

"I'm certain that horrible old mummy he mentions in his will had something to do with it," she shot back in a low, almost breathless voice. "Show him the transcription, David," she ordered, turning to her brother.

Mr. Monteith produced a second paper from his pocket. "Louella found this in an old escritoire in the library the day before Uncle Absalom died," he explained. "She meant to ask him about it, but never got the chance. It may shed some light on the case — to you. It only makes it more mysterious to us."

"Transcription of the Tablet found in the Tomb of Sepa

the Priest," de Grandin read:

"Sepa, servant and priest of Aset, the All-Mother, Who Is and Was and Is to Be, to whoso looks hereon, greeting and admonition:

"Impious stranger, who has defiled the sanctuary of my sepulcher, be thou accursed. Be thy uprisings and thy down-lyings accursed; accursed be thy goings-out and thy returnings; cursed be thou in labor and in rest; may thy nights be filled with terrifying visions and thy days with travail and with pain, and may the wrath of Aset, who Was and Is and Is to Be, be on thee and on thy house for all time. May thy body be the prey to kites and jackals and thy soul endure the torture of the Gods. Unburied shalt thou die, and bodiless and accursed shalt thou wander in Amenti forever and forever, and be this malediction on thee and on thy house until such time as my relics be once again interred in the sands of Khem. I have said."

"*Eh bien*, he cursed a vicious curse, this one," the Frenchman remarked as he concluded. "And what is this we have here?"

Pasted to the bottom of the sheet bearing the translation of the old curse was a newspaper cutting bearing a London dateline:

London, Nov. 16. — The strange death of Richard Bethell, son of Lord Westbury, today revived the legend of the curse of death that hovers over those who disturb the graves of the ancient lords of Egypt.

His death is the tenth among the leaders of Lord Carnarvon's expedition to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, which uncovered the tomb of King Tutankhamen.

Bethell, who was secretary to Howard Carter, leader of the expedition, was found dead in bed in the aristocratic Bath Club. Physicians are at a loss as to what caused his end.

"U'm?" de Grandin put the paper down and regarded the visitors once more with his direct, level stare. "And what of your late uncle?" he demanded. "Tell me what you can of his life; more particularly of his death."

Again it was the girl who answered. "Uncle Absalom was educated for the Unitarian ministry," she began, "but he never accepted the vocation. About the time he was to take up his ministerial work he met a young lady in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and fell violently in love with her. Yankee clippers still traded with the Orient and Near East in those days, and Miss Goodrich's father, who was a ship-owner, offered Uncle Absalom a share in the business if he would give up his clerical career. He shipped as supercargo on the *Polly Hatton* at his future father-in-law's suggestion, and in the course of a three-year cruise touched at Alexandria, Egypt.

"He seems to have had plenty of time to go inland exploring, for he made a trip up the Nile and with a party of

Arabs broke into a tomb somewhere near Luxor and brought back several mummies, some papyri and some funerary statues. It was comparatively easy to get such things out of Egypt in those days, so Uncle had little difficulty in bringing his finds — or would you call them loot? — away. Oddly enough, they proved the foundation of his fortune.

“Unknown to Uncle Absalom and the master of the ship, Mr. Goodrich had died of smallpox while the *Polly Hatton* was on her cruise, and when they came to appraise his estate he was found to be practically bankrupt. Harriet, his daughter, married a wealthy young ship-chandler, and was the mother of two children when her ‘fiancé’ finally returned to New Bedford.

“But the mummies Uncle Absalom had found proved rather valuable ones. Egyptology was just beginning to be the important science it is today, and the papyri found in the mummy-cases gave a great deal of valuable information the officials of the British Museum had only guessed at before. They paid Uncle £200 — a great deal of money in those days — for his finds, and made him a liberal offer for any further antiquities he might bring them.

“When Uncle Absalom returned to New England to find his expected bride already a wife and mother, his entire nature seemed to change almost overnight. The quiet, bookish divinity student was transformed into a desperate adventurer. The Civil War had been over five years, and the country was beginning to drift into the period of hard times which ended in the panic of 1873. Plenty of young men who’d served in the Union army and navy were out of work, and Uncle Absalom had no trouble recruiting a company of followers without respect either for danger or decency, provided there was money to be had for their work.

“Poor Uncle Absalom! I’m afraid everything he did during the next twenty years or so wouldn’t bear too close scrutiny! The returns from his first venture in grave robbery had proved so good that he went into it as a business.

“Even though most of them were Mohammedans and didn’t believe in the old gods, the Egyptians didn’t take kindly to foreigners despoiling the ancient tombs, and Uncle and his men encountered resistance more than once; but the men who had fought with Grant and Sherman and Farragut weren’t the kind to be stopped by unorganized Arabs, or even by the newly organized gendarmerie of Egypt. They robbed and plundered systematically, taking their loot to a sort of buccaneers’ cache they’d established at a desert oasis, and when they’d accumulated enough spoil to make it worth while, they’d take it out in an armed caravan, sometimes striking for the Red Sea, sometimes going boldly to the Mediterranean and woe betide whoever tried to stop them!

“Of course, both the English and the French went through the motions of combating this wholesale graverobbery, but

both countries had more important things to attend to, and Uncle’s men helped them subdue rebellious natives more than once; so many of his crimes were winked at officially. Also, the great museums of London, Paris, Berlin and St. Petersburg were glad to buy whatever he had for sale, and often bid against each other for his wares; so he grew rich and, in a way, respected. The curators of those museums weren’t so very different from people over here,” she added with a smile. “When I was in school in Washington it was common gossip that the Senators and Congressmen who championed prohibition most eloquently in the halls of Congress were the bootleggers’ best customers in private life.

“What had started as a purely commercial enterprise with the additional element of adventure to help him forget the way he had been jilted at length became a real passion with Uncle Absalom. He learned to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphics, for he’d been a first-rate Greek scholar in college and Bousard’s discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 had furnished the key to the old written language, you know. Long before he retired from his dangerous profession Uncle was rated as one of the foremost authorities on both ancient and modern Egypt, and two universities and the British government made him handsome offers for his services when he finally gave up tomb-robbing as a vocation.

