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The Casebook Of Jules de Grandin

SCIENCE FICTION

by Seabury Quinn

with an introduction by Robert A.W. Lowndes

EVEN JULES de GRANDIN SHIVERED AT THE GIRL'S STORY:

"While the woman stood eying me, the man stroked my bare arm. He murmured, 'You have eaten well since you came here. How did you like the meat we served?' "

" 'It was very nice,' I whispered, fearing to anger him if I kept silent."

" 'Ye-es, very nice,' he agreed with a laugh. 'Very nice, indeed. That meat, dear, tender young lady—were the guests who came before you!' "

"I closed my eyes, and stood swaying with nauseated horror. Then I heard a faint click. I opened my eyes and found the lights had been shut off and I was standing alone in the center of the room facing my two captors."

"How'd you know that?" demanded the police detective. "You already said 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!"*

Also by Seabury Quinn and available from Popular Library:

THE ADVENTURES OF JULES DE GRANDIN

The Casebook Of Jules de Grandin

by Seabury Quinn

Edited by Robert Weinberg

Illustrations by Steve Fabian

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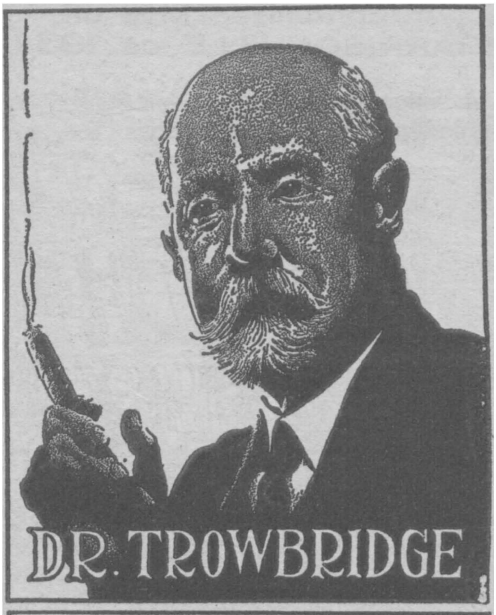
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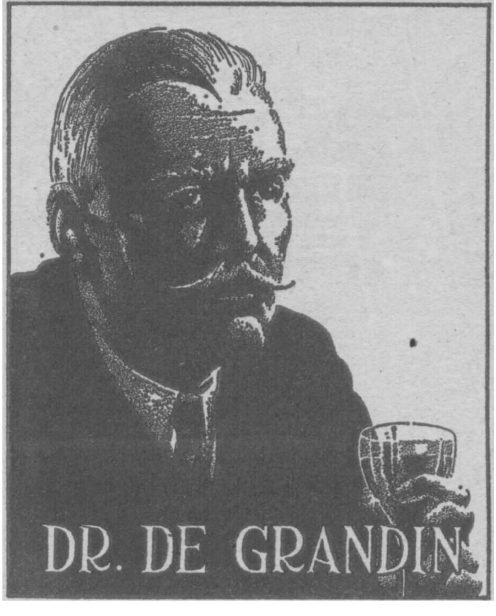
DR. DE GRANDIN

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 oldtimers remember him with love; I predict that the revival of the de Grandin series will swell the number.

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 came 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 figurd 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 8 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 insigne 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 Parisian 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 Frenchman 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 whiskey 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 gray 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 thin-lipped mouth; the overhanging nails that made her long fingers seem longer still were definitely clawlike 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 whiskey 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 whiskey, 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 4 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 praecox, 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 praecox. 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 codein 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 bedgown 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 undoubtlessly 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 night-gown 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 cruelest 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-gray 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 damnit, 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'Afriques 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 4 o'clock next afternoon Costello called on us. "I got some o' th' dope you're wantin', Dr. de Grandin," he announced. "Th' de Africans 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? *Parbleu,* 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 Albemarle 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 stripèd 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 tiger-skin 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 dumbly.

"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 Cableson—a youth of good family and position—young, attractive, in love; with everything to live for, drove his coupé through Mooreston along the Albemarle 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 worshipped 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 clinks 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 Cableson 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 Cableson 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 Peterson 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 unsportsmanlike "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 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 Mooreston.

He had evidently made a reconnaissance that afternoon, for he directed me unerringly to a large graystone structure on the outskirts of the suburb. On the north was the dense patch of second-growth pine through which the autumn wind soughed 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 shashing 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. Bear! Who's '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 negligée 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, 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 gray shade. Beneath the wool on its front side we found twin rows of rudimentary teats, the secondary sexual characteristics of a member of the multiparae.

