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# The Horror Chambers Of Jules de Grandin

SCIENCE FICTION

by Seabury Quinn

# VENGEANCE FOR JULES DE GRANDIN!

Jules de Grandin tried to remove the mask covering the face of the girl prostrate on the bed, but so firmly was it bound that it resisted his efforts. Again he pulled, more sharply this time, until he noticed a movement at the side of her head. Grandin felt for the mask cords, then started back with a low cry of horror. The mask was not tied, but *wired to her flesh!*

"Oh, the villains, the assassins, the ninety-thousand-times-damned beast!" Grandin gritted through his teeth. "If ever Satan walked the earth in human guise, he lodges within this accursed kennel of hell-hounds. Though this monster has as many gullets as the fabled hydra, I shall slit them all for this night's business!"

*For the first time Jules de Grandin realized the enormity of the evil he had uncovered, the monstrous might of his eerie enemy—and now as never before the great sleuth knew he had to triumph, or die a devilish death trying. . . .*

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THE DEVIL'S BRIDE

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THE SKELETON CLOSET OF JULES DE GRANDIN

# The Horror Chambers Of Jules de Grandin

by Seabury Quinn

*Edited by* Robert Weinberg

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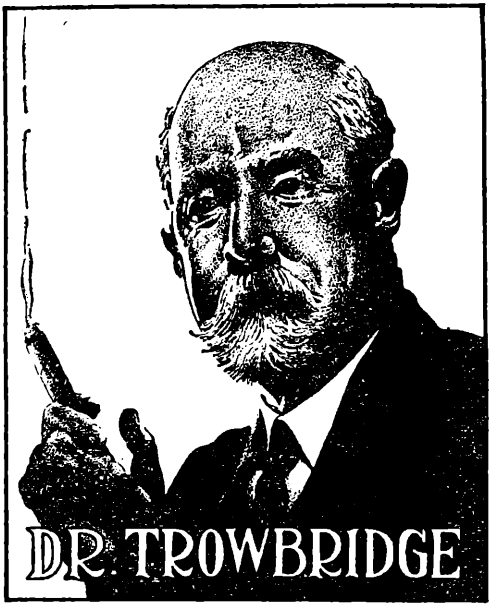
## Contents


ST. ROSE CEMETERY
LINKS
SEBOMOOK COUNTRY CLUB
RUPLEYSVILLE
SUICIDE CHAPEL
TERRYVILLE RD
TURNPIKE
TO EUNICE HOUSE - 2 MI.
CIRCLE ROAD
LONESOME


An Epitomized Map of
HARRISONVILLE ca. 1934
HARRISONVILLE RIVER
MILLS
HOPKINS
SUSQUEHANNA
PARADISE
TUNNEL
ORIEN
NEWARK BAY
SWAMP
N
W
E
S


DR. TROWBRIDGE


DR. DE GRANDIN

# The Gods of East and West

"*Tiens*, Friend Trowbridge, you work late tonight."

Jules de Grandin, debonair in faultlessly pressed dinner clothes, a white gardenia sharing his lapel buttonhole with the red ribbon of the Legion d'Honneur, paused at the door of my consulting-room, glimpsed the box of coronas lying open on the table, and straightway entered, seating himself opposite me and selecting a long, black cigar with all the delighted precision of a child choosing a bon-bon from a box of sweets.

I laid aside the copy of Baring's *Diagnosis in Disease of the Blood* I had been studying and helped myself to a fresh cigar. "Have a pleasant time at the Medical Society dinner?" I asked, somewhat sourly.

"But yes," he agreed, nodding vigorously while his little blue eyes shone with enthusiasm. "They are a delectable crowd of fellows, those New York physicians. I regret you would not accompany me. There was one gentleman in particular, a full-blooded Indian, who—but you do not listen, my friend; you are *distrait*. What is the trouble?"

"Trouble enough," I returned ungraciously. "A patient's dying for no earthly reason that I can see except that she is."

"Ah? You interest me. Have you made a tentative diagnosis?"

"Half a dozen, and none of 'em checks up. I've examined her and re-examined her, and the only thing I'm certain of is that she's fading away right before my eyes, and nothing I can do seems an earthly bit of good."

"U'm. Phthisis, perhaps?"

"Not a bit of it. I've tested her sputum numerous times; every result is negative. There isn't a thing wrong with her organically, and her temperature is almost always normal, fluctuating slightly at times one way or the other, but hardly ever more than one or two degrees. I've made several blood counts, and while she runs slightly under the million mark, the deficiency isn't enough to cause alarm. About the only objective symptoms she displays are a steady falling off in weight and a progressive pallor, while subjectively she complains of loss of appetite, slight headaches and profound lassitude in the morning."

"U'm," he repeated thoughtfully, expelling a twin cloud of smoke from his narrow nostrils and regarding the ash of his cigar as though it were something of intense interest. "And how long has this condition of affairs obtained?"

"About three months. She's a Mrs. Chetwynde, wife of a likable young chap who's superintending a piece of railway construction for an English company in Burma. He's been away about six months or so, and while she would naturally be expected to pine for him to some extent—they've been married only a couple of years—this illness has been going on only since about the middle of August."

"U'm!" He knocked the ash from his cigar with a deft motion of his little finger and inhaled a great lungful of strong, fragrant smoke with careful deliberation. "This case interests me, Friend Trowbridge. These diseases which defy diagnosis are the things which make the doctor's trade exciting. With your permission I will accompany you when next you visit Madame Chetwynde. Who knows? Together we may find the doormat under which the key of her so mysterious malady lies hidden. Meantime, I famish for sleep."

"I'm with you," I agreed as I closed my book, shut off the light and accompanied him upstairs to bed.

The Chetwynde cottage was one of the smallest

and newest of the lovely little dwellings in the Rockwood section of town. Although it contained but seven rooms, it was as completely a piece of art as any miniature painted on ivory, and the appointments and furnishings comported perfectly with the exquisite architectural artistry of the house. Jules de Grandin's round little eyes danced delightedly as he took in the perfect harmony existing inside and out when we parked my car before the rose-trellised porch and entered the charming reception hall. "*Eh bien*, my friend," he whispered as we followed the black-and-white-uniformed maid toward the stairs, "whatever her disease may be, she has the *bon gout*—how do you say? good taste?—this Madame Chetwynde."

Lovely as a piece of Chinese porcelain—and as frail—Idoline Chetwynde lay on the scented pillows of her Louis Treize bed, a negligee of knife-plaited crepe de chine trimmed with fluffy black marabou shrouding her lissom form from slender neck to slenderer ankles, but permitting occasional highlights of ivory body to be glimpsed through its sable folds. Little French-heeled mules of scarlet satin trimmed with black fur were on her stockingless feet, and the network of veins showed pale violet against the dead-white of her high-arched insteps. Her long, sharp-chinned face was a rich olive hue in the days of her health, but now her cheeks had faded to the color of old ivory, and her fine, high forehead was as pale and well-nigh as translucent as candle-wax. The long, beautifully molded lips of her expressive mouth were more an old rose than a coral red, and her large gray eyes, lifted toward the temples like those of an Oriental, shone with a sort of patient resignation beneath the "flying gull" curve of her intensely black brows. Her hair cut short as a boy's at the back, had been combed across her forehead from right to left and plastered down with some perfumed unguent so that it surmounted her white face like a close-wrapped turban of gleaming ebon silk. Diamond studs, small, but very brilliant, flickered lambently in the lobes of

her low-set ears. Some women cast the aura of their feminine allure about them as a bouquet of roses exudes its perfume. Idoline Chetwynde was one of these.

"Not so well this morning, thank you, Doctor," she replied to my inquiry. "The weakness seems greater than usual, and I had a dreadful nightmare last night."

"H'umph, nightmare, eh?" I answered gruffly. "We'll soon attend to that. What did you dream?"

"I—I don't know," she replied languidly, as though the effort of speaking was almost too much for her. "I just remember that I dreamed something awful, but what it was I haven't the slightest notion. It really doesn't matter, anyway."

"*Pardonnez-moi, Madame*, but it matters extremely much," de Grandin contradicted. "These things we call dreams, they are sometimes the expression of our most secret thoughts; through them we sometimes learn things concerning ourselves which we should not otherwise suspect. Will you try to recall this unpleasant dream for us?"

As he spoke he busied himself with a minute examination of the patient, tapping her patellar tendons, feeling along her wrists and forearms with quick, practiced fingers, lifting her lids and examining the pupils of both her luminous eyes, searching on her throat, neck and cardiac region for signs of abrasions. "*Eh bien,*" and "*morbleu, c'est estrange!*" I heard him mutter to himself once or twice, but no further comment did he make until he had completed his examination.

"Do you know, Dr. Trowbridge," Mrs. Chetwynde remarked as de Grandin rolled down his cuffs and scribbled a memorandum in his notebook, "I've been gone over so many times I've begun to feel like an entry at the dog show. It's really not a bit of use, either. You might just as well save yourselves and me the trouble and let me die comfortably. I've a feeling I shan't be here much longer anyway, and it might be better for all concerned if . . ."

"*Zut!*" de Grandin snapped the elastic about his pocketbook with a sharp report and leveled a shrewd, unwinking stare at her. "Say not so, *Madame*. It is your duty to live. *Parbleu*, the garden of the world is full to suffocation with weeds; flowers like yourself should be most sedulously cultivated for the joying of all mankind."

"Thank you, Doctor," Mrs. Chetwynde smiled slowly in acknowledgment of the compliment and pressed the ebony-and-silver bell which hung over the ornamental head of her bed.

"*Madame* has called?" The swart-visaged maid-servant appeared at the door of the chamber with a promptitude which led me to suspect her ear had never been far from the keyhole.

"Yes, Dr. Trowbridge and Dr. de Grandin are leaving," her mistress replied in a tired voice.

"*Adieu, Madame,*" de Grandin murmured in farewell, leaning forward and possessing himself of the slender hand our hostess had not troubled to lift as we turned to go. "We go, but we shall return anon, and with us, unless I greatly mistake, we shall bring you a message of good cheer. No case is hopeless until . . ."

"Until the undertaker's been called?" Mrs. Chetwynde interrupted with another of her slow tired smiles as the little Frenchman pressed his lips to her pale fingers and turned to accompany the maid and me from the room.

"Be careful—sir," the maid cautioned, with just enough space between the command and the title of courtesy to rob her utterance of all semblance of respect. De Grandin, turning from the stairs into the hall, had almost collided with a statuette which stood on a pedestal in a niche between the staircase and the wall. To me it seemed the woman bent a look of almost venomous hate on him as he regained his footing on the highly polished floor and wheeled about to stare meditatively at the figurine into which he had nearly stumbled.

"This way—if you please, sir," the servant admonished, standing by the front door and offering his hat in a most suggestive manner.

"Ah, yes, just so," he agreed, turning from the statue to her, then back again. "And do you suffer from the mosquitoes here at this time of year, *Mademoiselle?*"

"Mosquitoes?" the woman's reply was half word, half scornful sniff at the little foreigner's irrelevant remark.

"Precisely, the mosquito, the gnat, the *moustique,*" he rejoined with a humorous lift of his brows. "The little, buzzing pests, you know."

"No, sir!" The answer served notice there was no more to be said on the subject.

"Ah? Perhaps it is then that *Madame* your mistress delights in the incense which annoys the moths, yes?"

"No, sir!"

"*Parbleu, ma vierge*, there are many strange things in the world, are there not?" he returned with one of his impish grins. "But the strangest of all are those who attempt to hold information from me."

The servant's only reply was a look which indicated clearly that murder was the least favor she cared to bestow on him.

"*La, la,*" he chuckled as we descended the steps to my car. "I did her in the eye, as the Englishmen say, that time, did I not, my friend?"

"You certainly had the last word," I admitted wonderingly, "but you'll have to grant her the last look, and it was no very pleasant one, either."

"*Ah bah,*" he returned with another grin, "who cares how old pickleface looks so long as her looks reveal that which I seek? Did not you notice how she stiffened when I hinted at the odor of incense in the house? There is no reason why they should not burn incense there, but, for some cause, the scent is a matter of utmost privacy—with the maid, at least."

"U'm?" I commented.

"Quite right, my friend, your objection is well

taken," he responded with a chuckle. "Now tell me something of our fair patient. Who is she, who were her forebears, how long has she resided here?"

"She's the wife of Richard Chetwynde, a naturalized Englishman, who's been working on an engineering job in India, as I told you last night," I replied. "As to her family, she was a Miss Millatone before her marriage, and the Millatones have been here since the Indians—in fact, some of them have been here quite as long, since an ancestress of hers was a member of one of the aboriginal tribes—but that was in the days when the Swedes and Dutch were contending for this part of the country. Her family is more than well to do, and . . ."

"No more, my friend; you have told me enough, I think," he interrupted. "That strain of Indian ancestry may account for something which has caused me much wonderment. Madame Chetwynde, is a rarely beautiful woman, my friend, but there is that indefinable something about her which tells the careful observer her blood is not entirely Caucasian. No disgrace, that; *parbleu*, a mixture of strain is often an improvement of the breed, but there was a certain—how shall I say it?—foreignness about her which told me she might be descended from Orientals, perhaps; perhaps from the Turk, the Hindu, the . . ."

"No," I cut in with a chuckle, "she's what you might call a hundred and ten percent American."

"U'm," he commented dryly, "and therefore ten percent nearer the bare verities of nature than the thinner-blooded European. Yes. I think we may win this case, my friend, but I also think we shall have much study to do."

"Oh"—I looked at him in surprise—"so you've arrived at a hypothesis?"

"Hardly that, my friend. There are certain possibilities, but as yet Jules de Grandin has not the courage to call them probabilities. Let us say no more for the time being. I would think, I would cogitate, I would meditate upon the matter." Nor could all my urging

extract a single hint concerning the theory which I knew was humming like a gyroscope inside his active little brain as we drove home through the rows of brilliant maple trees lining the wide streets of our pretty little city.

A spirited altercation was under way when we arrived at my house. Taking advantage of the fact that office hours were over and no patients within earshot, Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, was engaged in the pleasing pastime of expressing her unvarnished opinion with all the native eloquence of a born Irishwoman. "Take shame to yerself, Katy Rooney," she was advising her niece as de Grandin and I opened the front door, "sure, 'tis yerself as ought to be ashamed to set foot in me kitchen an' tell me such nonsense! Afther all th' doctor's been afther doin' for yez, too! Desertin' th' pore lady while she's sick an' in distriss, ye are an' without so much as sayin' by yer lave to th' doctor. Wurra, 'tis Nora McGinnis that's strainin' ivery nerve in her body to kape from takin' her hand off th' side o' yer face!"

"Take shame ter meself, indade!" an equally belligerent voice responded. " 'Tis little enough ye know of th' goin's on in that there house! S'posin' 'twas you as had ter live under th' same roof wid a hay-then statchoo, an see th' misthress ye wuz takin' yer wages from a-crawlin' on her hands an' knees before th' thing as if she was a haythen or a Protestant or sumpin, instid of a Christian woman! When first I come to Missis Chetwynde's house th' thing was no larger nor th' span o' me hand, an' ivery day it's growed an' growed until it's as long as me arm this minit, so it is, an' no longer ago than yestiddy it wunk its haythen eye at me as I was passin' through th' hall. I tell ye, Nora darlin', what wid that black statchoo a-standin' in th' hall an' gittin bigger an' bigger day be day, an' th' missis a-crawlin' to it on her all-fours, an' that slinky, sneaky English maid o' her'n actin' as if I, whose ancistors wuz kings in Ireland, wuz no better than th' dirt benathe her feet, an' be-

like not as good, I'd not be answerable fer me actions another day—th' saints hear me when I say it!"

I was striding toward the kitchen with intent to bring the argument to an abrupt close when de Grandin's fingers suddenly bit into my arm so sharply that I winced from the pressure. "No, no, Friend Trowbridge," he whispered fiercely in my ear, "let us hear what else she has to say. This information is a gift from heaven, no less!" Next moment he was in the kitchen, smiling ingratiatingly at the two angry women.

"Dr. de Grandin, sor," began Nora, anxious to refer the dispute to his arbitration, "'tis meself that's ashamed to have to own this gurrul as kin o' mine. When Mrs. Chetwynde wuz taken sick, Dr. Trowbridge got her to go over an' cook fer th' pore lady, fer all our family's good cooks, though I do say it as shouldn't. An' now, bad cess to her, she's fer up an' laving' th' pore lady in th' midst of her trouble, like as if she were a Scandinavian or Eyetalian, or some kind o' stinkin' furriner, beggin' yer pardon, sor."

"Faith, Doctor," the accused Kathleen answered in defense, "I'm niver th' one to run out from a good situation widout warnin', but that Chetwynde house is no Christian place at all, at all. 'Tis some kind o' haythen madhouse, no less."

De Grandin regarded her narrowly a moment, then broke into one of his quick smiles. "What was it you did say concerning a certain statue and Madame Chetwynde?" he asked.

"Sure, an' there's enough ter say," she replied, "but th' best part of it's better left unsaid, I'm thinkin'. Mrs. Chetwynde's husband, as belike you know, sor, is an engineer in India, an' he's forever sendin' home all sorts o' furrin knickknacks fer souvenirs. Some o' th' things is reel pretty an' some of 'em ain't so good. It wuz about three months ago, just before I came wid her, he sent home th' statchoo of some old haythen goddess from th' furrin land. She set it up on a pedis-

tal like as if it were th' image of some blessed saint, an' there it stands to this day, a-poisonin' th' pure air o' th' entire house.

"I niver liked th' looks o' th' thing from th' first moment I clapped me two eyes on it, but I didn't have ter pass through th' front end o' th' house much, an' when I did I turned me eyes away, but one day as I was passin' through th' hall I looked at it, an' ye can belave me or not, Doctor, but th' thing had growed half a foot since last time I seen it!"

"Indeed?" de Grandin responded politely. "And then . . ."

"Then I sez to meself, sez I, 'I'll jist fix *you*, me beauty, that I will,' an' th' next evenin', when no one wuz lookin', I sneaked into th' hall an' doused th' thing 'wid howly wather from th' church font!"

"Ah? And then . . . ?" de Grandin prompted gently, his little eyes gleaming with interest.

"Ouch, Doctor darlin', if I hadn't seen it I wouldn't a' belaved it! May I niver move off'n this spot if th' blessed wather didn't boil an' stew as if I'd poured it onto a red-hot sthove!"

"*Parbleu!*" the Frenchman murmured.

"Th' next time I went past th' thing, so help me hivin, if it didn't grin at me!"

"*Mordieu*, do you say so? And then . . . ?"

"An' no longer ago than yestiddy it wunk its eye at me as I went by!"

"And you did say something concerning Madame Chetwynde praying to this . . ."

"Doctor"—the woman sidled nearer and took his lapel between her thumb and forefinger—"Doctor, 'tis meself as knows better than to bear tales concernin' me betters, but I seen sumpin last week that give me th' cowld shivers from me big toes to me eye-teeth. I'd been shlapin' as paceful as a lamb that hadn't been born yet, when all of a suddent I heard sumpin downstairs that sounded like burglars. 'Bad cess ter th' murtherin' scoundrils,' says I, 'comin' here to kill pore definseless women in their beds!' an' wid that I picks up a piece o' iron pipe I found handy-like

beside me door an' shtarts ter crape downstairs ter lane it agin th' side o' their heads.