“On his retirement he made a number of gifts to the Egyptian departments of the museums which had been his best customers, but the cream of his finds he retained for his private collection and kept them in his house near Harrisonville.

“I don’t suppose you ever even heard of him, Dr. Trowbridge?” she turned her odd, rather melancholy smile on me. “He’s lived just outside town for almost ten years, but when we came to visit him the taxidriver had never heard of ‘Journey’s End’, where he lived, and we had a great deal of trouble finding him. You see, he had hardly been outside his own grounds once since settling here, and most of his things, including staple groceries, he bought from a mail order house in Chicago. I don’t believe half-a-dozen people in the whole city knew him, or even knew of him.

“David and I came to visit him last month in response to an urgent invitation. He intimated he intended making us his heirs, and as we’re orphans and were his only living relatives, it seemed no more than human charity to accede to his request.

“He was a wonderful-looking old man, courteous, gentle and very learned. He did everything possible to make us welcome, and we should have been very happy at ‘Journey’s End’ if it hadn’t been for an air of — well — uncanniness, which seemed to permeate the whole place.

Somehow, both David and I seemed to feel alien presences there. We'd be reading in the library, or sitting at table, or, perhaps, just going about our affairs in the house, when suddenly we'd have that strange, eerie feeling of someone staring fixedly at the backs of our heads. When we'd turn suddenly — as we always did at first — there'd be no one there, of course; but the feeling was always there, and instead of wearing off it became stronger and stronger. Since Uncle's death I've noticed it more than David has, though.

"Uncle Absalom never mentioned it, and, of course, neither did we — except to each other — but I'm sure he felt it too, for there was a furtive, almost fearful, look in his eyes all the time, and the queer, haunted expression seemed to grow on him, just during the little time of our visit. It was only ten days before his death when he made his will, and you remember how he speaks of 'unescapable and inevitable doom' — instead of 'death' — in the opening paragraph.

"Now, I realize all this is not enough to excuse our belief in anything supernatural being involved in Uncle Absalom's death; that is, not enough to convince a disinterested third party who hadn't felt the queer, terrifying atmosphere of 'Journey's End' and seen the took of hopeless fear grow into an expression of almost resignation in Uncle Absalom's face," she admitted, "and I'm not sure you'll see anything so very unusual in what occurred the night he died. David will have to tell you about that; curiously enough, though everyone else in the house was awake, I slept through it all, and have no first-hand knowledge of anything."

"I compliment you, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin declared with one of his characteristically courteous bows. "You tell your story most exceedingly well. Already I am convinced. I shall most gladly undertake the case.

"Now, young *Monsieur*," he addressed the crippled boy, "add what you can to the so graphic narrative *Mademoiselle* your sister has detailed. I listen; I am all attention."

David Monteith took up the story. "Uncle Absalom died shortly after New Year's — the ninth of January, to be exact," he began. "He and Louella had gone to bed about ten o'clock, but I stayed up in the library reading. It's — pardon the personal reference — it's rather difficult for me to dress and undress, and sometimes I sit up rather late, just to defer the trouble of going to bed. So—"

"It hurts him," his sister interrupted, her eyes welling with tears. "Sometimes he suffers terribly, and—"

"Louella, dear, don't!" the boy cut in. "As I was saying, gentlemen, I sat up late that night, and fell asleep over my book. I woke with a start and found the night, which had been clear and sharp earlier, had become stormy and bitter cold. A perfect gale was blowing, and soft, clinging snowflakes were being dashed against the window-panes

with such force that they struck the glass with an audible impact.

"Just what wakened me I can't say with certainty. I thought at first it was the shrieking of the wind, but, looking back, I'm not so sure; for, blending with the recollection of the dream I'd been having when I woke, was a sound, or combination of sounds—"

"*Mille pardons, Monsieur*, but what of this dream?" de Grandin interrupted. "Such stuff as dreams are made on are oftentimes of greatest importance in cases like this."

"Why," David Monteith colored slightly, "it was a silly hodgepodge I'd been dreaming, sir; it couldn't possibly have any bearing on what happened later. I dreamed I heard two people, a man and a woman, come up the stairs from Uncle Absalom's museum, which was on the ground floor, and pass the library on their way to Uncle's room. And in the absurd way dreams have of making things appear, I thought I could look right through the solid wall and see them, the way you do in those illusional scenes they sometimes have in the theater. They were both dressed in ancient Egyptian costume, and were speaking together in some outlandish language. I'd been reading *Munzinger's Ostafrikanische Studien* when I fell asleep; I expect that accounts for the dream."

"U'm; possibly," de Grandin conceded. "What then, if you please?"

"Well, as I said, when I woke I thought I heard a sort of soft, but very clear, chiming sound, something like sleigh-bells heard a long way off, yet different, somehow, and with it what I took to be a woman's voice singing softly.

"I leaned back in my chair, half asleep still, wondering if some dream image hadn't carried over into my semi-consciousness, when there came a new sound, totally unlike the others.

"It was my Uncle Absalom's voice, not very loud, but terribly earnest, arguing with, or pleading with someone. Gradually, as I sat there listening, his words became louder, he almost shouted, then broke off with a sort of scream which seemed to die half-uttered, as though his mouth had suddenly been stopped or his throat grasped in a strangling hold.

"I lifted myself out of my chair and hurried toward the upper story as well as I could, but the stairway leading to the third floor was some twenty feet down the corridor and the stairs were steep and winding; so, with my handicap, I couldn't make very good time.

"While I was still half-climbing, half-crawling up the stairs, I heard a woman's scream, 'Howly Mither, 'tis th' banshee!' and recognized Maggie Gourlay, my uncle's cook and housekeeper. She and her husband, Tom, were his only servants, and shared all the household duties between them.

"When I finally reached the landing above, Maggie stood

at the far end of the hall, her teeth fairly chattering, her eyes bulging with terror.