"You see?" he asked simply.

"No, I'm damned if I do," I denied as the other 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 thick-headed 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 trade of death among us. Had the she-thing not capitulated to her appetite for blood when she slew young Cableson, 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."

THE HOUSE OF HORROR

"*Morbleu,* Friend Trowbridge, have a care," Jules de Grandin warned as my lurching motor car almost ran into the brimming ditch beside the rainsoaked 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 througt 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 *sacre* rainstorm, 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-ceiled 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.

Obeying 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 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 keyhole, twisting it tentatively back and forth, at length pulling it out and regarding it carefully. *"Tres 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—"*voila,* 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 strychnin, 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 chere," 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. *"Hola, 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—*nam 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 fiancee.

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 practise. 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-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 it 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 chat-rouge,* 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 chateau 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, paddlelike 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.

"Marbleu, 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."

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 arbor-vitae, 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 gayly-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 selfconsciously—"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 is 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 pajamas 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 molding 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 raveled 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 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 prolapsed, as was natural when the extensor muscles had lengthened in cadaveric flaccidity, but the seal of death had obscured none of their beauty. The heels were narrow and the insteps high, the toes were long, slender and finger-like, 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 ELEANORA COMITISSA ARGENT . . .
QVAE OBIIT 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 Swearingen 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 shrug. "I know nothing about her," he returned. "I got her at an auction when the lawyers sell Mr. Pumphrey's things. All I know, I'm glad to be rid of her—she was unlucky."

"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! That boy was a *schlemihl!* What do you think he stole? Books. Religious books—old Bibles, prayer books, a missal from Italy with half the pages missing, a worthless old rosary and a wooden statue from a saint. I wouldn't give you twenty dollars for the lot of them!"

"Am I to understand that he confined himself to stealing worthless religious objects?"

Mr. Yellen lifted an expressive shoulder. "They were all I had. I don't buy much religious stuff—that goes to the richer dealers, but once in a while I get some with a job lot of things. Everything of that kind in the shop that *schlemihl* stole. What he did with them God only knows. Nobody with sense would have paid him money for them. Oh, well"—he waved his hand in a gesture of finality—"what can you expect from a madman, 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. Pumphrev'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 undoubtlessly 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 undoubtlessly 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 Metropolitain.* 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 per-

haps 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, or 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 an 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 grayness 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 crêpe 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.

"*Voyes-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 reëntered 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 life-likeness 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, crushing, 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. Damndest 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 undoubtlessly 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, I,' 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 Rhône 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 plowman 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 plowman 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 statue 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 blessèd 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 enthralls 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 anesthesia. 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 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 dishevelled 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 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 10 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!"

"Undoubtlessly," 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. "Trowbridge, 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. It is 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 poleaxed 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 Frémont Street."

"*Pardieu,* another?" asked de Grandin. "How do you know the latest one is not true suicide?"

"Well, sir, heres' 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 it's 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 chameau,* 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 rose bed, 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 Godsend. 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 Evens—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 nothin'—" 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 gray 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 buryin'?" 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's Funeral Parlors were new but by no means prosperous-looking. Situated in a small side street in the poor section of town, their only pretention 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? Lookit 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 fibrillary 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. "Why—"

"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 gray 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 earthern 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 rigadoon, 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 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.

"*Les 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 embalmment! These were no living women, they were—

De Grandin's fingers clutched my elbow fiercely. "Ob-

serve, 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 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 pellmell 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 chameau*, 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 un-

latched, 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 stepdaughter 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.'

"*Voila*, 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 rejoined 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. Th' first time didn't quite finish him."

ANCIENT FIRES

"*Tiens*, Friend Trowbridge, this is interesting." Jules de Grandin passed the classified page of the *Times* across the breakfast table, that morning in 1926, 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, birdlike 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 dared hope. Indeed, I did not suspect such characters existed outside book covers."

"*Parbleu, Monsieur l' Avoue,*" 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 sanitarium. 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 reestablishing 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 railroad 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 9 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 heard Monsieur Aglinberry's alarm bell!"