"Dr. de Grandin, sor, 'tis th' blessed truth an' no lie I'm tellin' ye. When I come to th' head o' th' stheps, there was Mrs. Chetwynde, all barefooty, wid some sort o' funny-lookin' thing on her head, a-lightin' haythen punk-sthicks before that black haythen image an' a-goin' down on her two knees to it!

"'Katy Hooney,' sez I to meselff, 'this is no fit an' proper house fer you, a Christian woman an' a good Catholic, to be livin' in, so it's not,' an' as soon as iver I could I give me notice to Mrs. Chetwynde, an' all th' money in th' mint couldn't hire me to go back to that place agin, sor."

"Just so," the little Frenchman agreed, nodding his sleek blond head vigorously. "I understand your reluctance to return; but could you not be induced by some consideration greater than money?"

"Sure, an' I'd not go back there fer . . ." Katy began, but he cut her short with a sudden gesture.

"Attend me, if you please," he commanded. "You are a Christian woman, are you not?"

"To be sure, I am."

"Very good. If I told you your going back to Madame Chetwynde's service until I give you word to leave might be instrumental in saving a Christian soul—a Christian body, certainly—would you undertake the duty?"

"I'd do most annything ye towld me to, sor," the woman replied soberly, "but th' blessed saints know I'm afeared to shlape under th' same roof wid that there black thing another night."

"U'm," de Grandin took his narrow chin in his hand and bowed his head in thought a moment, then turned abruptly toward the door. "Await me here," he commanded. "I shall return."

Less than two minutes later he re-entered the kitchen, a tiny package of tissue paper, bound with red ribbon, in his hand. "Have you ever been by the

Killarney lakes?" he demanded of Katy, fixing his level, unwinking stare on her.

"Sure, an' I have that," she replied fervently. "More than onct I've sthood beside th' blue wathers an' . . ."

"And who is it comes out of the lake once each year and rides across the water on a great white horse, attended by . . ." he began, but she interrupted with a cry that was almost a scream of ecstasy:

"'Tis th' O'Donohue himself! Th' brave O'Donohue, a-ridin' his grrate white harse, an' a-headin' his band o' noble Fayneans, all ridin' an' prancin' ter set owld Ireland free!"

"Precisely," de Grandin replied. "I, too, have stood beside the lake, and with me have stood certain good friends who were born and bred in Ireland. One of those once secured a certain souvenir of the O'Donohue's yearly ride. Behold!"

Undoing the tissue paper parcel he exhibited a tiny ring composed of two or three strands of white horsehairs loosely plaited together. "Suppose I told you these were from the tail of the O'Donohue's horse?" he demanded. "Would you take them with you as a safeguard and re-enter Madame Chetwynde's service until I gave you leave to quit?"

"Glory be, I would that, sor!" she replied. "Faith, wid three hairs from th' O'Donohue's horse, I'd take service in th' Divil's own kitchen an' brew him as foine a broth o' brimsthone as iver he drank, that I would. Sure, th' O'Donohue is more than a match fer any murtherin' haythen that iver came out o' India, I'm thinkin', sor."

"Quite right," he agreed with a smile. "It is understood, then, that you will return to Madame Chetwynde's this afternoon and remain there until you hear further from me? Very good."

To me, as we returned to the front of the house, he confided: "A pious fraud is its own excuse, Friend Trowbridge. What we believe a thing is, it is, as far as we are concerned. Those hairs, now, I did extract them from the mattress of my bed; but our supersti-

tious Katy is brave as a lion in the belief that they came from the O'Donohue's horse."

"Do you mean to tell me you actually take any stock in that crazy Irishwoman's story, de Grandin?" I demanded incredulously.

"*Eh bien,*" he answered with a shrug of his narrow shoulders, "who knows what he believes, my friend? Much she may have imagined, much more she may have made up from the activity of her superstitious mind; but if all she said is truth I shall not be so greatly surprised as I expect to be before we have finished this case."

"Well!" I returned, too amazed to think of any adequate reply.

"Trowbridge, my friend," he informed me at breakfast the following morning. "I have thought deeply upon the case of Madame Chetwynde, and it is my suggestion that we call upon the unfortunate lady without further delay. There are several things I should very much like to inspect in her so charming house, for what the estimable Katy told us yesterday has thrown much light on things which before were entirely dark."

"All right," I assented. "It seems to me you're taking a fantastic view of the case, but everything I've done thus far has been useless, so I dare say you'll do no harm by your tricks."

"*Morbleu,* I warrant I shall not!" he agreed with a short nod. "Come, let us go."

The dark-skinned maid who had conducted us to and from her mistress the previous day met us at the door in answer to my ring and favored de Grandin with an even deeper scowl than she had shown before, but she might as well have been a graven image for all the attention he bestowed on her. However:

"*Mon Dieu,* I faint, I am ill, I shall collapse, Friend Trowbridge!" he cried in a choking voice as we approached the stairs. "Water, I pray you; a glass of water, if you please!"

I turned to the domestic and demanded a tumbler

of water, and as she left to procure it, de Grandin leaped forward with a quick, catlike movement and pointed to the statuette standing at the foot of the stairs. "Observe it well, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded in a low, excited voice. "Look upon its hideousness, and take particular notice of its height and width. See, place yourself here, and draw a visual line from the top of its head to the woodwork behind, then make a mark on the wood to record its stature. Quick, she will return in a moment, and we have no time to lose!"

Wonderingly, I obeyed his commands, and had scarcely completed my task when the woman came with a goblet of ice-water. De Grandin pretended to swallow a pill and wash it down with copious drafts of the chilled liquid, then followed me up the stairs to Mrs. Chetwynde's room.

"*Madame,*" he began without preliminary when the maid had left us, "there are certain things I should like to ask you. Be so good as to reply, if you please. First, do you know anything about the statue which stands in your hallway below?"

A troubled look flitted across our patient's pale face. "No, I can't say I do," she replied slowly. "My husband sent it back to me from India several months ago, together with some other curios. I felt a sort of aversion to it from the moment I first saw it, but somehow it fascinated me, as well. After I'd set it up in the hall I made up my mind to take it down, and I've been on the point of having it taken out half a dozen times, but somehow I've never been able to make up my mind about it. I really wish I had, now, for the thing seems to be growing on me, if you understand what I mean. I find myself thinking about it—it's so adorably ugly, you know—more and more during the day, and, somehow, though I can't quite explain, I think I dream about it at night, too. I wake up every morning with the recollection of having had a terrible nightmare the night before, but I'm never able to recall any of the incidents of my dream except that the statue figures in it somehow."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured noncommittally. "This is of interest, *Madame*. Another question, if you please, and, I pray you, do not be offended if it seems unduly personal. I notice you have a *penchant* for attar of rose. Do you employ any other perfume?"

"No," wonderingly.

"No incense, perhaps, to render the air more fragrant?"

"No, I dislike incense, it makes my head ache. And yet"—she wrinkled her smooth brow in a puzzled manner—"and yet I've thought I smelled a faint odor of some sort of incense, almost like Chinese punk, in the house more than once. Strangely enough, the odor seems strongest on the mornings following one of my unremembered nightmares."

"H'm," de Grandin muttered, "I think, perhaps, we begin to see a fine, small ray of light. Thank you, *Madame*; that is all."

"The moon is almost at the full, Friend Trowbridge," he remarked apropos of nothing, about 11 o'clock that night. "Would it not be an ideal evening for a little drive?"

"Yes, it would not," I replied. "I'm tired, and I'd a lot rather go to bed than be gallivanting all over town with you, but I suppose you have something up your sleeve, as usual."

"*Mais out*," he responded with one of his impish smiles, "an elbow in each, my friend—and other things, as well. Suppose we drive to Madame Chetwynde's."

I grumbled, but complied.

"Well, here we are," I growled as we passed the Chetwynde cottage. "What do we do next?"

"Go in, of course," he responded.

"Go in? At this hour of night?"

"But certainly; unless I am more mistaken than I think, there is that to be seen within which we should do well not to miss."

"But it's preposterous," I objected. "Who ever heard of disturbing a sick woman by a call at this hour?"

"We shall not disturb her, my friend," he replied. "See, I have here the key to her house. We shall let ourselves in like a pair of wholly disreputable burglars and dispose ourselves as comfortably as may be to see what we shall see, if anything."

"The key to her house!" I echoed in amazement. "How the deuce did you get it?"

"Simply. While the sour-faced maid fetched me the glass of water this morning, and you did observe the statue, I took an impression of the key, which I did notice yesterday, in a cake of soap I had brought for that very purpose. This afternoon I had a locksmith prepare me a duplicate from the stamp I had made. *Parbleu*, my friend, Jules de Grandin has not served these many years with the *Sûreté* and failed to learn more ways than one of entering other peoples' houses!"

Quietly, treading softly, we mounted the veranda steps, slipped the Judas-key into the front door lock and let ourselves into Mrs. Chetwynde's hall. "This way, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin ordered, plucking me by the sleeve. "If we seat ourselves in the drawing-room we shall have an uninterrupted view of both stairs and hall, yet remain ourselves in shadow. That is well, for we have come to see, not to be seen."

"I feel like a malefactor . . ." I began in a nervous whisper, but he cut me off sharply.

"Quiet!" he ordered in a low breath. "Observe the moon, if you please, my friend. Is it not already almost peering through yonder window?"

I glanced toward the hall window before which the black statuette stood and noticed that the edge of the lunar disk was beginning to show through the opening, and long silver beams were commencing to stream across the polished floor, illuminating the figure and surrounding it with a sort of cold effulgence. The statue represented a female figure, gnarled and knotted, and articulated in a manner suggesting horrible deformity. It was of some kind of black stone or composition which glistened as though freshly

anointed with oil, and from the shoulder-sockets three arms sprang out to right and left. A sort of pointed cap adorned the thing's head, and about the pendulous breasts and twisting arms serpents twined and writhed, while a girdle of skulls, carved from gleaming white bone, encircled its waist. Otherwise it was nude, and nude with a nakedness which was obscene even to me, a medical practitioner for whom the human body held no secrets. As I watched the slowly growing patch of moonlight on the floor it seemed the black figure grew slowly in size, then shrunk again, and again increased in stature, while its twisting arms and garlands of contorting serpents appeared to squirm with a horrifying suggestion of waking into life.

I blinked my eyes several times, sure I was the victim of some optical illusion due to the moon rays against the silhouette of the statue's blackness, but a sound from the stairhead brought my gaze upward with a quick, startled jerk.

Light and faltering, but unquestionably approaching, a soft step sounded on the uncarpeted stairs, nearer, nearer, until a tall, slow-moving figure came into view at the staircase turn. Swathed from breast to insteps in a diaphanous black silk nightrobe, a pair of golden-strapped boudoir sandals on her little naked feet and a veil of black tulle shrouding her face, Idoline Chetwynde slowly descended the stairs, feeling her way carefully, as though the covering on her face obscured her vision. One hand was outstretched before her, palm up, fingers close together; in the other she bore a cluster of seven sticks of glowing, smoking Chinese punk spread fanwise between her fingers, and the heavy, cloyingly sweet fumes from the joss-sticks spiraled slowly upward, surrounding her veiled head in a sort of nimbus and trailing behind her like an evil-omened cloud.

Straight for the black image of the Indian goddess she trod, feeling each slow, careful step with faltering deliberation, halted a moment and inclined her head, then thrust the punk-sticks into a tiny bowl of

sand which stood on the floor at the statue's feet. This done, she stepped back five slow paces, slipped the gilded sandals off and placed her bared feet parallel and close together, then with a sudden forward movement dropped to her knees. Oddly, with that sense for noting trifles in the midst of more important sights which we all have, I noticed that when she knelt instead of straightening her feet out behind her with her insteps to the floor, she bent her toes forward beneath her weight.

For an instant she remained kneeling upright before the black image, which was already surrounded by a heavy cloud of punk-smoke; then, with a convulsive gesture, she tore the veil from before her face and rent the robe from her bosom, raised her hands and crossed them, palms forward, in front of her brow and bent forward and downward till crossed hands and forehead rested on the waxed boards of the floor. For a moment she remained thus in utter self-abasement, then rose upright, flinging her hands high above her head, recrossed them before her face and dropped forward in complete prostration once more. Again and again she repeated this genuflection, faster and faster, until it seemed her body swayed forward and back thirty or forty times a minute, and the soft pat-pat of her hands against the floor assumed a rhythmic, drumlike cadence as she began a faltering chant in eager, short-breathed syllables:

Ho, Devi, consort of Siva and daughter of Himavat!
Ho, Sakti, fructifying principle of the Universe!
Ho, Devi, the Goddess;
Ho, Gauri, the Yellow;
Ho, Uma, the Bright;
Ho, Durga, the Inaccessible;
Ho, Chandi, the Fierce; Listen Thou to my Mantra!
Ho, Kali, the Black,
Ho, Kali, the Six-armed One of Horrid Form,

Ho, Thou about whose waist hangs a girdle of human skulls as if it were a precious pendant;
Ho, Malign Image of Destructiveness—

She paused an instant, seeming to swallow rising trepidation, gasped for breath a moment, like a timid but determined bather about to plunge into a pool of icy water, then:

Take Thou the soul and the body of this woman prostrate before Thee,
Take Thou her body and her spirit, freely and voluntarily offered,
Incorporate her body, soul and spirit into Thy godhead, to strengthen Thee in Thine undertakings.
Freely is she given Thee, Divine Destroyer.
Freely of her own accord, and without reservation.
Asking naught but to become a part of Thee and of Thy supreme wickedness.

Ho, Kali of horrid form,
Ho, Malign Image of Destructiveness,
Ho, eater-up of all that is good,
Ho, disseminator of all which is wicked,
Listen Thou to my Mantra!

"*Grand Dieu*, forgive her invincible ignorance; she knows not what she says!" de Grandin muttered beside me, but made no movement to stop her in her sacrilegious rite.

I half-rose from my chair to seize the frenzied woman and drag her from her knees, but he grasped my elbow in a viselike grip and drew me back savagely. "Not now, foolish one!" he commanded in a sibilant whisper. And so we watched the horrid ceremony to its close.

For upward of a quarter-hour, Idoline Chetwynde continued her prostrations before the heathen idol,

and, either because the clouds drifting across the moon's face played tricks with the light streaming through the hall window, or because my eyes grew undependable from the strain of watching the spectacle before me, it seemed as though some hovering, shifting pall of darkness took form in the corners of the room and wavered forward like a sheet of wind-blown sable cloth until it almost enveloped the crouching woman, then fluttered back again. Three or four times I noted this phenomenon, then as I was almost sure it was no trick of lighting or imagination, the moon, sailing serenely in the autumn sky, passed beyond the line of the window, an even tone of shadow once more filled the hall, and Mrs. Chetwynde sank forward on her face for the final time, uttered a weak, protesting little sound, halfway between a moan and a whimper, and lay there, a lifeless, huddled heap at the foot of the graven image, her white arms and feet protruding from the black folds of her robe and showing like spots of pale light against the darkness of the floor.

Once more I made to rise and take her up, but again de Grandin restrained me. "Not yet, my friend," he whispered. "We must see the tragic farce played to its conclusion."

For a few minutes we sat there in absolute silence; then, with a shuddering movement, Mrs. Chetwynde regained consciousness, rose slowly and dazedly to her feet, resumed her sandals, and walked falteringly toward the stairs.

Quick and silent as a cat, de Grandin leaped across the room, passed within three feet of her and seized a light chair, thrusting it forward so that one of its spindle legs barred her path.

Never altering her course, neither quickening nor reducing her shuffling walk, the young woman proceeded, collided with the obstruction, and would have stumbled had not de Grandin snatched away the chair as quickly as he had thrust it forward. With never a backward look, with no exclamation of pain—although the contact must have hurt her cruelly—

without even a glance at the little Frenchman who stood half an arm's length from her, she walked to the stairs, felt for the bottommost tread a second, then began a slow ascent.

"*Tres bon!*" de Grandin muttered as he restored the chair to its place and took my elbow in a firm grip, guiding me down the hall and through the front door.

"What in heaven's name does it all mean?" I demanded as we regained my car. "From what I've just seen I'd have no hesitancy in signing commitment papers to incarcerate Mrs. Chetwynde in an institution for the insane—the woman's suffering from a masochistic mania, no doubt of it—but why the deuce did you try to trip her with a chair?"

"Softly, my friend," he replied, touching fire to a vile-smelling French cigarette and puffing furiously at it. "Did you help commit that poor girl to an insane asylum you would be committing a terrible crime, no less. Normal she is not, but her abnormality is entirely subjective. As for the chair, it was the test of her condition. Like you, I had a faint fear her actions were due to some mental breakdown, but did you notice her walk? *Parbleu*, was it the walk of a person in possession of his faculties? I say no! And the chair proved it, though it must have caused her tender body much pain, she neither faltered nor cried out. The machinery which telegraphed the sensation of hurt from her leg to her brain did suffer a short-circuit. My friend, she was in a state of complete anesthesia as regarded the outward world. She was, how do you say . . ."

"Hypnotized?" I suggested.

"U'm, perhaps. Something like that; although the controlling agent was one far, far different from any you have seen in the psychological laboratory, my friend."

"Then . . ."

"Then we would do well not to speculate too deeply until we have more pieces of evidence to fit

into the picture-puzzle of this case. Tomorrow morning we shall call on Madame Chetwynde, if you please."

We did. The patient was markedly worse. Great lavender circles showed under her eyes, and her face, which I had thought as pale as any countenance could be in life, was even a shade paler than theretofore. She was so weak she could hardly lift her hand in greeting, and her voice was barely more than a whisper. On her left leg, immediately over the fibula, a great patch of violet bruise showed plainly the effects of her collision with the chair. Throughout the pretty, cozy little cottage there hung the faint aroma of burnt joss-sticks.

"Look well, my friend," de Grandin ordered in a whisper as we descended the stairs; "observe the mark you made behind the statue's head no later than yesterday."

I paused before the horrid thing, closed one eye and sighted from the tip of its pointed cap to the scratch I had made on the woodwork behind it. Then I turned in amazement to my companion. Either my eye was inaccurate or I had made incorrect measurements the previous day. According to yesterday's marks on the woodwork the statue had grown fully two inches in height.

De Grandin met my puzzled look with an unwavering stare, as he replied to my unspoken question: "Your eye does not deceive you, my friend; the hell-hag's effigy has enhanced."

"But—but," I stammered, "that can't be!"

"Nevertheless, it is."

"But, good heavens, man; if this keeps up. . . ."

"This will not keep up, my friend. Either the devil's dam takes her prey or Jules de Grandin triumphs. The first may come to pass; but my wager is that the second occurs."

"But, for the Lord's sake! What can we do?"

"We can do much for the Lord's sake, my friend, and He can do much for ours, if it be His will. What

we can do, we will; no more and certainly no less. Do you make your rounds of mercy, Friend Trowbridge, and beseech the so excellent Nora to prepare an extra large apple tart for dinner, as I shall undoubtlessly bring home a guest. Me, I hasten, I rush, I fly to New York to consult a gentleman I met at the Medical Society dinner the other night. I shall get back when I return, but, if that be not in time for an early dinner, it will be no fault of Jules de Grandin's. *Adieu*, my friend, and may good luck attend me in my errand. *Cordieu*, but I shall need it!"