“Ouch, Misther David, ’tis all over wid Misther Absalom, God rist ’im!” she hailed me as I came up. ’Tis meself just seen the banshee woman lave ’is room. Don’t go nigh, Misther David; she may be waitin’ fer others o’ th’ family.’

“Nonsense,’ I panted. ‘Didn’t you hear my uncle call? Come here; we must see what he wants.’

“Wurra, wurra, ’tis nothin’ but a praste an’ an undertaker he’ll be nadin’ now, sor!’ she answered, without coming a step nearer.

“I couldn’t wait for the superstitious old fool to get over her hysteria, for my uncle might be seriously ill, I thought; so I rapped sharply on his door, then, receiving no answer, pushed my way into his room.

“Uncle Absalom lay on his bed, the covers thrown back, one foot hanging just off the floor, as though he had been in the act of rising. His arms were folded over his breast, his fingers locked together, clasping a pillow tightly against his chest and face.

“I switched on the light and removed the pillow; then I knew. I’d never seen a newly dead man before, but I needed no one to tell me my uncle was dead. I think we recognize death instinctively, just as a child recognizes and hates a snake without having been told reptiles are deadly. My uncle’s jaw had sagged and his tongue had fallen forward and outward, as though he were making an inane grimace, and there was a bright, transparent film over his still opened eyes.

“I turned back his pajama jacket to feel his heart, and then it was I noticed the mark. It was just to the right of his left breast, a sort of deep purple, like a discolored bruise or a St. Andrew’s birthmark, less than an inch high, and faintly raised, like the wale left by a whiplash. Here” — the young man leaned forward, took a slender gold pencil from his pocket and drew a design on the margin of his uncle’s will — “it was like this:”



“*Mordieu*, do you say it?” de Grandin exclaimed in a low, tense voice. “*Barbe dun singe, c’est le plus étrange!*”

“Something else I noticed, though at the time it made little impression on me,” Monteith continued: “There was a distinct odor of spice or incense — almost the odor you find in a Catholic church after services — in the room. It wasn’t till considerably later, when I began rearranging my recollections, that I recalled it.

“Once I’d made sure Uncle Absalom was dead, Maggie and Tom seemed to have no more fear. They came into the

room, helped me arrange his body, then assisted me down the hall to find Louella. She’d slept through it all, and I had to hammer on her door to waken her.”

“You, *Monsieur?*” de Grandin asked. “Did not the servants knock?”

“Why” — the young man seemed to catch his breath as sudden recollection struck him — “why no; they didn’t.

“D’ye know, Dr. de Grandin,” he leaned toward the little Frenchman in his earnestness, “I believe they kept behind me purposely. At the time I thought nothing of it, but since you asked me about who knocked on Louella’s door, I distinctly remember Tom held me under one arm and Maggie under the other, but both walked a little behind me, and both stood back when we halted at my sister’s room.”

“U’m?” de Grandin murmured. “And then what, if you please?”

“When Louella finally woke and let us in, she seemed so sleepy I had to shake her to make her understand what had happened. At first she just looked uncomprehendingly at me and kept repeating whatever I said to her in a dreamy singsong voice.”

“U’m?” de Grandin murmured again. “And—”

“By George, yes! Now I think of it, there was that same scent of incense in her room, too. I’m positive it wasn’t in the hall or anywhere else; just in Uncle’s room and hers.”

“*Tiens*, at any rate, it was the odor of sanctity you smelled,” the Frenchman returned with a chuckle. “Now, concerning this so strange mark you found upon *Monsieur* your uncle’s breast. Was it—”

“I was coming to that,” Monteith interrupted. “As soon as we could we got in touch with the nearest physician, Dr. Canby. He came about an hour later, examined Uncle Absalom’s body, and gave a certificate of death by heart failure.

“I asked him about the mark and wanted to know if, in his opinion, it had any significance. He just looked at me and asked, ‘What mark?’

“We argued about it for a while, and both of us lost our tempers a little, I think. Finally, distasteful as it was, I went into Uncle’s room, unbuttoned his sleeping-jacket and pointed to his breast.”

“Yes, and then?” de Grandin demanded, leaning toward the narrator, his little eyes fairly aglow with anticipation.

“Nothing,” Monteith returned in dull, anticlimactic voice. “There was nothing there. The mark had disappeared.”

“A-a-ah?” de Grandin let his breath out slowly between his teeth as he leaned back in his chair.

“But, Dave, are you *sure* you saw that mark on Uncle’s flesh?” the girl asked gently. “In the excitement and the poor light, mightn’t you have imagined—”

“No,” the young man answered positively. “I’m certain it was there when I found Uncle Absalom, and just as certain

it had disappeared when I looked the second time.”

“*Mais oui, Mademoiselle,*” de Grandin put in. “Monsieur your brother is undoubtedly right. This business, it promises interest. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall do ourselves the honor of calling on you tomorrow or as soon thereafter as may be.”

We sat long before the fire after David and Louella Monteith had gone. The Frenchman smoked cigarette after cigarette in moody silence, staring at the leaping flames in the fireplace as fixedly as a crystal-gazer seeking inspiration from his globe. At length:

“Friend Trowbridge, it is most remarkable, is it not?” he demanded abruptly.

“What?” I answered.

“That sign, that stigma on Monsieur the Grave-Robber’s breast.”

“Why, yes,” I agreed. “It is odd it should have showed a few moments after death, then disappeared. I wonder, after all, if the girl was right. Young David might have imagined it, and—”

“*Non,*” he cut in. “The disappearance is the least mystifying phenomenon of all. It is of its form I speak. Did not you recognize it?”

“Why, no. It looked something like the conventionalized outline of a boot to me, but—”

“Ah bah,” he exclaimed, “that sign, my friend, was the ideograph standing for the Goddess Aset, or, as she is better known to us, Isis, whom the Egyptians of old knew as the All-Mother. She Who Was and Is and Is to Be. It was she whom the priest Sepa, who so violently cursed the despoilers of his tomb, served, you will remember.”

“Well—”

“Exactly, precisely, quite so; I damn think we shall see interesting things before he have done with this matter, friend.”