I slipped a bathrobe over my pajamas 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 ear, 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, fairy-like 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 sheerless, but cloth, nevertheless. And now, as I gazed unbelievingly, 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 pajamas 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 in-

sects, 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 much stone by the lake," he informed Aglinberry lazily, raising the hat from his face, but making no other move toward obeying the summons to quit. "Too much stone an' sand. I like this 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 tell me pull the freight? You kick 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 a 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 make a joke. I not mean to hurt your friend. I poor man, trying to make honest living by selling horses. I not mean to scare your frand. We take the camp off this 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. "Trowbridge," 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 soughing 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 pajamas, "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 toeholds 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 highlights 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 an-

noyance, 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 coroner's 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 nighttime, forcibly, feloniously and 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. Good night." 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, somber old reading room, but nothing more ghostly than the tall walnut bookcases, 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 shadow 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 hawkbell of gold, scarcely larger than a head, 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 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 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 un-

happy 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 *koilas* 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 Hindu 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! *A 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 *sacre* 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 sanitarium 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 sanitarium.

Thornwood Sanitarium 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 keeper's 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 penciled 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 strychnin, 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? Hyoscin, by example?"

"By George, it didn't!" Wiltsie confessed. "Of course, hyoscin would act as a cerebral sedative, but we'd never thought of using it."

"Very well, I suggest you employ a hypodermic injection of hyoscin hypobromid," 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 gipsies and gossiped about by all the country yaps in the country, 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 halfway 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 strait-jacket 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 Sanitarium. 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 sneeze 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 Hindu 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 Hindu 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 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 elder 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 Hindu, 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 at first, but eventually you would be able to produce harmony. So it was 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 secured mastery of her instrument, and henceforth as that of a healthy, sane 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 ends of his blond mustache and set his hat at a rakish angle on the side of his head,

"it is possible that somewhere in space there waits for me the spirit of a woman whom I have loved and lost. I wonder, when she comes, if I, like the lucky young Aglinberry yonder, shall 'wake, and remember, and understand'?"

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 negatived 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 2 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 maid 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 houserobe 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 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 undoubtlessly 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, Irving? 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 anough 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 and 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 will 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 8 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 practising 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 car 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 re-

sembling 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 an-

other 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 practised 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 *gendarmerie*. Let us take him there. Undoubtlessly 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 guardroom. "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 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 guardroom 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 skilful 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 influ-enza, the doctor say, and he went ver' quick, like falling asleep after a hard day's work. In life he had been—how do you call it? snake-charmer?—with the 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

"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.

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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 redhanded, 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 have 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 fumes 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 kidnaper. 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."

THE CHAPEL OF MYSTIC HORROR

I

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 a 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—"*an 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 candle-light 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 her-

self 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 risque 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 exclama-

tion, 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 concamerated 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, gargoylish 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, cowled 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 cowled 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-im-

patient 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 lizardskin 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.

Obeying 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. Liebestraum 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 drawingboard, "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 tete 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 10 o'clock that night. "This is such a romantic old house—I'm sure it's just full of memories. Let's have a seance!"

"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 unoiled 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 we're 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 graylight 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 raspingly. "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 10 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 ex-

pression of amazement, "You really believe this?" he asked at length.

"More, *Monseigneur*, I almost know it," re 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 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 12 with the understanding that all were to be ready to attend Thanksgiving services in the near-by parish church at 11 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 Mademoiselle 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 open-mouthed 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 be-

fore 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 tiles 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, semi-transparent 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. "U'm?" 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 door-leaves, 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.

"Ohe!" 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 arched 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 fullthroated 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 cowled 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 cowled 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 nebula of light which glowed like cigarette-ends of

intense blue radiance. Then, where the nebula 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 by-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. "*Hola,* 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 Riper 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 seance 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.

AFTERWORD

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 Harrison*ville's* location. Elizabeth was close to New York City so that travelling 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 travelling to some out-of-the-way part of the country when the Jersey suburbs suited them just as well.

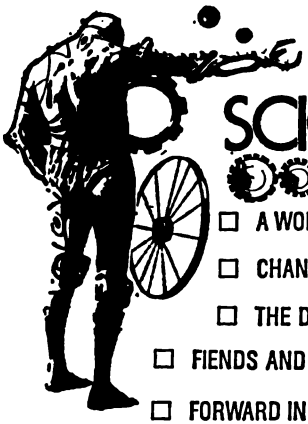
Dr. John Marston's son fell in love with an actress. As New York was and is the center of America's theatrical community, it was no surprise that he and his father should make their home in New Jersey. After the death of John Marston Jr., the revengeful plans of the father made it necessary for him to 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 ghostbreaker? 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.



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