"Dr. Trowbridge, may I present Dr. Wolf?" de Grandin requested that evening, standing aside to permit a tall, magnificently built young man to precede him through the doorway of my consulting room. "I have brought him from New York to take dinner with us, and—perhaps—to aid us in that which we must do tonight without fail."

"How do you do, Dr. Wolf?" I responded formally, taking the visitor's hand in mine, but staring curiously at him the while. Somehow the name given by de Grandin did not seem at all appropriate. He was tall, several inches over six feet, with an enormous breadth of shoulder and extraordinary depth of chest. His face, disproportionately large for even his great body, was high-cheeked and unusually broad, with a jaw of implacable squareness, and the deep-set, burning eyes beneath his overhanging brows were of a peculiarly piercing quality. There was something in the impassive nobility and steadfastness of purpose in that face of the central allegorical figure in Franz Stuck's masterpiece, *War*.

Something of my thought must have been expressed in my glance, for the young man noticed it and a smile passed swiftly across his rugged countenance, leaving it calm again in an instant. "The name is a concession to civilization, Doctor," he informed me. "I began life under the somewhat unconventional sobriquet of 'Johnny Curly Wolf', but that

hardly seemed appropriate to my manhood's environment, so I have shortened the name to its greatest common divisor—I'm a full-blooded Dakotah, you know."

"Indeed?" I replied lamely.

"Yes. I've been a citizen for a number of years, for there are certain limitations on the men of my people who retain their tribal allegiance which would hamper me greatly in my lifework. My father became wealthy by grace of the white man's bounty and the demands of a growing civilization for fuel-oil, and he had the good judgment to have me educated in an Eastern university instead of one of the Indian training schools. An uncle of mine was a tribal medicine man and I was slated to follow in his footsteps, but I determined to graft the white man's scientific medicine onto my primitive instruction. Medical work has appealed to me ever since I was a little shaver and was permitted to help the post surgeon at the agency office. I received my license to practice in '14, and was settling down to a study of pulmonary diseases when the big unpleasantness broke out in Europe."

He smiled again, somewhat grimly this time. "My people have been noted for rather bloody work in the old days you know, and I suppose the call of my lineage was too strong for me. At any rate, I was inside a Canadian uniform and overseas within two months of the call for Dominion troops, and for three solid years I was in the thick of it with the British. When we came in I was transferred to the A. E. F., and finished my military career in a burst of shrapnel in the Argonne. I've three silver bones in each leg now and am drawing half-compensation from the government every month. I endorse the check over to the fund to relieve invalid Indian veterans of the army who aren't as well provided with worldly goods by Standard Oil as I am."

"But are you practicing in New York now, Doctor?" I asked.

"Only as a student. I've been taking some special post-graduate work in diseases of the lungs and pos-

terior poliomyelitis. As soon as my studies are completed I'm going west to devote my life and fortune to fighting those twin scourges of my people."

"Just so," de Grandin cut in, unable longer to refrain from taking part in the conversation. "Dr. Wolf and I have had many interesting things to speak of during our trip from New York, Friend Trowbridge, and now, if all is prepared, shall we eat?"

The young Indian proved a charming dinner companion. Finely educated and highly cultured, he was indued with extraordinary skill as a raconteur, and his matter-of-fact stories of the "old contemps'" titanic struggle from the Marne and back, night raids in the trenches and desperate hand-to-hand fights in the blackness of No Man's land, of the mud and blood and silent heroism of the dressing-stations and of the phantom armies which rallied to the assistance of the British at Mons were colorful as the scenes of some old Spanish tapestry. Dinner was long since over and 11 o'clock had struck, still we lingered over our cigars, liqueurs and coffee in the drawing room. It was de Grandin who dragged us back from the days of '15 with a hasty glance at the watch strapped to his wrist.

"*Parbleu*, my friends," he exclaimed, "it grows late and we have a desperate experiment to try before the moon passes the meridian. Come, let us be about our work."

I looked at him in amazement, but the young Indian evidently understood his meaning, for he rose with a shrug of his broad shoulders and followed my diminutive companion out into the hall, where a great leather kit bag which bore evidence of having accompanied its owner through Flanders and Picardy rested beside the hall rack. "What's on the program?" I demanded, trailing in the wake of the other two, but de Grandin thrust hat and coat into my hands, exclaiming:

"We go to Madame Chetwynde's again, my friend. Remember what you saw about this time last night?

*Cordieu*, you shall see that which has been vouchsafed to few men before another hour has passed, or Jules de Grandin is wretchedly mistaken!"

Piling my companions into the back seat, I took the wheel and drove through the still, moonlit night toward the Chetwynde cottage. Half an hour later we let ourselves quietly into the house with de Grandin's duplicate key and took our station in the darkened parlor once more.

A quick word from de Grandin gave Dr. Wolf his cue, and taking up his travel-beaten bag the young Indian let himself out of the house and paused on the porch. For a moment I saw his silhouette against the glass panel of the door, then a sudden movement carried him out of my line of vision, and I turned to watch the stairs down which I knew Idoline Chetwynde would presently come to perform her unholy rites of secret worship.

The ticking pulse-beats of the little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece sounded thunderous in the absolute quiet of the house; here and there a board squeaked and cracked in the gradually lowering temperature; somewhere outside, a motor horn tooted with a dismal, wailing note. I felt my nerves gradually tightening like the strings of a violin as the musician keys them up before playing, and tiny shivers of horripilation pursued each other down my spine and up my forearms as I sat waiting in the shadowy room.

The little French clock struck twelve sharp, silvery chimes. It had arrived, that hideous hour which belongs neither to the day which is dead nor to the new day stirring in the womb of Time, and which we call midnight for want of a better term. The moon's pale visage slipped slowly into view through the panes of the window behind the Indian statue and a light, faltering step sounded on the stairs above us.

"*Mon Dieu*," de Grandin whispered fervently, "grant that I shall not have made a mistake in my calculations!" He half rose from his chair, gazing fixedly at the lovely, unconscious woman walking her tranced march toward the repellent idol, then stepped

softly to the front window and tapped lightly on its pane with his fingertips.

Once again we saw Idoline Chetwynde prostrate herself at the feet of the black statue; once more her fluttering, breathless voice besought the evil thing to take her soul and destroy her body; then, so faint I scarcely heard it through the droning of the praying woman's words, the front door gave a soft click as it swung open on its hinges.

Young Dr. Wolf, once Johnny Curly Wolf, medicine man of the Dakotahs, stepped into the moonlit hall.

Now I understand why he had hidden himself in the shadows of the porch when he left the house. Gone were his stylishly—cut American clothes, gone was his air of well-bred sophistication. It was not the highly educated, cultured physician and student who entered the Chetwynde home, but a medicine man of America's primeval race in all the panoply of his traditional office. Naked to the waist he was, his bronze torso gleaming like newly molded metal from the furnace. Long, tight-fitting trousers of beaded buckskin encased his legs, and on his feet were the moccasins of his forefathers. Upon his head was the war-bonnet of eagle feathers, and his face was smeared with alternate streaks of white, yellow and black paint. In one hand he bore a bull-hide tom-tom, and in his deep-set, smoldering eyes there burned the awful, deadly earnestness of his people.

Majestically he strode down the hall, paused some three or four paces behind the prostrate woman, then, raising his tom-tom above his head, struck it sharply with his knuckles.

*Toom, toom, toom toom!* the mellow, booming notes sounded again and still again. Bending slightly at the knees, he straightened himself, repeated the movement, quickened the cadence until he was rising and sinking a distance of six inches or so in a sort of stationary, bobbing dance. "Manitou, Great Spirit of

my fathers!" he called in a strong, resonant voice. "Great spirit of the forest dwellers and of the people of the plains, hear the call of the last of Thy worshippers:

"Hear my prayer, O Mighty Spirit,
As I do the dance before Thee,
Do the dance my fathers taught me,
Dance it as they danced before me,
As they danced it in their lodges,
As they danced it at their councils
When of old they sought Thy succor.

"Look upon this prostrate woman,
See her bow in supplication
To an alien, wicked spirit.
Thine she is by right of lineage,
Thine by right of blood and forebears.
In the cleanly air of heaven
She should make her supplication,
Not before the obscene statue
Of a god of alien people.

"Hear my prayer, O Mighty Spirit,
Hear, Great Spirit of my fathers,
Save this woman of Thy people,
Smite and strike and make impotent
Demons from across the water,
Demons vile and wholly filthy,
And not seemly for devotion
From a woman of Thy people."

The solemn, monotonous intoning ceased, but the dance continued. But now it was no longer a stationary dance, for, with shuffling tread and half-bent body, Johnny Curly Wolf was circling slowly about the Hindu idol and its lone worshipper.

Something—a cloud, perhaps—drifted slowly across the moon's face, obscuring the light which streamed into the hall. An oddly shaped cloud it was, some-

thing like a giant man astride a giant horse, and on his brow there seemed to be the feathered war-bonnet of the Dakotahs. The cloud grew in density. The moon rays became fainter and fainter, and finally the hall was in total darkness.

In the west there sounded the whistling bellow of a rising wind, shaking the casements of the house and making the very walls tremble. Deep and rumbling, growing louder and louder as it seemed to roll across the heavens on iron wheels, a distant peal of thunder sounded, increased in volume, finally burst in a mighty clap directly over our heads, and a fork of blinding, jagged lightning shot out of the angry sky. A shivering ring of shattered glass and of some heavy object toppling to a fall, a woman's wild, despairing shriek, and another rumbling, crashing peal of thunder deafened me.

By the momentary glare of a second lightning-flash I beheld a scene stranger than any painted by Dante in his vision of the underworld. Seemingly, a great female figure crouched with all the ferocity of a tigress above the prostrate form of Idoline Chetwynde, its writhing, sextuple arms grasping at the woman's prone body, or raised as though to ward off a blow, while from the window looking toward the west there leaped the mighty figure of an Indian brave armed with shield and war-club.

Johnny Curly Wolf? No! For Johnny Curly Wolf circled and gyrated in the measures of his tribal ghost-dance, and in one hand he held his tom-tom, while with the other he beat out the rhythm of his dance-music.

It was but an instant that the lightning showed me this fantastic tableau, then all was darkness blacker than before, and a crashing of some stone thing shattered into half a thousand fragments broke the rumble of the thunder.

"Lights! *Grand Dieu*, lights, Friend Trowbridge!" de Grandin screamed in a voice gone high and thin with hysteria.

I pressed the electric switch in the hall and beheld Johnny Curly Wolf, still in tribal costume, great beads of sweat dewing his brow, standing over the body of Idoline Chetwynde, the hall window-panes blown from their frame and scattered over the floor like tiny slivers of frozen moonlight, and, toppled from its pedestal and broken into bits almost as fine as powder, the black statue of Kali, Goddess of the East.

"Take her up, my friend," de Grandin ordered me, pointing to Mrs. Chetwynde's lifeless body. "Pick her up and restore her to her bed. *Morbleu*, but we shall have to attend her like a new-born infant this night, for I fear me her nerves have had a shock from which they will not soon recover!"

All night and far past daylight we sat beside Idoline Chetwynde's bed, watching the faint color ebb and flow in her sunken cheeks, taking heedful count of her stimulants when the tiny spark of waning life seemed about to flicker to extinction.

About 10 o'clock in the morning de Grandin rose from his seat beside the bed and stretched himself like a cat rising from prolonged sleep. "*Bon, tres bon!*" he exclaimed. "She sleeps. Her pulse, it is normal; her temperature, it is right. We can safely leave her now, my friends. Anon, we shall call on her; but I doubt me if we shall more to do than wish her felicitations on her so miraculous cure. Meantime, let us go. My poor, forgotten stomach cries aloud reproaches on my so neglected mouth. I starve, I famish, I faint of inanition. Behold, I am already become but a wraith and a shadow!"

Jules de Grandin drained his third cup of coffee at a gulp and passed the empty vessel back for replenishment. "*Parbleu*, my friends," he exclaimed, turning his quick, elfin smile from Dr. Wolf to me, "it was the beautiful adventure, was it not?"

"It might have been a beautiful adventure," I agreed grudgingly, "but just what the deuce *was* it? The whole thing's a mystery to me from beginning to

end. What caused Mrs. Chetwynde's illness in the first place, what was the cause of her insane actions, and what was it I saw last night? Was there really a thunderstorm that broke the black image, and did I really see . . ."

"But certainly, my excellent one," he cut in with a smile as he emptied his cup and lighted a cigarette, "you did behold all that you thought you saw; no less."

"But . . ."

"No buts, if you please, good friend. I well know you will tease for an explanation as a pussy-cat begs for food while the family dines, and so I shall enlighten you as best I can. To begin:

"When first you told me of Madame Chetwynde's illness I knew not what to think, nor did I think anything in particular. Some of her symptoms made me fear she might have been the victim of a *revenant,* but there were no signs of bloodletting upon her, and so I dismissed that diagnosis. But as we descended the stairs after our first visit, I did behold the abominable statue in the hall. 'Ah ha,' I say to me, 'what does this evil thing do here? Perhaps it makes the trouble with Madame Idoline?' And so I look at it most carefully.

"My friends, Jules de Grandin has covered much land with his little feet. In the arctic snows and in the equatorial heat he has seen the sins and follies and superstitions of men, and learned to know the gods they worship. So he recognized that image for what it was. It is of the goddess Kali, tutelary deity of the *Thugs* of India, whose worship is murder and whose service is bloodshed. She goes by many names, my friends: sometimes she is known as Devi, consort of Siva and daughter of Himavat, the Himalaya Mountains. She is the Sakti, or female energy of Siva, and is worshiped in a variety of forms under two main classes, according as she is conceived as a mild and beneficent or as a malignant deity. In her milder shapes, besides Devi, 'the goddess,' she is called also

Gauri 'the yellow,' or Uma, 'the bright.' In her malignant forms she is Durga, 'the inaccessible,' represented as a yellow woman mounted on a tiger, Chandi, 'the fierce,' and, worst of all, Kali, 'the black,' in which guise she is portrayed as dripping with blood, encircled with snakes and adorned with human skulls. In the latter form she is worshiped with obscene and bloody rites, oftener than not with human sacrifice. Her special votaries are the *Thugs*, and at her dreadful name all India trembles, for the law of the English has not yet wiped out the horrid practice of *thuggee*.

"Now, when I beheld this filthy image standing in Madame Chetwynde's home I wondered much. Still, I little suspected what we later came to know for truth, for it is a strange thing that the gods of the East have little power over the people of the West. Behold, three hundred thousand Englishmen hold in complete subjection as many million Hindus, though the subject people curse their masters daily by all the gods whom they hold sacred. It seems, I think, that only those who stand closer to the bare verities of nature are liable to be affected by gods and goddesses which are personifications of nature's forces. I know not whether this be so, it is but a theory of mine. At any rate, I saw but small connection between the idol and our sick lady's illness until Friend Trowbridge told me of her strain of American Indian ancestry. Then I say to me: 'Might not she, who holds a mixture of aboriginal blood in her veins, become affected by the strength of this heathen goddess? Or perhaps it is that fused blood is weaker than the pure strain, and the evil influence of the Black One may have found some loophole in her defense. One thing was most sure, in Madame Chetwynde's house there was clearly the odor of Eastern incense, yet nowhere was there visible evidence of perfume save such as a dainty woman of the West might use. Me, I sniffed like a hound while examining her, and kissed her fingers twice in

farewell to make sure. This incense which were so all unaccounted for did puzzle me.

"You recall, Friend Trowbridge, how I questioned her maid about the punk smell, and how little satisfaction I got of her. 'There is going on here the business of monkeys,' I tell me as we leave the house. And so I make a print of the front door key that we may enter again at our convenience and see what is what.

"*Eh bien*, my friends, did we not see a sufficiency the following night when we beheld Madame Idoline fall forward on her face and make a voluntary offer of her soul and body to the Black One? I shall say so.

" 'How to overcome this Eastern fury?' I ask me. 'The excellent Katy Rooney have bathed her in holy water, and the blessed fluid have burned and sizzled on her so infamous head. Clearly, the force of Western churches is of little value in this case. Ah, perhaps she *have* attacked Madame Chetwynde through her strain of primitive blood. Then what?

"*Mort d'un chat*, all suddenly I have it! At the dinner in New York I have met the young Dr. Wolf. He is a full-blooded American Indian and, he have told me, a medicine man of his people as well. Now, if this woman's weakness is her Indian blood, may not that same blood be her strength and her protection as well? I hope so.

"So I persuade Monsieur Wolf to come with me and pit the strength of his Great Spirit against the evil force of Kali of the *Thugs*. Who will win? *Le bon Dieu* alone knows, but I have hopes."

For a moment he regarded us with a quizzical smile, then resumed.

"The Indian of America, my friends, was truly *un sauvage noble*. The Spaniard saw in him only something like a beast to be enslaved and despoiled; the Englishman saw in him only a barrier to possession of the new country, and as such to be swept back or exterminated; but to the Frenchman he was a noble character. Ha, did not my illustrious countrymen, the

Sieurs La Salle and Frontenac, accord him his just dues? Certainly. His friendship was true, his courage undoubted, his religion a clean one. Why, then, could we not invoke the Indians' Great Spirit?

"We know, my friends, or at least think we know, that there is but one true God, almighty and everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; but does that same God appear in the same manner to all peoples? *Mais non.* To the Arab He is Allah; to many so-called Christians He is but a sort of celestial Santa Claus; I greatly fear, Friend Trowbridge, that to many of your most earnest preachers He is little more than a disagreeable old man with the words 'Thou Shalt Not!' engraved upon His forehead. But, for all these different conceptions, He is still God.

"And what of the deities of heathendom?" He paused, looking expectantly from one of us to the other, but as we made no reply, proceeded to answer his own question: "They are nothing, and yet they are something, too. They are the concentrated power of thought, of mistaken belief, of misconception. Yet, because thoughts are truly things, they have a certain power—*parbleu*, I think a power which is not to be sneezed upon. For years, for centuries, perhaps, that evil statue of Kali has been invoked in bloody and unseemly rites, and before her misshapen feet has been poured out the concentrated hate and wickedness of countless monkey-faced heathens. That did indue her with an evil power which might easily overcome the resistance of a sensitive nature, and all primitive peoples are more sensitive to such influences than are those whose ancestors have long been agnostic, however much and loudly they have prated of their piety.

"Very good. The Great Spirit of the Indian of America, on the other hand, being a clean and noble conception, is one of the manifestations of God Himself. For countless generations the noble Red Man had clothed him with all the attributes of nobility. Shall this pure conception of the godhead go to waste? No, my friends, ten thousand times no! You

cannot kill a noble thought any more than you can slay a noble soul; both are immortal.

"And so I did prevail upon the good Wolf to come with us and summon the massed thought of those despicable ones who have made him a goddess of their own uncleanness of mind. *Nom d'une anguille*, but the struggle was magnificent!"

"You mean to tell me that I actually saw the Great Spirit, then?" I demanded incredulously.

"*Ah bah*, my friend," he replied, "have I not been at pains to tell you it was the massed, the concentrated thought and belief of all the Indians of today and for countless generations before today which our good Wolf invoked? *Mordieu*, can I never convince you that thought, though it be immaterial, is as much a thing as—as for example, the skull in your thick head?"

"But what about Mrs. Chetwynde's maid?" I asked, for deep in my mind there lurked a suspicion that the woman might know more of the unholy sights we had seen than she care to tell."