Early next morning he set off to visit the old priest in charge of the local Greek Orthodox Church. I stopped by the rectory something after four o’clock in the afternoon and together we set out to visit the Monteiths.

2

“Journey’s End,” the quaint old Georgian house where Absalom Barnstable had spent the closing uneventful decade of his adventurous life and finally met mysterious death, was three stories high, flat-roofed, not particularly beautiful, and unexpectedly comfortable. Built of time-mellowed red brick with slightly discolored facings of white stone, it stood a dozen yards or so back from the Albemarle Pike, in the sparsely settled country lying ten miles east of Harrisonville.

An iron railing, ornamented with faces, javelins and twining garlands, after the fashion of the late eighties, divided the front yard from the road, and on each side of the door, which was approached by three white-stone steps, grew a small privet tree neatly clipped and trimmed into a pyramid of dull, rich green.

The entire ground floor, with the exception of kitchen, pantry and furnace room, was given over to a museum for housing the late owner’s antiquities. Partitions separating the big, high-ceiled rooms had been knocked out, and the major part of the story made into one great storehouse of curios — brightly painted mummy-cases, glass-fronted cabinets containing bits of ancient *vertu*, and tall, mahogany wardrobes, each furnished with secure locks, storing such relics as were not for open display.

The second story contained a large, old-fashioned formal drawing-room, a library with walls lined from baseboard to molding with book-laden shelves, and an open fireplace of almost baronial proportions, a dining-room vast as a banquet hall, and two guest-bedrooms, each with private bath. Sleeping-quarters for the family and servants and two large lumber rooms occupied the top floor.

Old Tom Gourlay, butler and majordomo of the establishment, met us at the gate and helped us with our luggage when we arrived at the house shortly before six in the evening. Behind him, in the lower entranceway, waited his wife, Maggie, looking very demure in her black bombazine dress and white apron, but an expression of lurking suspicion — a certain grimness about her lips and hardness in her eyes — made me glance sharply at her a second time as we followed her husband up the wide stairway to the library where our host and hostess waited.

The Frenchman noted the woman’s odd air of constraint, too, for he whispered as we ascended, “She will bear watching, that one, Friend Trowbridge.”

Dinner was served shortly after our arrival, and despite de Grandin’s efforts at small talk the meal proved a gloomy one, for we caught ourselves looking furtively at each other from under lowered lids, and though the old butler maintained his air of well-bred, stoical calm, on more than one occasion I caught a glimpse of Maggie Gourlay standing at the serving-pantry door, her queer, hard gaze fixed intently on Louella Monteith’s sleek, bowed head.

Shortly after coffee had been served in the library de Grandin excused himself and, motioning me to accompany him, stole silently down the stairs. “The surest defense lies in attack, my friend,” he explained as he led the way toward the kitchen. Then, as we entered the big, steamy room without preliminary knock, he demanded:

“Tell me, my friends, what was it you observed the night your unfortunate employer met his end?”

The servants started as though he had flung an accusation

at them. Old Tom opened his lips, licked them lightly with the tip of his tongue, then closed them again and averted his eyes, like a sullen schoolboy chided by his teacher.

Not so his wife. An angry, challenging light shone in her Celtic blue eyes as she answered: "Why don't ye ask her about it sor? She'll be better able ter tell ye than Tom or me, good Christians that we be."

"*Dites*," de Grandin pursed his lips, "is it an accusation that you make, my old one?"

"I'm making no accusations, an' I'm sayin nothin' agin nobody," the woman returned sullenly, "leastwise, not widin hearin' distance of ears as miss nothin'. See here, sor"—she softened, as women always did when Jules de Grandin regarded them with that elfish, provocative smile of his — "ye're from th' other side; have ye ever been to Ireland — do ye know annything o' her fairy lore?"

"Ah-ho," de Grandin let his breath out with a half-chuckle, "the winds blows that way, *hein*? Yes, my excellent one, I have been to your so beautiful island, and I know much of her traditions. What is it you have seen which reminds you of the old sod?"

The woman hesitated, casting a half-defiant, half-fearful glance at the ceiling above her; then, confidentially: "What sort o' folk is it as can't call a name three times runnin' or eat three helpin's o' food at wan meal, or drink three sups o' drink?" she demanded with a sort of subdued ferocity.

The Frenchman met her earnest, searching stare with a level, unwinking look. "Fairy folk, and witches, and ghosts of the departed who masquerade as living men," he answered glibly, as though reciting a lesson learned by rote. "Also those who have sold themselves to the Evil One, or they who have any manner of traffic with the Powers of Darkness—"

"True for ye, sor," she interrupted with a satisfied nod. "Ye're a gentleman, an' non o' these learned fools who laugh at th' old-time truths an' call 'em superstition. Then listen:

"When first they came here, th' crippled Mither David an' she who calls herself his sister, I wuz mightily afeared o' th' green eyes of her, an' of her pale, bloodless face an' her smilin' red lips, so thin an' cruel, wid th' white teeth flashin' so close behint 'em, So I sets a trap fer her. Whenever she wanted me, I pretended not to hear her call th' first time, nor th' second. Did she call twice? She did, sor. Did she call th' charmed third time? *Niver!*

"An', 'Tom,' sez I to me old man, 'do you be watchin' how she eats an' drinks at the table while ye're servin' th' dinners,' an' to make sure he wuzn't fooled be th' wicked, false beauty of her pale face, I climbs th' stairs an' watches her from th' servin'-panthry door myself. More than wanst I watched her, sor, but niver, as God an' th' blessed St. Patrick hear me spake, did I see her put th' third piece o'

meat or bread in her mouth, nor did she ever take a third cup o' wine, though Tom at me express orders would fill her glass no more than half full, so she'd have all th' chancet a Christian woman needed ter ask for a third helpin' o' th' crater."

"U'm?" de Grandin tweaked the tightly waxed ends of his diminutive blond mustache. "And what else, if you please? The night your master died, by example—"

"Jest so, sor," she broke in eagerly. "'Twas afther we'd heard old Mither Abs'lom cry out in mortal anguish an' whilst Mither Davy — poor lad! — wuz clumpin' an' clompin' up th' stairs from th' lib'ry below, we seen it come out from his room. All scairt an' terror-shook as we wuz, I hollered out that 'twas th' banshee that walked th' house be night, but 'twarn't, sor. 'Twuz her — or *it* — sor, as howly St. Bridget hears me say it, 'twas her!

"Sure, an' I seen her come sneakin' from out his door, wid her cruel, red lips parted in a divil's laugh an' her terrible green eyes shootin' fire at me through th' dark, freezin' me where I stood.

"Down th' hall she went, sor, so quiet-like ye'd have swore she floated, for niver mortal woman stepped so softly, an' when she turned th' corner o' th' corridor, I knew we'd seen an evil thing that night; a witch-woman from Kylenegranagh Hill, arrayed in th' likeness o' pore Mither Abs'lom's blood-kin. Then it wuz me lips wuz loosened, an' I called aloud ter Mither Davy to beware — fer who knew but that she looked fer more o' th' mather's blood to destroy, havin' already kilt th' old man dead wid her magic power."

"I declare, I'm so sleepy I can scarcely keep my eyelids up!" Louella Monteith told us a few minutes after we re-joined her and her brother in the library upstairs. "I've not stirred from the house today, but I haven't been so drowsy since—" she broke off abruptly, her eyes widening with something like horror.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin prompted softly.

"Since the night Uncle Absalom died," she answered. "I was terribly drowsy from right after dinner that evening, too, and slept like a log from the moment I went to bed — remember what trouble David had to waken me when he and the servants came to my room, to tell me—"

"*Précisément*," de Grandin agreed. "By all means, *Mademoiselle*, do not let us keep you from your needed rest. Dr. Trowbridge and I are here to help, not to make nuisances of ourselves."

"You won't mind?" she asked gratefully as she rose to leave. "Good-night, gentlemen; good-night, Davy, dear; don't sit up too late, please."

Midnight sounded on the tall clock in the hall, still we talked and smoked in the library. David Monteith was

widely read and widely traveled, and his flow of conversation was as interesting as it was varied in subject-matter. We were discussing some comic idiosyncrasies of Parisian *concierges* and taxi-drivers when de Grandin halted the talk with upraised hand.

Quickly as a cat and as silently, he stole to the door, motioning over his shoulder for me to shut off the library lights. A moment he stood silent in the doorway of the darkened room, then crept down the hall toward the stairs leading to the museum below.

Ten minutes or so later he rejoined us with a shamefaced smile. "Jules de Grandin grows old and nervous, I fear," he admitted with a humorous lift of his eyebrows. "He starts at shadows and hears ghostly footsteps in the creaking of old floor-boards. My friends, it is late. My vote is that we retire: Do you agree?"

"*Non*, my friend, it may not be," he denied as I prepared to disrobe shortly after we had bid our host good-night. "Remove the shoes, by all means; otherwise remain clothed. I fear we shall have small sleep this night."

"But," I protested, "I thought you were so sleepy. You said—"

"Assuredly," he agreed with a nod as he replaced his evening shoes with a pair of soft-soled slippers, "and the mother who would still her little one's fear declares she hears nothing when she is most certain she hears a burglar prying at the window-latch. Attend me, my friend:

"While you, Monsieur Monteith and I talked all pleasantly in the library I did descry the soft, so silent step of someone creeping down the stairs. At once I bid you shut off the light, that I might not stand out in silhouette against its glow and thus betray myself; then I did reconnoiter.

"All quietly down the stairway Mademoiselle Louella did steal, and to one of those great, fast-locked cabinets she went unerringly, though the museum was dark as Pluto's own subcellar.

"Today she told me she knew not where the keys of those locked cases were — that her late uncle had them in a secret place and that she knew it not — but with a key she did unlock that cabinet door, and though that key was one of many on a ring, she made no difficulty finding it in the dark, or in fitting it to the lock. No.

"Anon she turned back, and on her arms and in her hands were many things; objects I could not certainly identify, but seeming to be articles of clothing and ornaments — grave-loot from the old ones' tombs, I doubt not, and worth a kingly ransom for their great antiquity, whatever their intrinsic worth might be."

"But why did you pretend you'd seen nothing?" I demanded. "Do you suspect—"

"I suspect nothing; I know nothing," he rejoined. "I de-

clared my mission fruitless that the young *monsieur* might not have new perplexities added to those he already has. What sort of business Mademoiselle Louella makes — or proposes to make — I do not know. At any rate, her actions were most strange, and we shall be advised to sit with one eye and one ear fast-glued to our keyhole throughout the night."

3

Wrapping myself in a dressing-gown, I dropped into one of the deep wing chairs flanking the bedroom fireplace and lighted a cigar.

Jules de Grandin paced the length of the chamber, lighted a cigarette and flung it aside after two or three puffs, drew something from the pocket of his lounge-robe and examined it, replaced it, finally seated himself on the extreme edge of the easy-chair across the hearth and seemed to freeze statue-still.

Once or twice I essayed a remark, but his quickly lifted hand cut me short each time. His attitude was one of intent listening for some expected sound, and I found myself thinking again how suggestive of a feline the fellow little was. With his round, blue eyes widened by the intentness of his attention, the sharp, needle-fine ends of his waxed mustache fairly quivering with nervous tautness and his delicate, narrow nostrils now and again expanding as though he would discover the presence of that for which he waited by virtue of his sense of smell, he was for all the world like a tensed, expectant, but infinitely patient tom-cat stationed at the entrance of a promising rathole.

Time crept by with weighted feet. I yawned, stretched myself, tossed away my cigar, and fell into a doze.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, arouse!" de Grandin's sibilant whisper cut through my nap. "Awake, my friend — listen!"

In the room above us, the chamber where crippled David Monteith slept, there sounded the indistinct murmur of a voice — a woman's voice — and blending with it like a cunningly played accompaniment to a soloist's recitation was the faint, musical chiming of a bell. Yet it was not like any bell I had ever heard; rather it was like a staff of chimes with a single, tri-toned note, or a major note with two undertones pitched differently.

"Sounds like—" I began.