"Quite right," he replied, nodding gravely. "I, too, suspected her once. It was because of that I induced the excellent Katy to return to Madame Idoline's service and spy upon her. I discovered much, for Katy, like all her race, is shrewd, and when she knows what is wanted she knows how to get it. It appears the maid was fully aware of her mistress' subjection to the Black One, but, though she understood it not, so deep was her devotion to *Madame* her mistress that she took it on herself to cast obstacles in our way lest we prevent a continuance of *Madame's* secret worship. Loyalty is a great, a wonderful thing, my friends. That poor woman was shocked by the spectacle of her beloved mistress casting herself before the thing of stone, but the bare fact that her mistress did it was justification enough for her. Had she been asked to do so by Madame Chetwynde, I firmly believe she would have joined in the obscene devotions and given her own body and soul to the Black One

along with that of her beloved mistress whom she adored."

"Well—I'll be . . . But look here . . ." I began again, but:

"No more, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin commanded, rising and motioning to Dr. Wolf and me. "It is long since we have slept. Come, let us retire. Me, *parbleu*, I shall sleep until your learned societies shall issue profound treatises on the discovery of a twin brother to Monsieur Rip Van Winkle!"

# The Poltergeist

"And so, Dr. de Grandin," our visitor concluded, "this is really a case for your remarkable powers."

Jules de Grandin selected a fresh cigarette from his engine-turned silver case, tapped it thoughtfully against a well-manicured thumb nail, and regarded the caller with one of his disconcertingly unwinking stares. "Am I to understand that all attempts to effect a cure have failed, Monsieur?" he asked at length.

"Utterly. We've tried everything in reason—and out of it," Captain Loudon replied. "We've had some of the best neurologists in consultation, we've employed faith healers, spiritualistic mediums, even had her given 'absent treatment,' all to no avail. All the physicians, all the cultists and quacks have failed us; now—"

"Now I do not think I care to be numbered among those quacks, Monsieur," the Frenchman returned coldly. "Had you called me into consultation with an accredited physician—"

"But that's just it," the captain interrupted. "Every doctor we've had has been confident he could work a cure, but they've all failed. Julia is a lovely girl—I don't say it because she's my daughter—I state it as a fact—and was to have been married this fall. Now this—this disorder has taken complete possession of her and it's wrecking her life. Robert—Lieutenant Proudfit, her fiancé—and I are almost beside ourselves, and as for my daughter, I fear her mind will give way and she'll destroy herself unless *somebody* can do *something*!"

"Ah?" the little Frenchman arched the slim black

brows that were in such a vivid contrast to his blond hair and mustache. "Why did not you say so before, *Monsieur le Capitaine?* It is not merely the curing of one nervous young woman you would have me undertake, but the fruition of a romance I should bring about? *Bien*, good, very well; I accept. If you will also retain my good Friend Trowbridge, so that there shall be a locally licensed and respected physician in the case, my powers which you have been kind enough to call remarkable are entirely at your disposal."

"Splendid!" Captain Loudon agreed, rising. "Then it's arranged. I may expect you to—"

"One moment, if you please," de Grandin interrupted, raising his slim white hand for silence. "Suppose we make a *précis* of the case before proceeding." He drew a pad of note paper and pencil toward him as he continued:

"Your daughter, Mademoiselle Julia, how old is she?"

"Twenty-nine."

"A most charming age." He scribbled a note. "And she is your only child?"

"Yes sir."

"Now, these manifestations of the *outré*, these so unusual happenings, they began to take place some six months ago?"

"Just about; I can't place the time exactly."

"No matter. They have assumed various mystifying forms? She has refused food, she has had visions, she shouts, she sings uncontrollably, she speaks in a voice which is strange to her—at times she goes into a deathlike trance and from her throat come strange voices, voices of men, or other women, even of little children?"

"That's correct, sir."

"Other seemingly inexplicable things occur. Chairs, books, tables, even such heavy pieces of furniture as a piano, move from their accustomed places when she is near, and bits of jewelry and other small objects are hurled through the air?"

"Yes, and worse than that, I've seen pins and needles fly from her work basket and bury themselves in her cheeks and arms," the captain interrupted. "Lately she's been persecuted by scars—scars from an invisible source. Great weals, like the claw-marks of some beast, have appeared on her arms and face, right while I looked on, and I've been wakened at night by her screams, and when I rush into her room I find the marks of long, thin fingers on her throat. It's maddening, sir; terrifying. I'd say it was a case of Biblical demoniacal possession, if I didn't disbelieve all that sort of supernaturalism."

"U'm," de Grandin looked up from the pad on which he had been industriously scribbling. "There is nothing in the world, or out of it, my friend, which is supernatural. The wisest man today cannot say where the powers and possibilities of nature begin or end. We say, 'Thus and so is beyond the bounds of our experience,' but does that therefore put it beyond the bonds of nature? I think not. Myself, I have seen such things as no man can hear me relate without calling me a liar, and my good, unimaginative Friend Trowbridge has witnessed wonders such as no writer of fiction would dare set down on paper, yet I do declare we have never seen that which I would call supernatural.

"But we waste the time. Let us hasten to your house; I would interview Mademoiselle Julia and see for myself some of these so remarkable afflictions of hers.

"Remember," he turned his fixed, unwinking stare on our patron as we paused for our outdoor things in the hall, "remember, if you please, Monsieur, I am not like one of those quacks who have failed you. I do not say that I can work a cure. I can but promise I will try. Agreed? *Très bon.* We shall see what we shall see. Let us be upon our way."

Robert Beauregard Loudon was a retired Naval captain, a widower with more than sufficient means to gratify his rather Epicurian tastes, and possessed one

of the finest houses in the fashionable new westside suburb. The furnishings bespoke something more than wealth as we surveyed them; they proclaimed that vague but nevertheless tangible thing known as "background" which is to be had only from generations of ancestors to the manner born. Original pieces of mahogany by Sheraton and Chippendale and the Brothers Adam, family portraits from the brush of Benjamin West, silver in the best tradition of the early eighteenth century smiths, even the dignified aloof, elderly black butler, announced our patient's father was in every sense of the term an officer and gentleman.

"If you'll give Hezekiah your things," Captain Loudon indicated the solemn old Negro with a nod, "I'll tell my daughter you're here. I know she'll be glad to—"

A clanking, banging noise, like a tin can clattering at the tail of some luckless dog, interrupted him, and as we turned in amazement toward the wide staircase at the far end of the hall the noise grew louder, almost deafening. Then it ceased abruptly as it had begun, and a young girl rounded the curve of the stairway, coming slowly toward us.

She was of more than middle height, slender and supple as a willow withe, and carried herself with the bearing of a young princess. A lovely though almost unfashionably long gown of white satin and chiffon draped its uneven hem almost to her ankles and about her slender shoulders and over her arms hung a richly embroidered shawl of Chinese silk. One hand rested lightly on the mahogany rail of the balustrade, as though partly for support, partly for guidance. This much we saw at first glance, but our second look remained fixed on her sweet pale face.

Almost unbeautifully long it was, pale with the rich, creamy pallor which is some women's birthright and not the result of poor health, and her vivid, scarlet lips showed in contrast to her pale cheeks. At first I thought her gaze was on the steps before her, and that she made each movement carefully lest she fall

from weakness or nervous exhaustion, but in a moment I realized that whether in natural sleep or in some supernatural trance, she was descending the stairs with eyes tight shut.

"*La pauvre petite,*" de Grandin exclaimed under his breath. "*Grand Dieu*, Friend Trowbridge, but she is beautiful! Why did I not come here before?"

Out of the empty air, apparently some six feet above the girl's head, a burst of mocking, maniacal laughter answered him, and from the thick-piled stair carpet before her suddenly rose again the clanging racket we had heard before she came into view.

"*Hélas*"—de Grandin turned a pitying look on the girl's father, then: "*Nom de Dieu!*" He ducked his head with a quick dodging movement. Against the wall some twenty feet away there hung a stand of arms, one or two swords, a spear and several bolos, trophies of the captain's service in the Philippines. As though seized by an invisible hand, one of the bolos had detached itself from the wall, hurtled through the air and embedded itself nearly an inch deep in the white wainscoting behind the little Frenchman, missing his cheek by the barest fraction of a centimetre as it flew whirring past.

The clanking tumult at the girl's feet ended abruptly, and she took an uncertain step forward and opened her eyes. They were unusually long, purple rather than blue, and held such an expression of changeless melancholy as I had never seen in one so young. It was the look of one foredoomed to death by an incurable disease.

"Why—" she began with the bewildered look of one suddenly roused from sleep—"why—Father! I was lying down in my room when I thought I heard Robert's voice. I tried to get up, but 'It' held me down, and I must have fallen asleep—"

"Daughter," Captain Loudon's voice shook with his effort to control it, "these gentlemen are Dr. de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge. They've come to—"

"Oh," the girl made an impatient gesture which yet seemed somehow strangely languid, "more doctors!

Why did you bring them, Father? You know they'll be just like the rest. Nothing can help me—nothing's any good!"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin bowed formally, "I think that you will find us different from the rest. To begin, we come to give you to the man you love; and in the second place I have a personal interest in this case."

"A personal interest?" she acknowledged his bow with a rather negligent nod.

"I have, indeed, Mademoiselle. Did not the—the thing that troubles you, hurl a bolo-knife at me? Mademoiselle, I assure you no *fantôme,* no *lutin,* shall throw knives at Jules de Grandin, then boast of the exploit to his ghostly fellows. But no.

"Now, Mademoiselle, we must ask your pardon for these questions," he began as we entered the drawing room. "To you it is an old and much-told tale, but we are ignorant, save for such meager information as your father has given. Tell us, if you please, when did these strange happenings begin to happen?"

The girl regarded him in silence, her brooding plum-colored eyes staring almost resentfully into his small blue ones. "It was about six months ago," she began in a lifeless monotone like a child reciting a rote-learned but distasteful lesson. "I had come home from a dance in New Burnswick with Lieutenant Proudfit. It must have been about three in the morning, for we hadn't left the party till sometime after one, and had been delayed on the road by a sleet storm. Lieutenant Proudfit was stopping overnight with us, for we are—that is, we were—engaged, and I had said good night to him and gone to my room when it seemed I heard something fluttering and tapping at my window, like a bird attracted by the light, or—I don't know what made me think so, but I got the impression somehow—a bat beating its wings against the panes.

"I remember I was rather frightened at first, then I was overcome with pity for the poor thing, for it was bitter cold outside and the sleet was driving down

like a whiplash. I went to the window and opened it to see what was outside. I"—she hesitated a moment—"I'd partially undressed, and the cold wind coming through the opened window chilled me, but I leaned out, looking for the bird, or—" Once more she hesitated, then ceased speaking altogether.

"Proceed, Mademoiselle," de Grandin's voice was absolutely toneless. "What was it you did next?"

"I looked out and said, 'Come in, you poor creature!'"

"Ah?" he raised his voice slightly. "So you invited what was outside to enter?" Level as his tone was, there was a note of shocked reproof in it.

"Of course. I know it was silly to speak to a bird that way, but you know we often talk to animals as if they understand. At any rate, I might have saved myself a chill, for there was nothing there, and when I closed the window again I heard no further flutterings."

"Probably not," he agreed dryly. "What then, if you please?"

"Why, nothing—right away. It seemed as if the room had become permanently chilled, though, for even when I'd closed the window the air was icy cold, and I had to wrap my dressing gown about me while I made ready for bed. Then—" she stopped with an involuntary shudder.

"Yes? Then?" His eyes narrowed as he looked at her and his lean white fingers tapped a devil's tattoo on his chair arm.

"Then the first strange thing happened. As I was slipping my gown off I distinctly felt a hand grasp me about the upper arm—a long, thin, deathly cold hand!" She looked up defiantly, as though expecting some skeptical protest, but:

She looked at him in wonder. "You believe me—believe I actually felt something grasp my arm?" she asked incredulously.

"Have you not said so, Mademoiselle?" he returned a trifle irritably. "Proceed, if you please."

"But every other doctor I've talked to has told me I didn't—couldn't have *actually felt* such a thing," she persisted.

"Mademoiselle!" annoyance cut through his habitual courtesy. "We waste time in bickering. We are discussing you and your case, not the other doctors or their methods. Now, you were saying—"

"That I felt a long, cold hand grasp me about the arm, and a moment later, before I had a chance to scream or even shrink away, something began scratching my skin. It was like a long blunt fingernail—a human nail, not the claw of an animal, you understand. But it had considerable force behind it, and I could see the skin turn white in its wake. Dr. de Grandin"—she leant forward, staring with wide, frightened eyes into his face—"the welts *formed letters!*"

"U'm?" he nodded unexcitedly. "Do you recall what they spelled?"

"They didn't spell anything. It was like the ramblings of a ouija board when the little table seems wandering from letter to letter without purpose. I made out a crude *D*, and a smaller *r*, then an *a* and finally a *c* and *u*. That was all. You see, it wasn't a word at all."

De Grandin was sitting on the extreme forward edge of his chair, his hands grasping its arms as if he were about to leap from his seat.

"*Dracu,*" he repeated softly, then, still lower, "*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!* It is entirely possible, but why?"

"Why, what was it?" the girl demanded, his tense attitude reflected in her widened eyes and apprehensive expression.

He shook himself like a spaniel emerging from the water. "Nothing, really, Mademoiselle. I thought at first I recognized a name, but I must be mistaken. You are sure there were no other letters?"

"Positive. Just those five, no more."

"Quite yes; and after that?"

"All sorts of dreadful things began to happen. Fa-

ther has told you how chairs and tables rise up when I come near them, and how little objects fly through the air?"

"But of course. And I myself saw one small thing fly through the air—entirely too close for my complete comfort. And these strange sleeps you have?"

"They come on almost any time; mostly when I'm least expecting them. One time I was seized while on the train from New York, and—" her face blushed coral at the recollection—"and the conductor thought I was drunk!"

"*Bête!*" de Grandin murmured. "And you have not heard the voices—the noises which sometime accompany you, Mademoiselle?"

"No, I've been told about them, but I know nothing of what happens while I'm in one of these seizures. I don't even dream; at least, I have no dreams I can remember when I wake up. I only know that I am apt to fall asleep at any time, and that I sometimes wander about while unconscious, waking up in some totally different place. Once I walked half-way to the city while asleep, and narrowly escaped being run down by a taxi when I came to in the middle of the street."

"But this is villainous!" he burst out. "This is infamous; this must not be permitted. *Morbleu,* I shall not permit it, me!"

Something of the girl's weary manner returned as she asked, "How are you going to stop it? The others all said—"

"*Chut!* Those others! We shall not discuss them, Mademoiselle. Me, I am not as the others; I am Jules de Grandin!

"First, my friend," he turned to me, "I would that you engage the service of a nurse, one whose discretion is matched by her ability. You know one such? *Très bien.* Rush, hasten, fly to procure her at once. Bid her come with all celerity, and be prepared to serve until relieved.

"Next," he scribbled a prescription on a pad, "I would that *Monsieur le Capitaine* has this filled and

administers a dose dissolved in hot water at once. It is Somnol, a harmless mixture of drugs, pleasant to the taste and of undoubted efficacy in this case. It will act better than chloral."

"But I don't want to take chloral," the girl protested. "I have enough trouble with sleep as it is."

"Mademoiselle," there was something like a twinkle in his eyes as he replied, "have you never heard of combatting the devil with flames? Take the medicine as directed. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall return soon; we shall not rest until we have produced a cure, do not doubt it."

"This is the strangest case I ever saw," I confided as we drove toward town. "That girl's symptoms all point to hysteria of the most violent sort, but I'm hanged if I can account for those diabolical noises that accompanied her down the stairs, or the laugh we heard as she reached the bottom—"

"Or the bolo-knife that nearly split the head of Jules de Grandin?" he supplied with a chuckle. "Do you recall the ancient medical theory regarding icterus?

"Jaundice?"

"But of course."

"You mean it used to be considered a disease rather than a symptom?"

"Precisely. One hundred, two hundred years ago the craft knew the yellow color of the patient's skin was due to diffused bile in the system, but what caused the diffusion? Ah, that was a question long left unanswered. So it is with this poor girl's case. Me, I recognize her symptoms, some of their cause is plain to me, but—ten thousand small red devils!—why? Why should she be the object of this persecution? One does not raise her window in the dead of winter to invite a nonexistent bird into her boudoir, only to fall victim to such scurvy tricks as have plagued her since that night. No, *mordieu*, there is a reason for it, for that which tapped upon her pane being abroad

that night. The writing on her arm, too; that did not come without cause!"

I listened in amazement to his tirade, but one of his statements struck a responsive chord in my memory. "You spoke of 'writing' on her arm," I interposed. "When she described it I thought you seemed to recognize some connection between the incomplete word and her symptoms. Is 'dakboo' a complete word, or the beginning of one?"

"*Dracu,*" he corrected with a grin. "Yes, my friend, it is a word. It is Romanian for devil, or, more exactly, demon. You begin to see the connection?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do."

"So am I," he admitted laconically.

Lulled into counterfeit rest by the drug de Grandin had prescribed, Julia Loudon passed the night comfortably enough, and seemed brighter and happier when we called next morning.

"Mademoiselle," he announced when the customary medical mummery of taking temperature and pulse had been completed, "the day is fine. I prescribe that you go for a drive this morning, indeed, I strongly advise that you accompany Dr. Trowbridge and me forthwith. He has a number of calls to make, and I would observe the effect of fresh air on you. One suspects that you have had but little of it lately."

"I haven't," she confessed. "You see, since the time I wandered off in my sleep, I've been afraid to go anywhere by myself, and I've even shrunk from going out with Father or Rob—Lieutenant Proudfit. I was so afraid of embarrassing them by one of my seizures. But I'll be all right with you and Dr. Trowbridge, I know." She smiled wistfully at him.

"Of a surety," he agreed, twisting the ends of his small mustache.

She turned to mount the stairs, a suggestion of freedom and returning health in the spring of her walk, and de Grandin faced her father with a puzzled frown. "Your daughter's case is simpler than I had supposed," he announced. "I have so long been used

to encountering what unthinking persons call the supernatural that I fear I have become what you Americans call 'hypped' on the subject. Now, when first Mademoiselle Julie detailed her experiences to me I was led to the certain conclusions which, happily, have not seemed justified by what we have since observed. Medicine is helpful in most cases of the kind, but I had feared—"

A perfect pandemonium of cacophonous dissonances, like the braying of a dozen jazz bands suddenly gone crazy, interrupted him. Clattering tin-cans, jangling cowbells, the wailings of tortured fiddles and discordant shrieks of woodwind instruments seemed mingled with shouts of wild, demoniac laughter as a bizarre figure appeared on the stairs and half leaped, half fell into the hall.

For an instant I failed to recognize patrician Julia Loudon in the grotesque thing. Her luxuriant black hair had escaped from the Crecian coronal in which she wore it and hung fantastically about her breast and shoulders, half-veiling, half-disclosing a face from which every vestige of serenity had disappeared and on which a leer—no other word expresses it—of mingled craft and idiotic stupidity sat like a toad enthroned on a fungus. She was bare-armed and bare-legged; indeed, the only garment covering her supple white body was a Spanish shawl wound tightly about breast and torso, its fringed ends dragging on the floor as she capered like a female satyr across the hall to the accompaniment of the infernal noise.