"*Zut!* Be quiet — come!" commanded Jules de Grandin.

Silently as a panther stalking through the jungle, he led the way into the corridor and up the stairs. Before the door of David's room he paused, raising his hand in an arresting, minatory gesture.

The voice behind the panels was that of Louella Monteith, yet strangely different from it; deeper, more rever-

berant than the girl's usual contralto. The words she spoke were in a language strange to me, but reminiscent, somehow, of such few phrases of Hebrew as I had learned when as a young hospital intern I'd ridden an ambulance through the crowded foreign sections of the city. And blending with the cold, passionless monotone of the woman's voice was a second one, a man's voice, quivering with passion, accusatory, low and vindictive as a serpent's hiss.

With a quick movement of his left hand de Grandin thrust the door back and advanced across the threshold, the tableau thus revealed struck me numb with blank amazement.

Although no light burned, the scene was clear-cut as though enacted in brilliant moonlight, for a silvery, radiant luminance without apparent source seemed to permeate the atmosphere of an Egyptian room.

Crouched on a couch, his eyes wide with grisly, unbelieving horror, was David Monteith. Kneeling on the drugget in an attitude half of adoration, half cringing servility, was a man clothed only in a loin-cloth. His shaven head accented his lean, cruel features. One of his long, bony hands was extended, pointing fiercely at young Monteith, and it seemed to me the pointed hand was like an aimed weapon, serving to direct the unabating flood of invective the kneeling creature hurled toward the man upon the bed.

But it was the woman that stood in regal, awful majesty in the midst of the moon-like effulgence who caught and riveted my attention. Louella Monteith it was, but a changed, transmuted version of the girl we knew. Upon her head was the crown of Isis — the vulture cap with beaten gold and blue-enamel wings and the vulture's head with gem-set eyes, above it two upright horns between which shone the red gold disk of the full moon, beneath them the uræus, emblem of Osiris.

About her neck lay a broad collar of hammered gold thick-set with emeralds and carnelian, and round her wrists were bands of gold and gleaming, blue enamel in which were studded emeralds and coral. Her bosom was bare, but high beneath her breasts was clasped a belt of blue and gold from which cascaded a diaphanous garment of web-fine linen gathered in scores of tiny, narrow pleats and fringed about the hem with a border of sparkling gems which hung an inch or less above the narrow, arching insteps of her white and tiny feet. In one hand she held a gold and crystal instrument fashioned like a cross with an elongated loop at its top, while in the other she bore a three-lashed golden scourge, the emblem of Egyptian royalty.

All this I noted in a sort of wondering daze, but it was the glaring, implacable eyes of her which held me rooted to the spot. Like the eyes of a tigress, or a leopardess, they were, and glowed with a horrid, inward light, as though illumined from behind by the phosphorescent luminance of an all-consuming, heatless flame.

Even as we halted spellbound she raised her golden scourge and aimed it at the man upon the bed, while the crouching thing at her feet gave vent to a wild, demoniac cachinnation — a triumphant laugh of hatred appeased and vengeance satisfied. A low, weak moan came from David Monteith, a groan of abysmal agony, as though his tortured soul were being ravished from his tormented flesh and tore his crippled body into tatters as it was dragged forth.

I started forward with a cry of horror, but Jules de Grandin was before me. "Accursed of God!" he shouted, and his voice was harsh and strident as a battle-cry. "Fallen foes of the Lord Jehovah; upstarts against the power of the most High; *in nomine Domini, conjuro te, scleratissime, abire ad tuum locum!* Hence, loathed remnants of a false and futile faith; in the name of Him who overcame ye, I command it!"

For a moment — or an eternity, I know not which — there was dead, frozen silence in that weirdly lighted room. Every actor in the drama stood sculptured-still, like a figure on a graven monument, and only the frantic pulsation of my heart sounded in my ears.

The Frenchman thrust his right hand into the pocket of his lounge-robe and brought forth something — a tiny golden reliquary, a little thing of gold and modest, purple amethyst so small a man might hide it in the hollow of his hand — and letting it slip through his fingers swung it by a slender golden chain, waving it slowly to and fro in the air as though it were a censer. "By the power of the one who cast ye out, O Aset, Aset of olden Egypt, by the memory of Cyrillus of Alexandria, I conjure ye," he chanted slowly. "Behold the thing which I have brought from out the Land of Khem, even that which the holy one of old upraised against ye and against your power; behold, and be afraid!" He swung the little golden cross ceremonially before him and advanced into the room.

The groveling man-shape cut short its horrid laughter, and with jaws still agape, half-rose, half-crawled across the floor, its lean and claw-like hands upraised as if to ward away some stream of invincible power which flowed from out the bit of gold de Grandin held.

Jabbering half-formed words in an outlandish tongue, words I could not understand, but which were clearly an appeal, the thing retreated as de Grandin pursued inexorably.

I held my breath in horror, then almost screamed aloud as the Frenchman and his adversary reached the room's boundary, for the hunted creature *passed directly through the wall*, as though brick and mortar had no substance!

The little Frenchman turned from his quarry and approached the form of Isis, which seemed to stand irresolute beside the bed. Only, it was no longer a goddess we beheld, but a woman. True, she was still beautiful and

queenly in her trappings of barbaric splendor, but the odd and moonlike light no longer shone around her, nor was there an aura of dread and fearsomeness about her, and the awful, flowing eyes which filled my soul with fear were now recognizable for what they were — the likeness of staring, vengeful eyes *drawn in luminous paint upon her lowered lids!*

“To your chamber, *Mademoiselle*, I command it!” de Grandin ordered in a low, authoritative voice. Then, to me:

“Look to Monsieur David, Friend Trowbridge. You will find him suffering from shock, but not greatly hurt otherwise, I think.”

Quickly, I ministered to the fainting man upon the bed, forced water mixed with brandy down his throat, pressed a vial of sal volatile to his nostrils and bathed his wrists and temples. He rallied slightly, gasped once or twice, then lapsed into a heavy, natural sleep. When at last he lay quietly on his pillow I opened his pajama jacket to listen to his heart, and on the flesh of his left breast, faint, but still recognizable for what it was, lay a tiny, reddish stigma. thus:



I hurried to de Grandin to tell him of my find, and met him tiptoeing from Louella Monteith’s room. “Softly, my friend,” he warned with upraised finger; “she sleeps.”

“Where’s David?” Louella Monteith asked as she joined de Grandin and me at breakfast the following morning. “He’s usually an early riser — I hope he’s not ill today?” She turned to ascend the stairs to her brother’s chamber, but de Grandin put forth a detaining hand.

“Your brother had rather a trying night, *Mademoiselle*,” he said. “Dr. Trowbridge has given him an opiate; it will be some time before he wakes.”

“Oh” — the concern in her eyes was very real — “don’t tell me the poor boy’s had another of his spells! He suffers so! Usually he calls me if he’s ill in the night, and I do what I can to help him; but last night I didn’t hear a thing. I slept so soundly, too. Do you—”

She brightened as a consoling thought seemed to come to her. “Of course,” she smiled. “Why should he have called me when we had two physicians in the house? I’m sure you did everything possible for him, gentlemen.”

“Precisely; we did, *Mademoiselle*,” Jules de Grandin returned noncommittally as he gave his undivided attention to the well-filled plate of bacon and eggs before him.

“No! I tell you; I’ll never willingly look at that she-devil again, so long as I live!” David Monteith almost shouted in response to de Grandin’s suggestion. “Talk all you will of

her being my sister; I tell you she’s the vilest most unholy thing unhanged. Oh God, why doesn’t the law recognize witchcraft today? How I’d enjoy denouncing her, and seeing her tied to the stake!” He leaned back on his pillow, exhausted by the vehemence of his emotion, but his deep-set, greenish hazel eyes glowed with fury as he looked from one of us to the other. Then:

“She killed Uncle Absalom, too. I know it. Now I understand what old Maggie Gourlay meant when she warned me against the banshee. It was Louella — my sister! She killed our uncle, and she almost finished me last night. I tell you—”

“And I tell *you*, Monsieur David, that you talk like an uncommonly silly fool!” de Grandin broke in sharply. “Hear me, if you please — or if you do not please, for that matter. Attend me, listen, pay attention, forget your chuckle-headedness! You talk of witch-burning, and, *parbleu*, you do well to do so, for you assuredly show the shallow-emptiness of head which so characterized those old ones who sent innocent women to the flames!

“*Non*, listen to me,” he bade sharply as the other would have spoken. “You will hear me through, if I must knock you senseless and bind you to the bed in order to keep you quiet!

“Your story of your uncle’s death did greatly interest me when first you told it. That old Sepa, the Priest of Aset, or Isis, as we call her nowadays, had any personal part in it I did not seriously consider; but that the constant, continuous, subconscious *thought* of that old one’s curse had much to do with it I was very certain. Consider, my friend, you know how half-a-dozen people, thinking together, can sometimes influence one in a company? You have seen it demonstrated? Good. So it was in this case, only more so; much more so. For generations the dwellers in Egypt bowed the knee to Aset, the All-Mother, she whom they worshiped as She Who Was and Is and Is to Be. Now, whether such a personality as hers ever existed or not is beside the question; let but enough persons loose thoughts of her, and they have created a thought-image of such strength that only *le bon Dieu* knows its limitations.

“So with the vengeance of the dead. For more generations than you have hairs upon your head the Egyptians believed implicitly that he who broke the rest of the entombed dead laid himself open to direst vengeance. And to strengthen this belief, those who were buried were wont to place a curse-stone in their tombs, denouncing the disturbers of their long rest in such language as old Sepa directed against your late uncle. Yes, it is so.

“Your late lamented kinsman spent much time among the ancient tombs. It was inevitable he should have absorbed some sort of half-agnostic belief in the potency of the old ones’ curses. That sort of thing grows on one.

“Anon, having retired, he sets himself to translating the various tablets and papyri he had collected. At length he comes upon the curse-stone from old Sepa’s grave.

“Now, we do not realize when the *Uncinaria americana* infects our systems with its eggs, but anon we suffer drowsiness, anemia and dropsy. We have no desire to do anything but sit about and sleep — we have the disease known as hookworm, for the eggs have germinated. So it was with old Sepa’s curse. *Monsieur* your uncle wrought out the translation of the curse-stone, and paid little heed to what he read — at first. But all the same the idea of a dreadful doom awaiting him who invaded that wicked old one’s tomb was firmly lodged in his subconscious mind, and there it germinated, and grew into a monstrous thing, even as the hookworm’s eggs grow in the body of their victim. And when your uncle read of the young Englishman’s death, and how he was the tenth to die of those who opened Tutankhamen’s tomb, such doubts as he might have had disappeared utterly. He did resign himself to death by Sepa’s vengeance.

“Your sister, being sensitive to thought-influence, at length became infected, too. It was as if your uncle, all unknowingly, transferred his fearful thoughts to her subconscious mind, much as a hypnotist imposes his thought and will upon his subject. Your sister is tall, stately, beautiful. She had the peculiar greenish eyes which go with mysticism. What more natural than that your uncle should have conceived the Goddess Aset as in your sister’s image, and, so conceiving, impregnated your sister with his thought. All unknowingly, she was to him, and to herself, the very incarnation of that olden one — that probably non-existent one — whose wrath had been called down on *Monsieur* your kinsman by the curse-stone found in Sepa’s grave.

“Very good. Upon the night in which your uncle died your sister did arise, descend the stairs into the museum, and there equip herself with the garments once worn by some Egyptian priestess. Consider, now: She did not consciously know what was in those cabinets below, she knew not which keys fitted the locks, she did not know how the ancient priestesses arrayed themselves, for she had no knowledge of archeology, yet she went unerringly to the proper case, chose the proper trappings, and donned them in the proper manner. Why? *Because Your uncle’s thought guided her!*

“All this she did at the urge of her subconscious mind. Her conscious mind, by which she recognized external things, was fast asleep meanwhile. Yet so deftly did her dream-commanded mind order the disguise that she even went so far as to trace the likeness of open, staring eyes upon her lids with phosphorescent paint.