"*Ai, ai, ai-ee!*" she screeched raucously, bending this way and that in time to the devilish racket. "Behold my work, O foolish man; behold my mastery! Fool that you are to try to take mine from me! Today I shall make of this woman a scandal and disgrace; tonight I shall require her life. *Ai, ai, ai-ee!*"

For a fleeting instant de Grandin turned an appalled face to me, and I met his flying glance with one no less surprised, for the voice issuing from the girl's slender throat was not hers. Every shrilling syllable spoke of a different individual, a personality in-

stinct with evil vivacity as hers seemed instinct with sweetness and melancholy.

*"Cordieu!"* he exclaimed, then halted as though frozen. From every side of the room, like flickering beams of light, tiny bits of metal flew toward the girl's body, and in an instant her arms, her legs, her throat and cheeks were encrusted with glittering pins and needles buried point-deep in her creamy skin like the torture implements driven into the bodies of pain-defying dervishes or the fakirs of India. Almost it seemed as though she had become a powerful electro-magnet to which every scrap of movable metal in the apartment had leaped.

For an instant she stood swaying there, the cruel points embedded in her flesh, yet apparently feeling no pain, then a wild, heartrending scream burst from her, and her eyes opened wide in sudden terror and consternation. Instantly it was apparent she had regained consciousness, realizing her position, her almost complete nudity and the biting, stinging points of the countless needles all at once.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge!" called de Grandin as he sprang forward. "Do not let her fall—those pins, they will surely impale her if she drops."

Even as I seized the fainting girl in my arms the Frenchman was furiously garnering the pins from her flesh, cursing fiercely and imaginatively in mingled French and English as he worked.

*"Parbleu, cordieu,* by damn-it!" he panted, "this is the devil's doing, surely. By damn, I shall have words with this execrable *Dracu* who sticks pins in young ladies and throws knives at Jules de Grandin!"

Following him, I bore the swooning girl up the stairs, placed her on her bed and turned furiously in search of the nurse. What could the woman have been thinking of to let her patient leave her room in such a costume? "Miss Stanton!" I called angrily. "Miss Stanton, where are you?"

A muffled sound, half-way between a scream and groan, and a faint ineffectual tap-tap on the door of the closet answered me. Snatching the door of the

clothes-press open, I found her lying on the floor, half smothered by fallen dresses, her mouth gagged with a Turkish towel, wrists tied behind her and ankles lashed together with knotted silk stockings.

"A-ah, oh!" she gasped as I relieved her of her fetters and helped her to her feet. "It took me, Dr. Trowbridge. I was helpless as a baby!"

De Grandin looked up from his ministrations to Julia. "What took you, Mademoiselle?" he asked, folding back the shawl from the girl's injured limbs and deftly shoving her beneath bedclothes. "Was it Mademoiselle Loudon?"

"No!" the nurse gasped, her hands still trembling nervously. "Oh, no, not Miss Loudon, sir. It was—I don't know what. Miss Loudon came upstairs a few moments ago and said you and Dr. Trowbridge were taking her motoring, and she must change her clothes. She began removing her house dress, but kept taking her garments off till she was—she was—" she hesitated a moment, catching her breath in short, laboring gasps.

"*Mordieu*, yes!" de Grandin prompted. "We waste time, Mademoiselle. Is it that she removed her clothes until she was completely nude?"

"Yes, sir," the nurse returned. "I was about to ask her if she needed to change *all* her clothes when she turned and looked at me, and her face was like the face of a devil. Then something seemed to come down on me like a wet blanket. No, not a blanket, either. It clung to me and bore me down, and smothered me all at once, but it was transparent. I could feel it, but couldn't see it. It was like a—like a terrible, great jelly-fish, sir. It was cold and slimy and strong, strong as a hundred men. I tried to call out, and it oozed into my mouth—choked me; ugh!" she shuddered at the recollection.

"Then I must have fainted, for the next thing I knew everything was dark and Dr. Trowbridge was calling me, so I tried to answer and kicked as hard as I could—"

"One understands," he nodded. "I do not wonder

that your nerves jump like the frightened rabbit, Mademoiselle. You are *nerveux. Corbleu*, are we not all so? I shall damn say yes!"

"Attend me, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "Do you remain with Mademoiselle Stanton and the patient. Watch her well, my old one. I think she will require careful watching from now on."

"But it is damnable, my friends," he pronounced a few minutes later as he, Captain Loudon and I conferred in the lower hall. This cursed *poltergeist*, it has complete possession of poor Mademoiselle Julie, and it has manifested itself to Mademoiselle Stanton as well. If we but knew from whence it came, and why, we might be better able to combat it, but as things are all, all is mystery. It comes, it wreaks havoc, and it remains. Pains of a dyspeptic bullfrog, I am greatly annoyed, me!" He strode across the rug, twisting first one, then the other end of his small wheat-blond mustache till I thought he would surely drag the hairs from his lips.

"If only we could—" he began, stopping in his nervous walk beside a buhl cabinet that stood between two low windows. "If only we could—ah? What—who is that, *Monsieur le Capitaine*, if you please?"

His slender, carefully manicured forefinger pointed to an exquisite little miniature which stood in a gold easel-frame on the cabinet's top.

Looking over his shoulder, I saw the picture of a young girl, black-haired, oval-faced, purple-eyed, her red lips showing on the pallor of her face almost like a wound. There was a subtle something of difference—more in expression than in feature—from the original, but I recognized the likeness as a well executed portrait of Julia Loudon, though made, I imagined, several years before. "Why," I exclaimed in astonishment at his query, "can't you see it's Miss Loudon, de Grandin?"

Ignoring my remark, he kept his fixed, unwinking stare on Captain Loudon. "This lady, if you please, *mon capitaine*, she is who?"

"It's a picture of my niece, Julia's cousin," Captain Loudon answered shortly, then: "Doesn't it occur to you that we might occupy our time better than with such trifles—"

"Trifles, Monsieur!" de Grandin cut in. "In cases such as this there are no trifles. All, all is of the importance. Tell me of this young lady, if you please. She bears a close resemblance to your daughter, yet a look is in her eyes which Mademoiselle Julie does not have. I would know all about her, if you please."

"She was my niece, Anna Wassilko," the captain returned. "That picture was made in Bukharest before the war."

"Ah?" the little Frenchman stroked his mustache gently, as if to make amends for the fierce pulling to which he had subjected it a moment earlier. "You did say 'was', Monsieur. One takes it that she is no more?" He cast a speculative glance at the portrait, then: "And her name, so different from yours, yet her appearance so similar to your daughter's. You will explain, perhaps?"

Captain Loudon looked as if he would enjoy wringing the inquisitive little man's neck. "My wife was a Romanian lady," he replied. "I met her while stationed at our legation in Bukharest shortly before World War I. We were married on the first of July, 1914, the same month that Francis Ferdinand was assassinated at Sarajevo, and one week later her twin sister Zoë married Lieutenant Leonidas Wassilko of the Imperial Russian Navy.

"I was ordered back to this country when the war broke out, and my sister-in-law and her husband went to Russia. They escaped from the Bolsheviks when the Russian revolution broke out and came to this country, where their daughter Anna was born the same day Julia was. The children were inseparable almost from birth, and when Leonidas died of tuberculosis in 1919, and Zoë went with the same disease two years later Anna came to live with us. She and Julia grew up together, and attended the same convent school at Lakeland.

"When Robert—Lieutenant Proudfit—came along and courted Julia, Anna seemed to take it as a sort of personal affront. Seems she had some sort of fool idea she and Julia were more than cousins, and ought to remain celibate to devote their lives to each other. To tell the truth, though, I've an idea she was more than a little taken with Proudfit herself, and when he showed a preference for Julia—well, it didn't please her any too much."

"Ah?" a trace of the heat-lightning flashed that betokened excitement showed in de Grandin's eyes. "And she is now where, if you please?"

"She—died, poor child."

"She committed suicide?" the Frenchman's words were so low we could scarcely hear them.

"I didn't say so."

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur le Capitaine*, you did not say otherwise, and the pause before you mentioned her death, surely, that was something more than a tribute of momentary regret?"

"Humph! Yes, you're right. She drowned herself about six months ago."

"Six months, you say! Six months ago she drowned herself; how long ago was the engagement of your daughter to Lieutenant Proudfit announced?"

"About the same time. Just a few days before—but look—see here—" De Grandin grinned mirthlessly at him. "I look there, *mon capitaine*, and I see there. *Parbleu*, I see far past there! Six months, six months, everything it dates from six months of yore! The death of Mademoiselle Anna, the engagement of Mademoiselle Julie, the tapping at her window, the start of all these so strange signs and wonders—all are six months old. My friend, it is that I begin to see the light." Turning on his heel he mounted the stairs, beckoning to me as he went.

"Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle Julie!" he burst into the girl's room with hardly a perceptible pause between his knock and the nurse's summons to enter. "You have not told me all, Mademoiselle; no, nor near all. This Mademoiselle Anna, who was she, and what

relation was there between you and her? Of haste; speak quickly; it is of the great importance!"

"Why," Miss Loudon looked at him with startled eyes, "she was my cousin."

"But certainly, that much I know. What I desire to learn is if there was some close bond between you, some secret understanding?"

The girl regarded him fixedly a moment, then in a whisper so low we could hardly hear, "Yes, sir; there was," she answered. "Anna loved me; not as a cousin or even as a sister, but more like a possessive mother, or perhaps as if she'd been a man instead of another girl. She said she couldn't bear the thought of my 'deserting' her by marrying anyone, and threatened to kill herself the day I married Robert. I tried to laugh her out of the idea, and one day told her, 'If you commit suicide so will I, and then there'll be two of us dead and nobody any the happier.' "

The Frenchman eyed her steadily. "And then?"

"She gave me one of those queer, long looks of hers and her eyes filled with tears as she replied, 'Maybe I'll hold you to that promise, cousin. *Jizn kopyeka*—life is a kopeck—it may be we shall spend it together, you and I.' That was all she said at the time, but two months later, just after Robert and I announced our engagement, I found a note from her on my dresser one evening. It said, *'I have gone to spend my kopeck. Remember your promise and do likewise.'*

"Next morning—"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, next morning?"

"Next morning they took her from the Bay—drowned."

"A-a-a-ah!" He let the hissing syllable out through his teeth slowly. "I think at last I understand, Mademoiselle."

"You mean—"

"*Parbleu*, I mean nothing less. Tonight, she said? Very well, then. Tonight it shall be. We shall see what we shall see. Yes, certainly."

"Stay here, Friend Trowbridge, if you please," he ordered. "I go to get *matériel* for battle."

Darkness had fallen when he returned, a small black bag beneath one arm and an expression of unbridled excitement on his face. "Any change in the patient?" he asked. "Any further visitations from the accursed *poltergeist*?"

"No," I reported, "everything's been singularly quiet this afternoon."

"So? I fear that means that we shall have the harder fight tonight."

He tiptoed to the sickroom, entered quietly and took a seat beside the bed. "*Regardez-vous*, Mademoiselle Julie!" he ordered as he opened his satchel and drew out an odd-looking contrivance. "He is a novelty which I obtained today at the *magasin de joujoux*, the—what you call him?—toy-shop." The thing was something like the rotary toy fans which consist of three twisted blades like reversed propeller wings and which whirl by the pressure of the thumb against a trigger fitted in the handle. But instead of blades of colored celluloid it had three brightly nickeled arms which shone like quicksilver in the lamplight.

"Observe him, if you please," he ordered again, and signaled me to turn the ceiling light full-on.

Julia's languid gaze fixed on the whirling mirrors, and he speeded up their motion with increasing pressure on the rotator. "*Regardez, s'il vous plait!*" he commanded in a tense whisper.

The three bright blades of metal seemed to merge into a single disc, and from their flying tips a rain of tiny rays of brilliant light seemed to be splashing, like water thrown from a revolving paddle wheel. The girl looked at the whirling mirrors for a moment without interest, then gradually her gaze became fixed, and a tense look, like that of one bracing himself for a long jump, froze upon her features.

She moaned a little, as in pain, and he leant forward, almost glaring at her in the excess of his earnestness. "Do not heed them, Mademoiselle!" he whispered. "Pay them no attention. Hear no orders save the ones I give you!"

The fixed expression faded slowly from her face, her tense, drawn mouth relaxed, her eyelids fluttered for a moment, then drooped sleepily. *"Bien,"* he murmured. *"Très bien."* The whirling nickel-plated mirrors cut the air with a soft whirring sound, and in a moment this was seconded by her low, regular breathing.

"What in the world—" I began, but he waved me into silence.

"Another time, my friend," he promised in a low voice. "We must not talk at present; there is too much at stake."

All night he sat beside the bed, raising his whirling mirrors and commanding sleep in tones of suppressed fury each time the girl stirred on her pillow. Then, as the first faint streaks of dawn began to lighten the sky: "The time has come," he told me, opening his bag again and producing—of all things!—a hyssop of mistletoe bough.

Around the room he hurried, waving his small brush of mistletoe for all the world like a country woman fanning flies from the house in summertime. "Anna Wassilko, Anna Wassilko, who has wandered beyond the bounds of the tomb," he ordered as he waved his little brush-broom, "I command you to return from whence you came. To Death you have said, 'Thou art my lord and my master,' and to the grave, 'Thou art my lover and my betrothed.' Your business with this world is done, Anna Wassilko; get you to the world you chose for a dwelling-place when you cast yourself into the sea!"

Near the window, where the dimming lamplight mingled with the beams of the coming day, he halted and repeated his command, waving his brush toward the ocean surging on the beach a quarter-mile away.

Something seemed to rustle past him, a thing invisible, yet with substance enough to stir the scrim curtains trailing in the still air, and for an instant I thought I caught the faint penumbra of a shadow cast against the wall. A monstrous thing it was, large as a lion, yet like nothing I had ever seen or imagined, for

it seemed to partake of the shape of both bat and fox, with long, pointed snout, claw-armed forepaws and great, spike-edged wings extending from its shoulders.

"Get you gone, unfortunate one," he cried, striking at the shadow with his sprigs of mistletoe. "Poor soul who would collect the wager of a thoughtless promise, hie you back to your own place and leave the ordering of other lives to God."

The dreadful shadow rested on the wall another fraction of a second, then, like smoke borne away on a rising breeze, was gone.

"Gone!" he murmured softly as he closed the window and shut off the lights. "Call the nurse, if you will be so kind, Friend Trowbridge. Her duties will be simpler hereafter. A little medicine, a little tonic and much rest are all that Mademoiselle Julie requires—and Monsieur Robert, of course," he added as a smiling afterthought.

We tiptoed into the hall, roused the sleeping nurse and turned the patient over to her care.

"And now that other time you spoke of last night has come, I suppose?" I asked as we drove home. "You were close-mouthed enough about it all the while it was happening. Will you explain, or must I choke it out of you?"

"Most certainly," he agreed in high good humor, lighting a cigarette and inhaling with gusty content. "It—like everything else—was entirely simple, once I knew the answer.

"To begin: when Captain Loudon first explained his daughter's case it seemed like hysteria to me, the sort of thing that any capable physician could handle. 'Why, then,' I ask me, 'does he seek the services of Jules de Grandin? I am not a great physician.' I had no answer, and at first I declined the case, as you know.

"But when we hear the other phases of the case I take an interest, and when we hear those noises which accompany Mademoiselle Julie I am of another mind. When the Whatever-It-Is throws a knife at me

I am of still a third mind. *'Pardieu,'* I tell me when I dodge that knife, 'it is the challenge! Shall Jules de Grandin flee from such a contest? *Sacré don d'un chou-fleur, non!'* I answer me.

"Across the Rhine in that dark country which has spewed war on the world twice in one generation they have some words that are most truly expressive. Among them is *poltergeist*, which signifies a ghost that pelts—that flings things round the house—and plays the stupid childish tricks, although it can be vicious, too. Quite often he is not a ghost at all, that is, he is not truly ghostly in the sense that he has once inhabited a human form, but is some evil entity which plagues a man, or more often a woman. It was not for nothing, my friend, that the ancient ones referred to Satan as Prince of the Powers of the Air, for there are many evil things in the air which we can no more see than we can behold the germs of disease. Yes." He nodded solemn affirmation.

When Mademoiselle Julie told us of the mark that came upon her arm I recognized the Romanian word for demon, and I think some more. And when she tells us of the bird or bat that fluttered at her window, yet was not there, I recognize some things in common with other cases I have observed.

"Foolish people sometimes say, 'Come in,' when they think the wind has blown the door ajar. It is not well to do so. Who knows what lurks outside, needing only the spoken invitation to enter? Attend me, my friend: very rarely can the evil ones come in unless they are first invited; very rarely can they be gotten out once they have been bidden to enter. So all these things fit together in my mind, and I say to me, 'Jules de Grandin, we have here a *poltergeist*. But yes.'

"But why should a *poltergeist* attach his evil self to Mademoiselle Julie? True, she are very pretty, but there are other pretty women of whom the *poltergeisten* do not seek shelter.

"Then, when the demon tells us he holds her in his power and makes her dance almost nude in her fa-

ther's house and sticks pins in her, I hear something else. I hear him promise to kill her.

"For why? I wonder. What have she done that she must die?"

"Then I see the picture of Anna Wassilko. Very like poor Julie she was, yet a certain subtle something in her face makes me know she was not the same. And what does *Monsieur le Capitaine* tell us when I ask about her? Ah, now we see a little so small gleam of light among the shadows of this case. She was partially Romanian, part Russian. *Quel mélange!* She have gone to school with Mademoiselle Julie, she have lived here in the same house, she have loved the same man. *Très bien.* She have committed suicide. *Tant mieux.* Now I need only a little reassuring as to the reason—the result I already know.

"But when Julie tells us of her cousin's fierce, possessive love for her, of her jealousy of her fiancé, of her threats of suicide, and her own unthinking promise—*grand Dieu des procs*, the picture takes another shape, the horse assumes another color!

"The demon which made Julie do all kinds of things she knew not of had promised to take her life. How to circumvent her? That was the question. I think. 'This young woman goes off into trances, and does all manner of queer things without knowing them,' I remind me. 'Would she not do much the same in hypnosis?' Assuredly.

"Very well. I procure a set of whirling mirrors, not because of any magic in them, but because they are an easy thing on which to focus the subject's attention. I use them, hypnotizing Julie before the *poltergeist* has a chance to conquer her consciousness. Hypnotism, when all is said and done, is the rendering of a subject's objective mind passive while that of the operator is substituted for it. The *poltergeist*, which was really the *revenante* of Anna, had substituted *her* mind for Julie's on former occasions. Now I get there first, and place my mind in her brain. There is no room for another, and Julie cannot take suggestions or brainhints from the ghost and destroy herself, for

Jules de Grandin is already in possession of her brain-house, and have hung out a NO TRESPASSING sign. Yes, of course."

"But what was all that monkey-business with the mistletoe?" I asked.

"*Tiens*, my friend, do you perhaps remember what the mistletoe stands for at Noël?"

"You mean a kiss?"

"What else? It is the plant held sacred to lovers in this day, but in the elder times it was the holy bush of the Druids. With it they cast many spells, and with it they cast out many evil-workers. Not by mistake is it the lovers' tree today, for it is a powerful charm against evil and will assuredly lay the unhappy ghost of one who dies because of unfortunate love. *Voilà*—you catch the connection?"

"I never heard that before—" I began, but his chuckle interrupted me.

"*Ma foi*, Friend Trowbridge, there is much of which you never heard, yet all of it is true, none the less!"

"And that hideous shadow?

He sobered instantly. "Oh, Trowbridge, my friend, who can say? She was beautiful, that Mademoiselle Anna, but she was the slave of dark passions, and dominated by a strange, forbidden love like that of the women of ancient Lesbos. Also she went forth from the world uncalled and in an evil way. Who knows what shape she has been doomed to wear in the next world; who knows but that the shadow which affrighted you is but the silhouette of the misshapen soul that once inhabited her lovely body? The less we think upon that subject the better we shall sleep hereafter.

"Come, we are arrived at your house. Let us drink one glass of brandy for luck's sake, and then to sleep. *Mordieu*, me, I feel as if I had been stranger to my bed since my fifth birthday!"

# The House of Golden Masks

"An' so, Dr. de Grandin, sor," Detective Sergeant Costello concluded with a pitying sidelong glance at his companion, "if there's annything ye can do for th' pore lad, 'tis meself that'll be grateful to ye for doin' it. Faith, if sumpin like this had happened to me whilst I was a-courtin' Maggie, I'd 'a' been a dead corpse from worry in less time than this pore felley's been sufferin'.

"Th' chief won't raise his hand in th' matter wid th' coroner's verdict starin' us in th' face, an' much as I'd like to do sumpin for th' boy, me hands is tied tighter'n th' neck of a sack. But with you, now, 'tis a different matter entirely. Meself, I'm inclined to agree with th' chief an' think th' pore gur-rl's dead as a herring, but if there's sumpin in th' case th' rest of us can't see, sure, 'tis Dr. Jools de Grandin can spot it quicker than a hungry tom-cat smells a rat!"

Jules de Grandin turned his quick, birdlike glance from the big, redheaded Irishman to the slender, white-faced young man seated beside him. "What makes you assume your beloved survives, *Monsieur?*" he asked. "If the jury of the coroner returned a verdict of suicide—"

"But, I tell you, sir, the jury didn't know what they were talking about!"

Young Everett Wilberding rose from his chair and faced the little Frenchman, his knuckles showing white with the intensity of his grip on the table edge. "My Ewell *didn't* commit suicide. She didn't kill herself, neither did Mazie. You *must* believe that, sir!"

Resuming his seat, he fought back to comparative

calm as he laced his fingers together nervously. "Last Thursday night Ewell and I were going to a dance out at the country club. My friend, Bill Stimpson, was to take Mazie, Ewell's twin sister. The girls had been out visiting an aunt and uncle at Reynoldstown, and were to meet us at Monmouth Junction, then drive out to the club in Ewell's flivver.

"The girls took their party clothes out to Reynoldstown with them, and were to dress before leaving to meet us. They were due at the Junction at 9 o'clock, but Ewell was hardly ever on time, so I thought nothing of it when they failed to show up at half-past. But when 10 o'clock came, with no sign of the girls, we began to think they must have had a blow-out or engine trouble. At half-past 10 I went to the drug store and 'phoned the girls' uncle at Reynoldstown, only to be told they had left at a quarter past 8—in plenty of time to reach the Junction by 9, even if they had bad going. When I heard that I began to worry sure enough. By 11 o'clock I was fit to be tied.

"Bill was getting worried, too, but thought that one of 'em might have been taken ill and that they'd rushed right to Harrisonville without coming through the Junction, so we 'phoned their house here. Their folks didn't know any more than we did.

"We caught the next bus to Harrisonville, and went right up to the Eatons'. When nothing was heard of the girls by 4 the next morning, Mr. Eaton notified the police."

"U'm?" de Grandin nodded slowly. "Proceed, if you please, young *Monsieur*."

"The searching parties didn't find a trace of the girls till next day about noon," young Wilberding answered; "then a State Trooper came on Ewell's Ford smashed almost out of shape against a tree half a mile or more from the river, but no sign of blood anywhere around. A little later a couple of hunters found Ewell's party dress, stockings and slippers on the rocks above Shaminee Falls. Mazie—"

"They found th' pore child's body up agin th' grilles

leadin' to th' turbine intakes o' Pierce's Mills next day, sor," Costello put in softly.

"Yes, they did," Wilberding agreed, "and Mazie was *wearing* her dance frock—what was left of it. Why didn't Ewell jump in the falls with hers on, too, if Mazie did? But *Mazie didn't!*"

Sergeant Costello shook his head sadly. "Th' coroner's jury—" he began, as though reasoning with a stubborn child, but the boy interrupted angrily:

"Oh, damn the coroner's jury! See here, sir"—he turned to de Grandin as if for confirmation—"you're a physician and know all about such things. What d'ye say to this? Mazie's body was washed through the rapids above Shaminee Falls and was terribly mauled against the rocks as it came down, so badly disfigured that only the remnants of her clothes made identification possible. No one could say definitely whether she'd been wounded before she went into the water or not; but *she wasn't drowned!*"

"Eh, what is it you say?" de Grandin straightened in his chair, his level, unwinking stare boring into the young man's troubled eyes. "Continue, if you please, Monsieur; I am interested."

"I mean just what I say," the other returned. "They didn't find a half-teacupful of water in her lungs at the autopsy; besides, this is March, and the water's almost ice-cold—yet they found her *floating* next morning; if—"

"*Barbe d'un chauve canard,* yes!" de Grandin exclaimed. "*Tu parles, mon garçon!* In temperature such as this it would be days—weeks, perhaps—before putrefaction had advanced enough to form sufficient gas to force the body to the surface. But of course, it was the air in her lungs which buoyed her up. *Morbleu,* I think you have right, my friend; undoubtlessly the poor one was dead before she touched the water!"

"Aw, Doc, ye don't mean to say *you're* fallin' for that theory?" Costello protested. "It's true she mightn't 'a' been drowned, but th' coroner said death was due to shock induced by—"

De Grandin waved him aside impatiently, keeping

his gaze fixed intently on Everett. "Do you know any reason she might have had for self-destruction, *mon vieux?*" he demanded.

"No, sir—none whatever. She and Bill were secretly married at Hacketstown last Christmas Eve. They'd been keeping it dark till Bill got his promotion—it came through last week, and they were going to tell the world last Sunday. You see, they couldn't have concealed it much longer."

"Ah?" de Grandin's narrow brows elevated slightly. "And they were happy together?"

"Yes, sir! You never saw a spoonier couple in your life. Can you imagine—"

"*Tiens*, my friend," the Frenchman interrupted with one of his quick, elfish grins, "you would be surprized at that which I can imagine. Howeverly, let us consider facts, not imaginings." Rising, he began pacing the floor, ticking off his data on his fingers as he marched. "Let us make a *précis:*

"Here we have two young women, one in love, though married—the other in love and affianced. They fail to keep an appointment; it is not till the day following that their car is discovered, and it is found in such position as to indicate a wreck, yet nowhere near it is sign of injury to its passengers. *Alors*, what do we find? The frock of one of the young ladies, neatly folded beside her shoes and stockings upon a rock near the Shaminee Falls. In the river, some miles below, next day is found the floating corpse of the other girl—and the circumstances point conclusively that she did not drown. What now? The mishap to the car occurred a half-mile from the river, yet the young women were able to walk to the stream where one of them cast herself in fully clothed; the other is supposed to have disrobed before immersing herself.

"*Non, non*, my friends, the facts, they do not make sense. Women kill themselves for good reasons, for bad reasons, and for no reasons at all, but they do it characteristically. Me, I have seen ropes wherewith despondent females have strangled themselves, and they have wrapped silken scarves about the rough

hemp that it might not bruise their tender necks. *Tiens,* would a delicately nurtured girl strip herself to the rude March winds before plunging into the water? I think not."

"So do I," rumbled Costello's heavy voice in agreement. "Th' way you put it, Dr. de Grandin, sor, makes th' case crazier than ever. Faith, there's no sense to it from beginnin' to end. I think we'd better be callin' it a day an' acceptin' th' coroner's decision."

"*Zut!*" de Grandin returned with a smile. "Are you then so poor a poker player, *mon sergent?* Have you not learned the game is never over until the play is done? Me, I shall give this matter my personal attention. I am interested, I am fascinated, I am intrigued.

"To your home, Monsieur Wilberding," he ordered. "When I have some word for you, you will hear from me. Meantime do not despair."

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin greeted next morning when I joined him in the dining-room, "I am perplexed; but yes, I am greatly puzzled; I am mystified. Something has occurred since last night which may put a different face upon all. Consider, if you please: Half an hour ago I received a telephone call from the good Costello. He tells me three more young women have disappeared in a manner so similar to that of Monsieur Wilberding's sweetheart as to make it more than mere coincident. At the residence of one Monsieur Mason, who resides in West Fells, there was held a meeting of the sorority to which his daughter belongs. Many young women attended. Three, Mesdemoiselles Weaver, Damroche and Hornbury, drove out in the car of Mademoiselle Weaver. They left the Mason house sometime after midnight. At 6 o'clock this morning they had not returned home. Their alarmed parents notified the police, and"—he paused in his restless pacing, halting directly before me as he continued—"a state dragoon discovered the motor in which they rode lying on its side, mired in the swamps beside the Albemarle Road, but of the

young women no trace could be found. Figure to yourself, my friend. What do you make of it?"

"Why——" I began, but the shrill stutter of the office 'phone cut my reply in two.

"*Allo?*" de Grandin called into the transmitter. "Yes, Sergeant, it is I—*grand Diable!* Another? You do not tell me so!"

To me he almost shouted as he slammed the receiver back into its hook: "Do you hear, my friend? It is another! Sarah Thompford, an employee of Braunstein frères' department store, left her work at half-past 5 last evening, and has been seen no more. But her hat and cloak were found upon the piers at the waterfront ten little minutes ago. *Nom d'un choufleur*, I am vexed! These disappearances are becoming epidemic. Either the young women of this city have developed a sudden mania for doing away with themselves or some evil person attempts to make a monkey of Jules de Grandin. In either case, my friend, I am aroused. *Mordieu*, we shall see who shall laugh in whose face before this business of the fool is concluded!"

"What are you going to do?" I asked, striving to keep a straight face.

"Do?" he echoed. "Do? *Parbleu*, I shall investigate, I shall examine every clue, I shall leave no stone unturned, but"—he sobered into sudden practicality as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, entered the dining-room with a tray of golden-brown waffles—"first I shall eat breakfast. One can accomplish little on an empty stomach."

A widespread, though fortunately mild, epidemic of influenza kept me busy in office and on my rounds all day. Rainy, fog-bound darkness was approaching as I turned toward home and dinner with a profound sigh of thankfulness that the day's work was done, only to encounter fresh disappointment.

"Trowbridge, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," an excited voice hailed as I was waiting for the crosstown traffic lights to change and let me pursue my homeward

way, "draw to the curb; come with me—I have important matters to communicate!" Swathed from knees to neck in a waterproof leather jacket, his Homburg hat pulled rakishly down over his right eye and a cigarette glowing between his lips, Jules de Grandin stood at the curb, his little blue eyes dancing with excited elation.

"Name of a little blue man!" he swore delightedly as I parked my motor and joined him on the sidewalk; "it is a fortunate chance, this meeting; I was about to telephone the office in hopes you had returned. Attend me, my friend, I have twisted my hand in the tail of something of importance!"

Seizing my elbow with a proprietary grip, he guided me toward the illuminated entrance of a café noted for the excellence of its food and its contempt of the XVIIIth Amendment, chuckling with suppressed delight at every step.

"The young Monsieur Wilberding was undoubtlessly right in his surmises," he confided as we found places at one of the small tables and he gave an order to the waiter. "*Parbleu*, what he lacked in opportunity of observation he made up by the prescience of affection," he continued, "for there can be no doubt that Madame Mazie was the victim of murder. *Regardez-vous*: At the police laboratories, kindly placed at my disposal through the offices of the excellent Sergeant Costello, I examined the tattered remnants of the frock they took from the poor girl's body when they fished her from the river, and I did discover what the coroner, cocksure of his suicide theory, had completely overlooked—a small, so tiny stain. Hardly darker than the original pink of the fabric it was, but sufficient to rouse my suspicions. *Alors*, I proceeded to shred the chiffon and make the benzidine test. You know it? No?

"Very good. A few threads from the stained area of the dress I placed upon a piece of white filter paper; thereafter I compounded a ten per cent solution of benzidine in glacial acetic acid and mixed one part of this with ten parts of hydrogen peroxide. Next, with a

pipette I proceeded to apply one little, so tiny drop of the solution to the threads of silk, and behold! a faint blue color manifested itself in the stained silken threads and spread out on the white filter paper. *Voilà*, that the stain of my suspicion had been caused by blood was no longer to be doubted!"

"But mightn't this bloodstain have been caused by an injury to Mazie's body as it washed over the falls?" I objected.

"*Ah bah*," he returned. "*You* ask that, Friend Trowbridge? *Pardieu*, I had looked for better sense in your head. Consider the facts: Should you cut your finger, then immediately submerge it in a basin of water, would any trace of blood adhere to it? But no. Conversely, should you incise the skin and permit even one little drop of blood to gather at the wound and to dry there to any extent, the subsequent immersion of the finger in water would not suffice to remove the partly clotted blood altogether. Is it not so?

"*Très bon*. Had a sharp stone cut poor Madame Mazie, it would undoubtlessly have done so after she was dead, in which case there would have been no resultant hemorrhage; but even if a wound had been inflicted while she lived, bethink you of her position—in the rushing water, whirled round and round and over and over, any blood which flowed would instantly have been washed away, leaving no slightest stain on her dress. *Non*, my friend there is but one explanation, and I have found it. Her gown was stained by blood before she was cast into the river. Recall: Did not poor young Monsieur Wilberding inform us the car in which she rode was found a half-mile or more from the river? But certainly. Suppose, then, these girls were waylaid at or near the spot where their car was found, and one or both were done to death. Suppose, again, Madame Mazie's life-blood flowed from her wound and stained her dress while she was in transit toward the river. In that case her dress would have been so stained that even though the foul miscreants who slew her cast her poor, broken body

into the water, there would remain stains for Jules de Grandin to find today. Yes, it is so.

"But wait, my friend, there is more to come. Me, I have been most busy this day. I have run up and down and hither and yon like Satan seeking for lost souls. Out on the Albemarle Road, where the unfortunate Mademoiselle Weaver's car was discovered this morning, I repaired when I had completed my researches in the city. Many feet had trampled the earth into the semblance of a pig-coop's floor before I arrived, but *grâce à Dieu*, there still remained that which confirmed my worst suspicions.

"Finding nothing near the spot where the mired car lay, I examined the earth on the other side of the road. There I discovered that which made my hair to rise on end. *Pardieu*, my friend, there is the business of the Fiend himself being done here!

"Leading from the road were three distinct sets of footprints—girl's footprints, made by small, high-heeled shoes. Far apart they were, showing they had been made by running feet, and all stopped abruptly at the same place.

"Back from the roadway, as you doubtless remember, stands a line of trees. It was at these the foot-tracks halted, in each instance ending in two little pointed depressions, set quite close together. They were the marks of girls' slippers, my friend, and appeared to have been made as the young women stood on tiptoe.

" 'Now,' I ask me, 'why should three young women leave the motor in which they ride, run from the road, halt on their toes beneath these trees, *and leave no footprints thereafter?*'

" 'It seems they must have been driven from the road like game in a European preserve at hunting-time, then seized by those lying in wait for them among the tree-boughs as they passed beneath,' I reply. 'And you are undoubtlessly correct,' I answer me.

"Nevertheless, to make my assurance sure, I examined all those trees and all the surrounding land with great injury to my dignity and clothing, but my

search was not fruitless; for clinging to a tree-bough above one of the girls' toe-prints I did find this." From his pocket he produced a tiny skein of light-brown fiber and passed it across the table to me.

"U'm?" I commented as I examined his find. "What is it?"

"Burlap," he returned. "You look puzzled, my friend. So did I when first I found it, but subsequent discoveries explained it—explained it all too well. As I have said, there were no footprints to be found around the trees, save those made by the fleeing girls, but, after much examination on my knees, I found three strange trails leading toward the road, away from those trees. Most carefully, with my nose fairly buried in the earth, I did examine those so queer depressions in the moist ground. Too large for human feet they were, yet not deep enough for an animal large enough to make them. At last I was rewarded by finding a bit of cloth-weave pattern in one of them, and then I knew. They were made by men whose feet had been wrapped in many thicknesses of burlap, like the feet of choleric old gentlemen suffering from gout.

"*Nom d'un renard*, but it was clever, almost clever enough to fool Jules de Grandin, but not quite.

"Feet so wrapped make no sound; they leave little or no track, and what track they do leave is not easily recognized as of human origin by the average Western policeman; furthermore, they leave no scent which may be followed by hounds. However, the miscreants failed in one respect: They forgot Jules de Grandin has traveled the world over on the trail of wickedness, and knows the ways of the East no less than those of the West. In India I have seen such trails left by robbers; today, in this so peaceful State of New Jersey, I recognized the spoor when I saw it. Friend Trowbridge, we are upon the path of villains, assassins, *apaches* who steal women for profit. Yes"—he nodded solemnly—"it is undoubtlessly so."

"But how——" I began, when his suddenly upraised hand cut me short.

Seated in the next booth to that we occupied was a pair of young men who had dined with greater liberality than wisdom. As I started to speak they were joined by a third, scarcely more temperate, who began descanting on the sensational features of a current burlesque show.

"Aw, shut up, how d'ye get that way?" one of the youths demanded scornfully. "Boy, till you've been where Harry and I were last night you ain't been nowhere and you ain't seen nothin'. Say, d'je ever see the *chonkina*?"

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" de Grandin murmured excitedly even as the other young man replied:

"*Chonkina?* What d'ye mean, *chonkina?*"

"You'd be surprized," his friend assured him. "There's a place out in the country—mighty exclusive place, too—where they'll let you see something to write home about—if you're willing to pay the price."

"I'm game," the other replied. "What say we go there tonight? If they can show me something I never saw before, I'll blow the crowd to the best dinner in town."

"You're on," his companions accepted with a laugh, but:

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered, "do you go straightway to the desk and settle our bill. I follow."

In a moment we stood before the cashier's desk, and as I tendered the young woman a bill, the Frenchman suddenly reeled as though in the last stages of drunkenness and began staggering across the room toward the booth where the three sportively inclined youths sat. As he drew abreast of them he gave a drunken lurch and half fell across their table, regaining his balance with the greatest difficulty and pouring forth a flood of profuse apologies.

A few moments later he joined me on the street, all traces of intoxication vanished, but feverish excitement shining in his small blue eyes.

"*C'est glorieux!*" he assured me with a chuckle. "Those three empty-headed young rakes will lead us

to our quarry, or I am more mistaken than I think. In my pretended drunkenness, I fell among them and took time to memorize their faces. Also, I heard them make a definite appointment for their trip tonight. Trowbridge, my friend, we shall be there. Do you return home with all speed, bring the pistols, the flashlight and the horn-handled knife which you will find in my dressing-case, and meet me at police headquarters at precisely a quarter of midnight. I should be glad to accompany you, but there is a very great much for me to accomplish between now and then, and I fear there will be little sleep for Jules de Grandin this night. *Allez*, my friend, we have no time to waste!"

De Grandin had evidently perfected his arrangements by the time I reached headquarters; for a police car was waiting, and we drove in silence, with dimmed lights, through the chill March rain to a lonely point not far from the country club's golf links, where, at a signal from the little Frenchman, we came to a halt.