“And then, arrayed as Aset, she did repair to your uncle’s

room, and with her went the thought-concept of another one, the thought-induced and thought-begotten likeness of the long-dead Sepa.

“With ancient ritual she read aloud your uncle’s doom, the doom he had decreed upon himself by his persistent thought, and he — poor man! — believing that his doom was sealed, did die for very fright.

“Now, concerning yourself: Like her, you knew of the curse; like her you had read of the death of the young Englishman who violated the tomb of Tutankhamen. Very well. Subconsciously you feared the curse which Sepa had put upon your uncle and your uncle’s kin hovered over you. Although you strove to shake it off, the thought would not die, for the more you dismissed it from your conscious mind, the deeper it penetrated into your subconscious, there to fester like a septic splinter in one’s finger. Yes.

“Last night was the crucial time. Once more *Made-moiselle* your sister donned Aset’s unholy livery; once more she did pronounce the doom of Sepa upon your uncle’s kin — and, *parbleu*, she did almost succeed in doing it! Friend Trowbridge and I were not a second too soon, I damn think.”

“But the mark — the mark on Uncle Absalom’s breast, and which Dr. Trowbridge said appeared on mine too; what of that?” young Monteith persisted.

“Perhaps you have not seen it, but I have,” de Grandin returned: “a hypnotist can, by his bare mental command, cause the blood to leave his subject’s arm, and make the member become white and cold as death. So with the death-sign on your uncle’s breast, and yours. It was but the stigma of a mental order — a thought made physically manifest.”

“But what did you do — what did you use?” Monteith demanded. “I saw you drive the ghost of Sepa from the room with something. What was it?”

“To understand, you must know the history of Isis,” de Grandin answered. “Her cult was one of the most powerful of all the ancient world. Despite the sternest opposition she had her votaries in both Greece and Rome, and she was the last of the old gods to be expelled from Egypt, for notwithstanding the Christianizing of the land and the great strength of the Alexandrian Church, her shrine at Philae continued to draw worshipers until the Sixth Century of our era.

“Now, while Christianity still struggled with the remnant of the olden faiths there lived in Alexandria a certain priest named Cyril, a very holy man, who by virtue of his piety wrought many miracles. Also, when more than once the women of his congregation declared themselves spellbound by the ancient Goddess Aset, he was wont to cast the spell from off them by the use of a certain sacred amulet, a little cross of gold supposed to hold a tiny remnant of the True Cross within itself. This very sacred reliquary is in the

present custody of the *Papa* of the Greek Orthodox Church in Harrisonville. Often have I heard the old man speak of it.

“Accordingly, when we came here to ‘Journey’s End’ to try conclusions with the ancient gods of Egypt, I begged the use of that same relic from its custodian and brought it with me.

“And, as I have said, thoughts have power. It was the thought of Priest Sepa’s ancient curse which worked the death of your uncle and all but caused your own; yet here was a little, so small piece of gold which also carried the concentrated thought of centuries. Adored as a caster-out-of-spells by generations of pious Christians, once regarded as efficacious against the same old goddess by whom your house was so beset, it was ideally suited to my purpose. I did fight thought with counter-thought; against the evil thought-concepts of Aset and of Sepa her priest I set the defensive thought-power of Cyril, the Alexandrian monk, who once cast Aset forth from out the bodies of his bewitched parishioners. The tiny relic in my hand focused, so to speak, the thoughts which negated the harmful power of Aset and her followers, and — Aset and her ghostly worshiper are gone. If—”

“I — don’t — believe — a — word — of — it!” Monteith interrupted slowly. “You’re saying all this to shield Louella. She’s bad — wicked clear through, and I don’t ever want to see her again. I—”

“*Monsieur!*” de Grandin’s voice was sharp-edged as a razor. “Look at this!”

Once more he drew the little golden cross of Cyril from his pocket, holding it before the young man’s eyes. As young Monteith gazed wonderingly at it, the Frenchman continued in a low, earnest voice: “You will hear and obey. You will sleep for half an hour, at which time you will awake, completely forgetting all which occurred last night, remembering only that the thing which menaced your family and household has forever departed. Sleep. Sleep and forget. I command it!

“And that, my friend, is that,” he announced matter-of-

factly as Monteith’s eyelids lowered in compliance with his order.

“Now what?” I asked.

“I think we would better burn the mummy of Priest Sepa and the translation of his curse-stone,” he responded. “The uncle’s will absolved his legatees from burying the mummy if it became physically impossible — I propose rendering it so. Come, let us cremate the old one,”

Together we dismembered the desiccated corpse of the Egyptian, casting the pieces on the glowing coals of the furnace, where they burned with sharp, fierce spurts of flame and quickly turned to light, gray ashes which wafted, upward through the draft of the firebox.

“What about the uncanny feeling Louella complained of, de Grandin?” I asked as we pursued our grisly task. “You know, she said she felt as though someone were staring at her from behind?”

“*Mais oui,*” he chuckled as he fed a mummified forearm to the flames. “I shall say she had good cause to feel so. Did not the excellent Maggie and her husband stare her out of countenance from the rear, always seeking to see her take a third helping of food or wine? *Parbleu,* Mademoiselle Louella desired the boyish figure, therefore she eats sparingly, therefore she is tried and condemned by the so excellent Irish couple on the charge of being a fairy! *C’est drôle, n’est-ce-pas?*”

When we returned to the upper floor, David Monteith was up and disposing of an excellent breakfast.

“Good old Lou,” we heard him tell his sister, “of course. I wasn’t ill last night. I slept like a top — overslept, in fact; aren’t I an hour late to breakfast?” He smiled and patted his sister’s hand reassuringly.

“Ah, *parbleu,* Jules de Grandin, you are clever!” the little Frenchman murmured delightedly. “You have removed all danger from these young people and assured their happiness by exorcizing the devil of bad memories. Yes. Come with me, Jules de Grandin; I shall take you to the library and give you a magnificent-great drink of whisky.”

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