"Now, Friend Trowbridge," he admonished, "we must trust to our own heels, for I have no desire to let our quarry know we approach. Softly, if you please, and say anything you have to say in the lowest of whispers."

Quietly as an Indian stalking a deer he led the way across the rolling turf of the links, pausing now and again to listen attentively, at length bringing up under a clump of mournful weeping willows bordering the Albemarle Road. "Here we rest till they arrive," he announced softly, seating himself on the comparatively dry ground beneath a tree and leaning his back against its trunk. "Name of a name, but I should enjoy a cigarette; but"—he raised a shoulder in a resigned shrug—"we must have the self-restraint, even as in the days when we faced the *sale boche* in the trenches. Yes."

Time passed slowly while we maintained our silent vigil, and I was on the point of open rebellion when a

warning ejaculation in my ear and the quick clasp of de Grandin's hand on my elbow told me something was toward.

Looking through the branches of our shelter, I beheld a long, black motor slipping noiselessly as a shadow down the road, saw it come to a momentary halt beside a copse of laurels some twenty yards away, saw three stealthy figures emerge from the bushes and parley a moment with the chauffeur, then enter the tonneau.

"Ha, they are cautious, these birds of evil," the Frenchman muttered as he leaped from the shadows of the willows and raised an imperative hand beckoningly.

It was with difficulty I repressed an exclamation of surprise and dismay as a dozen shadowy figures emerged, phantomlike, from the shrubbery bordering the highway.

"Are you there, *mon lieutenant?*" de Grandin called, and I was relieved as an answering hail responded and I realized we were surrounded by a cordon of State Troopers in command of a young but exceedingly businesslike-looking lieutenant.

Motorcycles—two of them equipped with sidecars—were wheeled from their covert in the bushes, and in another moment we were proceeding swiftly and silently in the wake of the vanishing limousine, de Grandin and I occupying the none too commodious "bathtubs" attached to the troopers' cycles.

It was a long chase our quarry led us and had our machines been less powerful and less expertly managed we should have been distanced more than once, but the automobile which can throw dust in the faces of the racing-cycles on which New Jersey mounts its highway patrols has not been built, and we were within easy hail of our game as they drew up before the gateway of a high-walled, deserted-looking country estate.

"Now, my lieutenant," de Grandin asked, "you thoroughly understand the plans?"

"I think so, sir," the young officer returned as he gathered his force about him with a wave of his hand.

Briefly, as the Frenchman checked off our proposed campaign, the lieutenant outlined the work to his men. "Surround the place," he ordered, "and lie low. Don't let anyone see you, and don't challenge anyone going in, but—nobody comes out without permission. Get me?"

As the troopers assented, he asked, "All set?"

There was a rattle of locks as the constables swung their vicious little carbines up to " 'spection arms," and each man felt the butt of the service revolver and the riot stick swinging at his belt.

"All right, take cover. If you get a signal from the house, rush it. If no signal comes, close in anyhow at the end of two hours. I've got a search warrant here"—he patted his blouse pocket—"and we won't stand any monkey business from the folks inside. Dr. de Grandin's going in to reconnoiter; he'll give the signal to charge with his flashlight, or by firing his pistol when he's ready, but—"

"But you will advance, even though my signal fails," de Grandin interrupted grimly.

"Right-o," the other agreed. "Two hours from now—3 o'clock—is zero. Here, men, compare your watches with mine; we don't want to go into action in ragged formation."

Two husky young troopers bent their backs and boosted de Grandin and me to the rim of the eight-foot brick wall surrounding the grounds. In a moment we had dropped silently to the yard beyond and de Grandin sent back a whispered signal.

Flattening ourselves to the ground we proceeded on hands and knees toward the house, taking advantage of every shrub and bush dotting the grounds, stealing forward in little rushes, then pausing beneath some friendly evergreen to glance cautiously about, listening for any sign or sound of activity from the big, darkened house.

"I'm afraid you've brought us out on a fool's errand, old chap," I whispered. "If we find anything more

heinous than bootlegging here I'll be surprised, but—"

"*S-s-sh!*" his hissing admonition silenced me. "To the right, my friend, look to the right and tell me what it is you see."

Obediently, I glanced away from the house, searching the deserted park for some sign of life. There, close to the ground, shone a faint glimmer of light. The glow was stationary, for we watched it for upward of ten minutes before the Frenchman ordered, "Let us investigate, Friend Trowbridge. It may betoken something we should know."

Swerving our course toward the dim beacon, we moved cautiously forward, and as we approached it I grew more and more puzzled. The illumination appeared to rise from the ground, and, as we drew near, it was intercepted for an instant by something which passed between it and us. Again and yet again the glow was obscured with methodical regularity. For a moment I thought it might be some signal system warning the inmates of the house of our approach, but as we crawled still nearer my heart began to beat more rapidly, for I realized the light shone from an old-fashioned oil lantern standing on the ground and the momentary interruptions were due to shovelfuls of earth being thrown up from a fairly deep excavation. Presently there was a pause in the digging operations and two objects appeared above the surface about three feet apart—the hands of a man in the act of stretching himself. Assuming he were of average height, the trench in which he stood would be some five feet deep, judging by the distance his hands protruded above its lip.

Circling warily about the workman and his work we were able to get a fairly clear view. The hole was some two feet wide by six feet long, and, as I had already estimated, something like five feet deep.

"What sort of trench usually has those dimensions?" The question crashed through my mind like an unexpected bolt of thunder, and the answer sent tiny ripples of chills through my cheeks and up my arms.

De Grandin's thought had paralleled mine, for he whispered, "It seems, Friend Trowbridge, that they prepare sepulture for someone. For us, by example? *Cordieu*, if it be so, I can promise them we shall go to it like kings of old, with more than one of them to bear us company in the land of shadows!"

Our course brought the grave-digger into view as we crept about him, and a fiercer, more bloodthirsty scoundrel I had never before had the misfortune to encounter. Taller than the average man by several inches he was, with enormously wide shoulders and long, dangling arms like those of a gorilla. His face was almost black, though plainly not that of a Negro, and his cheeks and chin were adorned by a bristling black beard which glistened in the lantern light with some sort of greasy dressing. Upon his head was a turban of tightly twisted woolen cloth.

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured quizzically. "A Patan, by the looks of him, Friend Trowbridge, and I think no more of him for it. In upper India they have a saying, 'Trust a serpent or a tiger, but trust a Patan never,' and the maxim is approved by centuries of unfortunate experience with gentlemen like the one we see yonder.

"Come, let us make haste for the house. It may be we shall arrive in time to cheat this almost-finished grave of its intended tenant."

Wriggling snakelike through the rain-drenched grounds, our progress rendered silent by the soft turf, we made a wide detour round the dark-faced grave-digger and approached the big, forbidding mansion through whose close-barred windows no ray of light appeared.

The place seemed in condition to defy a siege as we circled it warily, vainly seeking some means of ingress. At length, when we were on the point of owning defeat and rejoining the troopers, de Grandin came to a halt before an unbarred window letting into a cellar. Unbuttoning his leather topcoat, he produced a folded sheet of flypaper and applied the

sticky stuff to the grimy windowpane, smoothed it flat, then struck sharply with his elbow. The window shattered beneath the impact, but the adhesive paper held the pieces firm, and there was no telltale clatter of broken glass as the pane smashed. "One learns more tricks than one when he associates with *les apaches,*" he explained with a grin as he withdrew the flypaper and glass together, laid them on the grass and inserted his hand through the opening, undoing the window-catch. A moment later we had dropped to the cellar and de Grandin was flashing his electric torch inquiringly about.

It was a sort of lumber room into which he had dropped. Bits of discarded furniture, an old rug or two and a pile of miscellaneous junk occupied the place. The stout door at the farther end was secured by an old-fashioned lock, and the first twist of de Grandin's skeleton key sprung the bolt.

Beyond lay a long, dusty corridor from which a number of doors opened, but from which no stairway ascended. "U'm?" muttered the Frenchman. "There seems no way of telling where the stairs lie save by looking for them, Friend Trowbridge." Advancing at random, he inserted his key in the nearest lock and, after a moment's tentative twisting, was rewarded by the sound of a sharp click as the keeper shot back.

No ray of moonlight filtered through the windows, for they were stopped with heavy wooden shutters. As we paused irresolute, wondering if we had walked into a *cul-de-sac*, a faint, whimpering cry attracted our attention. *"Un petit chat!"* Grandin exclaimed softly. "A poor little pussy-cat; he has been locked in by mistake, no doubt, and ha! *Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu, regardez, mon ami!* Do you, too, behold it?"

The beam of his questing flashlight swept through the darkness, searching for the feline, but it was no cat the ray flashed on. It was a girl.

She lay on a rough, bedlike contrivance with a net of heavily knotted, coarse rope stretched across its frame where the mattress should have been, and was drawn to fullest compass in the form of a St. An-

drew's cross; for leathern thongs knotted to each finger and toe strained tautly, holding hands and feet immovably toward the posts which stood at the four corners of the bed of torment. The knots were cruelly drawn, and even in the momentary flash of the light we saw the thongs were of rawhide, tied and stretched wet, but now dry and pulling the tortured girl's toes and fingers with a fury like that of a rack. Already the flesh about fingers and toe-nails was puffy and impurpled with engorged blood cut off by the vicious cinctures of the tightening strings.

The torment of the constantly shortening thongs and the cruel pressure of the rope-knots on which she lay were enough to drive the girl to madness, but an ultimate refinement had been added to her agony; for the bed on which she stretched was a full eight inches shorter than her height, so that her head hung over the end without support, and she was obliged to hold it up by continued flexion of the neck muscles or let it hang downward, either posture being unendurable for more than a fraction of a minute.

"O Lord," she moaned weakly between swollen lips which had been gashed and bitten till the blood showed on them in ruddy froth, "O dear Lord, take me—take me quickly—I can't stand this; I can't—oh, oh,—o-o-oh!" The prayerful exclamation ended in a half-whispered sob and her anguished head fell limply back and swung pendulously from side to side as consciousness left her.

*"Ohé, la pauvre créature!"* De Grandin leaped forward, unsheathing his knife as he sprang. Thrusting the flashlight into my hand, he slashed the cords from her hands and feet, cutting through each group of five strings with a single slash of his razor-sharp knife, and the thongs hummed and sang like broken banjo strings as they came apart beneath his steel.

As de Grandin worked I took note of the swooning girl. She was slight, almost to the point of emaciation, her ribs and the processes of her wrists and ankles showing whitely against the flesh. For costume she wore a wisp of printed cotton twisted bandeauwise

about her bosom, a pair of soiled and torn white-cotton bloomers which terminated in tattered ruffles at her ankles and were held in place at the waist by a gayly dyed cotton scarf secured by a sort of four-in-hand knot in front. A close-wrapped bandanna kerchief swathed her head from brow to nape, covering hair and ears alike, and from the handkerchief's rim almost to the pink of her upper lip a gilded metal mask obscured her features, leaving only mouth, nose-tip and chin visible.

As de Grandin lifted her from the bed-frame and rested her lolling head against his shoulder, he tugged at the mask, but so firmly was it bound that it resisted his effort.

Again he pulled, more sharply this time, and, as he did so, we noticed a movement at the side of her head beneath the handkerchief-turban. Snatching off the headgear, the Frenchman fumbled for the mask cords, then started back with a low cry of horror and dismay. The mask was not tied, but *wired to her flesh*, two punctures having been made in each ear, one in the lobe, the other in the pinna, and through the raw wounds fine golden wires had been thrust and twisted into loops, so that removal of the mask would necessitate clipping the wire or tearing the tender, doubly pierced ears.

"Oh, the villains, the assassins, the ninety-thousand-times-damned beasts!" de Grandin gritted through his teeth, desisting in his effort to take off the metallic mask. "If ever Satan walked the earth in human guise, I think he lodges within this accursed kennel of hell-hounds, Friend Trowbridge, and, *cordieu*, though the monster have as many gullets as the fabled hydra, I shall slit them all for this night's business!"

What more he would have said I do not know, for the fainting girl rolled her head and moaned feebly as she lay in his arms, and he was instantly all solicitude. "Drink this, *ma pauvre*," he commanded, drawing a silver flask from his pocket and pressing it to her pale lips.

She swallowed a bit of the fiery brandy, choked

and gasped a little, then lay back against his arm with a weak sigh.

Again he applied the restorative; then: "Who are you, *ma petite?*" he asked gently. "Speak bravely; we are friends."

She shuddered convulsively and whimpered weakly again; then, so faint we could scarcely catch the syllables, "Ewell Eaton," she whispered.

"*Cordieu*, I did know it!" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "*Gloire à Dieu*, we have found you, *ma petite!*

"The door, Friend Trowbridge—do you stand guard at the portal lest we be surprised. Here"—he snatched a pistol from his pocket and thrust it into my hand—"hesitate not to use it, should occasion arise!"

I took station at the entrance of the torture chamber while de Grandin set about making the half-conscious girl as comfortable as possible. I could hear the murmur of their voices in soft conversation as he worked frantically at her swollen feet and hands, rubbing them with brandy from his flask and massaging her wrists and ankles in an effort to restore circulation, but what they said I could not understand.

I was on the point of leaving my post to join them, for the likelihood of our being interrupted seemed remote, when it happened. Without so much as a warning creak from without, the door smashed suddenly back on its hinges, flooring me as the kick of a mule might have done, and three men rushed pell-mell into the room. I saw de Grandin snatch frantically at his pistol, heard Ewell Eaton scream despairingly, and half-rose to my feet, weak and giddy with the devastating blow I had received, but determined to use my pistol to best advantage. One of the intruders turned savagely on me, brought the staff of a long, spearlike weapon he carried down upon my head, and caught me a smashing kick on the side of the head as I fell.

"Trowbridge, my friend, are you living—do you survive?" Jules de Grandin's anxious whisper cut through the darkness surrounding me.

I was lying on my back, wrists and ankles firmly bound, a bump like a goose-egg on my head where the spear-butt had hit me. Through the grimy window of our cellar prison a star or two winked mockingly; otherwise the place was dark as a cave. How long we had lain there I had no way of telling. For all I knew the troopers might have raided the place, arrested the inmates and gone, leaving us in our dungeon. A dozen questions blazed through my mind like lightning-flashes across a summer night as I strove to roll over and ease the pressure of the knots on my crossed wrists.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, do you live, are you awake, can you hear?" the Frenchman's murmured query came through the darkness again.

"De Grandin—where are you?" I asked, raising my head, the better to locate his voice.

"*Parbleu*, here I lie, trussed like a capon ready for the spit!" he returned. "They are prodigal with their rope, those assassins. Nevertheless, I think we shall make apes of them all. Roll toward me if you can, my friend, and lie with your hands toward me. *Grâce à Dieu*, neither age nor overeating has dulled my teeth. Come, make haste!"

Followed a slow, dragging sound, punctuated with muttered profanities in mingled French and English as he hitched himself laboriously across the rough cement floor in my direction.

In a few moments I felt the stiffly waxed hairs of his mustache against my wrists and the tightening of my bonds as his small, sharp teeth sank into the cords, severing strand after strand.

Sooner than I had hoped, my hands were free, and after a few seconds, during which I wrung my fingers to restore circulation, I unfastened the ropes binding my feet, then released de Grandin.

"*Morbleu*, at any rate we can move about, even if those *sacré* rogues deprived us of our weapons," the Frenchman muttered as he strode up and down our prison. "At least one thing is accomplished—Mademoiselle Ewell is relieved of her torture. Before they

beat me unconscious I heard her told tomorrow she would be strangled, but as the Spaniards so sagely remark, tomorrow is another day, and I trust we shall have increased hell's population by that time.

"Have you a match, by any kind of chance?" he added, turning to me.

Searching my pockets, I found a packet of paper matches and passed them over. Striking one, he held it torchwise above his head, surveying our prison. It was a small, cement-floored room, its single window heavily barred and its only article of furniture a large, sheet-iron-sheathed furnace, evidently the building's auxiliary heating-plant. The door was of stout pine planks, nailed and doweled together so strongly as to defy anything less than a battering-ram, and secured with a modern burglar-proof lock. Plainly, there was no chance of escape that way.

"U'm?" murmured de Grandin, surveying the old hot-air furnace speculatively. "U'm-m-m? It may be we shall find use for this, if my boyhood's agility has not failed me, Friend Trowbridge."

"Use for that furnace?" I asked incredulously.

"*Mais oui*, why not?" he returned. "Let us see."

He jerked the heater's cast-iron door open, thrusting a match inside and looking carefully up the wide, galvanized flues leading to the upper floors. "It is a chance," he announced, "but the good God knows we take an equal one waiting here. *Au revoir*, my friend, either I return to liberate us or we say good morning in heaven."

Next instant he had turned his back to the furnace, grasped the iron door-frame at each side, thrust his head and shoulders through the opening and begun worming himself upward toward the flue-mouth.

A faint scraping sounded inside the heater's interior, then silence broken only by the occasional soft thud of a bit of dislodged soot.

I paced the dungeon in a perfect fever of apprehension. Though de Grandin was slight as a girl, and almost as supple as an eel, I was certain I had seen the last of him, for he would surely be hopelessly

caught in the great, dusty pipes, or, if not that, discovered by some of the villainous inmates of the place when he attempted to force himself through a register. His plan of escape was suicide, nothing less.

*Click!* The strong, jimmy-proof lock snapped back. I braced myself for the reappearance of our jailers, but the Frenchman's delighted chuckle reassured me.

"*Mordieu*, it was not even so difficult as I had feared," he announced. "The pipes were large enough to permit my passage without great trouble, and the registers—God be thanked!—were not screwed to the floor. I had but to lift the first I came to from its frame and emerge like a jack-in-the-box from his case. Yes. Come, let us ascend. There is rheumatism, and other unpleasant things, to be contracted in this cursed cellar."

Stepping as softly as possible, we traversed a long, unlighted corridor, ascended two flights of winding stairs and came to an upper hallway letting into a large room furnished in a garish East Indian manner and decorated with a number of mediæval sets of mail and a stand of antique arms.

The Frenchman looked about, seeking covert, but there was nothing behind which an underfed cat could hide, much less a man. Finally: "I have it!" he declared, "*Parbleu, c'est joli!*"

Striding across the room he examined the nearest suit of armor and turned to me with a chuckle. "Into it, *mon ami*," he commanded. "Quick!"

With de Grandin's help I donned the beavered helmet and adjusted the gorget, cuirass, brassards, cuisses and jambs, finding them a rather snug fit. In five minutes I was completely garbed, and the Frenchman, laughing softly and cursing delightedly, was clambering into another set of mail. When we stood erect against the wall no one who had not seen us put on the armor could have told us from the empty suits of mail which stood at regular intervals about the wall.

From the stand of arms de Grandin selected a keen, long-bladed misericorde, and gazed upon it lovingly.

Nor had he armed himself a moment too soon, for even as he straightened back against the wall and lowered the visor of his helmet there came the scuffle of feet from the corridor outside and a bearded, muscular man in Oriental garb dragged a half-fainting girl into the room. She was scantily clad in a Hindu version of a Parisian night club costume.

"By Vishnu, you shall!" the man snarled, grasping the girl's slender throat between his blunt fingers and squeezing until she gasped for breath. "Dance you must and dance you shall—as the Master has ordered—or I choke the breath from your nostrils! Shame? What have *you* to do with shame, O creature? Daughter of a thousand iniquities, tomorrow there shall be *two* stretched upon the 'bed of roses' in the cellar!"

"*Eh bien*, my friend, you may be right," de Grandin remarked, "but I damn think you shall not be present to see it."

The fellow toppled over without so much as a groan as the Frenchman, with the precise skill of a practised surgeon, drove his dagger home where skull and spine met.

"Silence, little orange-pip!" the Frenchman ordered as the girl opened her lips to scream. "Go below to your appointed place and do as you are bidden. The time comes quickly when you shall be liberated and we shall drag such of these sow-suckled sons of pigs as remain alive to prison. Quick, none must suspect that help approaches!"

The girl ran quickly from the room, her soft, bare feet making no sound on the thick carpets of the hall, and de Grandin walked slowly to the door. In a moment he returned, lugging a suit of armor in his arms. Standing it in the place against the wall he had vacated, he repeated the trip, filling my space with a second empty suit, then motioning me to follow.

"Those sets of mail I did bring were from the balcony at the stairhead," he explained softly. "In their places we shall stand and see what passes below. Per-

haps it is that we shall have occasion to take parts in the play before all is done."

Stiff and still as the lifeless ornaments we impersonated, we stood at attention at the stairway's top. Below us lay the main drawing-room of the house, a sort of low stage or dais erected at its farther end, a crescent formation of folding-chairs, each occupied by a man in evening clothes, standing in the main body of the room.

"Ah, it seems all is ready for the play," the Frenchman murmured softly through the visor-bars of his helmet. "Did you overhear the tale the little Mademoiselle Ewell told me in the torture chamber, my friend?"

"No."

"*Mordieu*, it was a story to make a man's hair erect itself! This is a house of evil, the abode of *esclavage*, no less, Friend Trowbridge. Here stolen girls are brought and broken for a life of degradation, even as wild animals from the jungle are trained for a career in the arena. The master of this odious cesspool is a Hindu, as are his ten retainers, and well they know their beastly trade, for he was a dealer in women in India before the British *Raj* put him in prison, and his underlings have all been *corah-bundars*—punishment-servants—in Indian harems before he hired them for this service. *Parbleu*, from what we saw of the poor one in the cellars, I should say their technique has improved since they left their native land!

"The headquarters of this organization is in Spain—I have heard of it before—but there are branches in almost every country. These evil ones work on commission, and when the girls they steal have been sufficiently broken in spirit they are delivered, like so many cattle, and their price paid by dive-keepers in South America, Africa or China—wherever women command high prices and no questions are asked.

"Hitherto the slavers have taken their victims where they found them—poor shop-girls, friendless

waifs, or those already on the road to living death. This is a new scheme. Only well-favored girls of good breeding are stolen and brought here for breaking, and every luckless victim is cruelly beaten, stripped and reclothed in the degrading uniform of the place within half an hour of her arrival.

"*Mordieu*, but their tactics are clever! All faces obscured by masks which can not be removed, all hair covered by exactly similar turbans, all clothing exactly alike—twin sisters might be here together, yet never recognize each other, for the poor ones are forbidden to address so much as a word to each other—Mademoiselle Ewell was stretched on the bed of torture for no greater fault than breaking this rule."

"But this is horrible!" I interrupted. "This is unbelievable—"

"Who says it?" he demanded fiercely. "Have we not seen with our own eyes? Have we not Mademoiselle Ewell's story for testimony? Do I not know how her sister, poor Madame Mazie, came in the river? Assuredly: Attend me: the fiends who took her prisoner quickly discovered the poor child's condition, and they thereupon deliberately beat out her brains and cast her murdered body into the water, thinking the river would wash away the evidence of their crime.

"Did not that execrable slave-master whom I slew command the other girl to dance—what did it mean?" He paused a moment, then continued in a sibilant whisper:

"This, *pardieu!* Even as we send the young conscripts to Algeria to toughen them for military service, so these poor ones are given their baptism into a life of infamy by being forced to dance before half-drunken brutes to the music of the whip's crack. *Nom d'une pipe*, I damn think we shall see some dancing of the sort they little suspect before we are done—no more, the master comes!"

As de Grandin broke off, I noticed a sudden focusing of attention by the company below.

Stepping daintily as a tango dancer, a man emerged through the arch behind the dais at the drawing-

room's farther end. He was in full Indian court dress, a purple satin tunic, high at the neck and reaching half-way to his knees, fastened at the front with a row of sapphire buttons and heavily fringed with silver at the bottom; trousers of white satin, baggy at the knee, skin-tight at the ankle, slippers of red Morocco on his feet. An enormous turban of peach-bloom silk, studded with brilliants and surmounted by a vivid green aigrette was on his head, while round his neck dangled a triple row of pearls, its lowest loop hanging almost to the bright yellow sash which bound his waist as tightly as a corset. One long, brown hand toyed negligently with the necklace, while the other stroked his black, sweeping mustache caressingly.

"Gentlemen," he announced in a languid Oxonian drawl, "if you are ready, we shall proceed to make whoopee, as you so quaintly express it in your vernacular." He turned and beckoned through the archway, and as the light struck his profile I recognized him as the leader of the party which had surprised us in the torture chamber.

De Grandin identified him at the same time, for I heard him muttering through the bars of his visor: "Ha, toad, viper, worm! Strut while you may; comes soon the time when Jules de Grandin shall show you the posture you will not change in a hurry!"

Through the archway stepped a tall, angular woman, her face masked by a black cloth domino, a small round samisen, or Japanese banjo, in her hand. Saluting the company with a profound obeisance, she dropped to her knees and picked a short, jerky note or two on her crude instrument.

The master of ceremonies clapped his hands sharply, and four girls came running out on the stage. They wore brilliant kimonos, red and blue and white, beautifully embroidered with birds and flowers, and on their feet were white-cotton *tabi* or foot-mittens with a separate "thumb" to accommodate the great toe, and *zori*, or light straw sandals. Golden masks covered the upper part of their faces, and their hair was hidden by voluminous glossy-black wigs arranged in elabo-

rate Japanese coiffures and thickly studded with ornamental hairpins. On their brightly rouged lips were fixed, unnatural smiles.

Running to the very edge of the platform, with exaggeratedly short steps, they slipped their sandals off and dropped to their knees, lowering their foreheads to the floor in greeting to the guests; then, rising, drew up in rank before the musician, tittering with a loud, forced affectation of coy gayety and hiding their faces behind the flowing sleeves of their kimonos, as though in mock-modesty.

Again the master clapped his hands, the musician began a titillating tune on her banjo, and the dance was on. More like a series of postures than a dance it was, ritualistically slow and accompanied by much waving of hands and fluttering of fans.

The master of ceremonies began crooning a low, singsong tune in time with the plink-plink of the banjo. *"Chonkina—chonkina,"* he chanted; then with a slapping clap of his hands:

*"Hoi!"*

Dance and music came to a frozen stop. The four girls held the posture they had when the call came, assuming the strained, unreal appearance of a motion picture when the film catches in the projecting reel.

For a moment there was a breathless silence, then a delighted roar from the audience; for the fourth girl, caught with one foot and hand upraised, could not maintain the pose. Vainly she strove to remain stone-still, but despite her efforts her lifted foot descended ever so slightly.

A guttural command from the show-master, and she paid the forfeit, unfastening her girdle and dropping it to the floor.

A wave of red mantled her throat and face to the very rim of her golden mask as she submitted, but the forced, unnatural smile never left her painted lips as the music and dance began afresh at the master's signal.

*"Hoi!"* Again the strident call, again the frozen dance, again a girl lost and discarded a garment.

On and on the bestial performance went, interminably, it seemed to me, but actually only a few minutes were required for the poor, bewildered girls, half fainting with shame and fear of torture, to lose call after call until at last they danced only in their cotton *tabi*, and even these were discarded before the audience would cry enough and the master release them from their ordeal.

Gathering up their fallen clothes, sobbing through lips which still fought valiantly to retain their constrained smiles, the poor creatures advanced once more to the platform's edge, once more knelt and touched their brows to the floor, then ran from the stage, only the fear of punishment holding their little baked feet to the short, sliding steps of their artificial run rather than a mad dash for sanctuary from the burning gaze and obscene calls of the onlookers.

"*Dieu de Dieu,*" de Grandin fumed, "will not the troopers ever come? Must more of this shameless business go on?"

A moment later the showman was speaking again. "Let us now give undivided attention to the next number of our program," he was announcing suavely.

Something white hurtled through the archway behind him, and a girl clothed only in strings of glittering rhinestones about throat, wrists, waist and ankles was fairly flung out upon the stage, where she cowered in a perfect palsy of terror. Her hands were fettered behind her by a six-inch chain attached to heavy golden bracelets, and an odd contrivance, something like a bit, was fastened between her lips by a harness fitted over her head, making articulate outcry impossible. Behind her, strutting with all the majesty of a turkey-cock, came a man in the costume of a South American *vaquero*—loose, baggy trousers, wide, nail-studded belt, patent leather boots and broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat of black felt. In his hand was a coiled whip of woven leather thongs—the bull-whip of the Argentine pampas.

"Good and the devil!" swore de Grandin, his teeth

fairly chattering in rage. "I know it; it is the whipping dance—he will beat her to insensibility—I have seen such shows in Buenos Aires, Friend Trowbridge, but may Satan toast me in his fires if I witness it again. Come, my friend, it is time we taught these swine a lesson. Do you stand firm and beat back any who attempt to pass. Me, I go into action!"

Like some ponderous engine of olden times he strode forward, the joints of his armor creaking with unwonted use.

For a moment guests and servants were demoralized by the apparition descending the stairs, for it was as if a chair or sofa had suddenly come to life and taken the field against them.

"Here, wash all thish, wash all this?" demanded a maudlin young man with drunken truculence as he swaggered forward to bar the Frenchman's way, reaching for his hip pocket as he spoke.

De Grandin drew back his left arm, doubled his iron-clad fingers into a ball and dashed his mailed fist into the fellow's face.

The drunken rake went down with a scream, spewing blood and teeth from his crushed mouth.

*"Awai, a bhut*!"* cried one of the servants in terror, and another took up the cry: *"A bhut! a bhut!"*

Two of the men seized long-shafted halberds from an ornamental stand of arms and advanced on the little Frenchman, one on each side.

*Clang!* The iron points of their weapons rang against his visor-bars, but the fine-tempered, hand-wrought steel that had withstood thrust of lance and glaive and flying cloth-yard arrow when Henry of England led his hosts to victory at Agincourt held firm, and de Grandin hardly wavered in his stride.

Then, with halberd and knife and wicked, razor-edged scimitar, they were on him like a pack of hounds seeking to drag down a stag.

De Grandin strode forward, striking left and right with mailed fists, crushing a nose here, battering a

*Demon.

mouth there, or smashing jaw-bones with the iron-shod knuckles of his flailing hands.

My breath came fast and faster as I watched the struggle, but suddenly I gave a shout of warning. Two of the Hindus had snatched a silken curtain from a doorway and rushed de Grandin from behind. In an instant the fluttering drapery fell over his head, shutting out sight and cumbering his arms in its clinging folds. In another moment he lay on his back, half a dozen screaming Indians pinioning his arms and legs.

I rushed forward to his rescue, but my movement was a moment too late. From the front door and the back there came a sudden, mighty clamor. The thud of gun-butts and riot sticks on the panels and hoarse commands to open in the law's name announced the troopers had arrived at last.

*Crash!* The front door splintered inward and four determined men in the livery of the State Constabulary rushed into the hall.

A moment the Hindus stood at bay; then, with waving swords and brandishing pikes they charged the officers.

They were ten to four, but odds were not with numbers, for even as they sprang to the attack there sounded the murderous *r-r-r-rat-tat-tat* of an automatic rifle, and the rank of yelling savages wavered like growing wheat before a gust of summer wind, then went down screaming, while the acrid, bitter fumes of smokeless powder stung our nostrils.

"*Nom d'un porc, mon lieutenant*, you came not a moment too soon to complete a perfect night's work," de Grandin complimented as we prepared to set out for home. "Ten tiny seconds more and you should have found nothing but the deceased corpse of Jules de Grandin to rescue, I fear."

From the secret closets of the house the girls' clothing had been rescued, wire-clippers in willing hands had cut away the degrading golden masks from the captives' faces, and Ewell Eaton, the three sorority sisters and the poor little shop-girl whose disappear-

ances had caused such consternation to their families were ready to ride back to Harrisonville, two in the troopers' side-cars, the rest in hastily improvised saddles behind the constables on their motorcycles.

"We did make monkeys out of 'em, at that," the young officer grinned. "It was worth the price of admission to see those guys in their dress suits trying to bluff us off, then whining like spanked kids when I told 'em it would be six months in the work-house for theirs. Gosh, won't the papers make hash of *their* reputations before this business is over?"

"Undoubtlessly," de Grandin assented. "It is to be deplored that we may not lawfully make hash of their so foul bodies, as well. Me, I should enormously enjoy dissecting them without previous anesthesia. However, in the meantime—"

He drew the young officer aside with a confidential hand upon his elbow, and a brief, whispered colloquy followed. Two minutes later he rejoined me, a satisfied twinkle in his eye, the scent of raw, new whisky on his breath.

"*Barbe d'un chameau*, he is a most discerning young man, that one," he confided, as he wiped his lips with lavender-bordered silk handkerchief.

# The Jest of Warburg Tantavul

Warburg Tantavul was dying. Little more than skin and bones, he lay propped up with pillows in the big sleigh bed and smiled as though he found the thought of dissolution faintly amusing.

Even in comparatively good health the man was never prepossessing. Now, wasted with disease, that smile of self-sufficient satisfaction on his wrinkled face, he was nothing less than hideous. The eyes, which nature had given him, were small, deep-set and ruthless. The mouth, which his own thoughts had fashioned through the years, was wide and thin-lipped, almost colorless, and even in repose was tightly drawn against his small and curiously perfect teeth. Now, as he smiled, a flickering light, lambent as the quick reflection of an unseen flame, flared in his yellowish eyes, and a hard white line of teeth showed on his lower lip, as if he bit it to hold back a chuckle.

"You're still determined that you'll marry Arabella?" he asked his son, fixing his sardonic, mocking smile on the young man.

"Yes, Father, but—"

"No buts, my boy"—this time the chuckle came, low and muted, but at the same time glassy-hard—"no buts. I've told you I'm against it, and you'll rue it to your dying day if you should marry her; but"—he paused, and breath rasped in his wizened throat—"but go ahead and marry her, if your heart's set on it. I've said my say and warned you—heh, boy, never say your poor old father didn't warn you!"

He lay back on his piled-up pillows for a moment, swallowing convulsively, as if to force the fleeting

life-breath back, then, abruptly: "Get out," he ordered. "Get out and stay out, you poor fool; but remember what I've said."

"Father," young Tantavul began, stepping toward the bed, but the look of sudden concentrated fury in the old man's tawny eyes halted him in midstride.

"Get—out—I—said," his father snarled, then, as the door closed softly on his son:

"Nurse—hand—me—that—picture." His breath was coming slowly, now, in shallow labored gasps, but his withered fingers writhed in a gesture of command, pointing to the silver-framed photograph of a woman which stood upon a little table in the bedroom windowbay.

He clutched the portrait as if it were some precious relic, and for a minute let his eyes rove over it. "Lucy," he whispered hoarsely, and now his words were thick and indistinct, "Lucy, they'll be married, 'spite of all that I have said. They'll be married, Lucy, d'ye hear?" Thin and high-pitched as a child's, his voice rose to a piping treble as he grasped the picture's silver frame and held it level with his face. "They'll be married, Lucy dear, and they'll have—"

Abruptly as a penny whistle's note is stilled when no more air is blown in it, old Tantavul's cry hushed. The picture, still grasped in his hands, fell to the tufted coverlet, the man's lean jaw relaxed and he slumped back on his pillows with a shadow of the mocking smile still in his glazing eyes.

Etiquette requires that the nurse await the doctor's confirmation at such times, so, obedient to professional dictates, Miss Williamson stood by the bed until I felt the dead man's pulse and nodded; then with the skill of years of practice she began her offices, bandaging the wrists and jaws and ankles that the body might be ready when the representative of Martin's Funeral Home came for it.

My friend de Grandin was annoyed. Arms akimbo, knuckles on his hips, his black-silk kimono draped round him like a mourning garment, he voiced his

plaint in no uncertain terms. In fifteen little so small minutes he must leave for the theatre, and that son and grandson of a filthy swine who was the florist had not delivered his gardenia. And was it not a fact that he could not go forth without a fresh gardenia for his lapel? But certainly. Why did that *sale chameau* procrastinate? Why did he delay delivering that unmentionable flower till this unspeakable time of night? He was Jules de Grandin, he, and not to be oppressed by any species of a goat who called himself a florist. But no. It must not be. It should not be, by blue! He would—

"Axin' yer pardon, sir," Nora McGinnis broke in from the study door, "there's a Miss an' Mr. Tantavul to see ye, an'—"

"Bid them be gone, *ma charmeuse*. Request that they jump in the bay—*Grand Dieu*"—he cut his oratory short—"*les enfants dans le bois!*"

Truly, there was something reminiscent of the Babes in the Wood in the couple who had followed Nora to the study door. Dennis Tantavul looked even younger and more boyish than I remembered him, and the girl beside him was so childish in appearance that I felt a quick, instinctive pity for her. Plainly they were frightened, too, for they clung hand to hand like frightened children going past a graveyard, and in their eyes was that look of sick terror I had seen so often when the X-ray and blood test confirmed preliminary diagnosis of carcinoma.

"Monsieur, Mademoiselle!" The little Frenchman gathered his kimono and his dignity about him in a single sweeping gesture as he struck his heels together and bowed stiffly from the hips. "I apologize for my unseemly words. Were it not that I have been subjected to a terrible, calamitous misfortune, I should not so far have forgotten myself—"

The girl's quick smile cut through his apology. "We understand," she reassured. "We've been through trouble, too, and have come to Dr. Trowbridge—"

"Ah, then I have permission to withdraw?" he

bowed again and turned upon his heel, but I called him back.

"Perhaps you can assist us," I remarked as I introduced the callers.

"The honor is entirely mine, Mademoiselle," he told her as he raised her fingers to his lips. "You and Monsieur your brother—"

"He's not my brother," she corrected. "We're cousins. That's why we've called on Dr. Trowbridge."

De Grandin tweaked the already needle-sharp points of his small blond mustache. "*Pardonnez-moi?*" he begged. "I have resided in your country but a little time; perhaps I do not understand the language fluently. It is because you and Monsieur are cousins that you come to see the doctor? Me, I am dull and stupid like a pig; I fear I do not comprehend."

Dennis Tantavul replied: "It's not because of the relationship, Doctor—not entirely, at any rate, but—"

He turned to me: "You were at my father's bedside when he died; you remember what he said about marrying Arabella?"

I nodded.

"There was something—some ghastly, hidden threat concealed in his warning, Doctor. It seemed as if he jeered at me—dared me to marry her, yet—"

"Was there some provision in his will?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," the young man answered. "Here it is." From his pocket he produced a folded parchment, opened it and indicated a paragraph:

> "To my son Dennis Tantavul I give, devise and bequeath all my property of every kind and sort, real, personal and mixed, of which I may die seized and possessed, or to which I may be entitled, in the event of his marrying Arabella Tantavul, but should he not marry the said Arabella Tantavul, then it is my will that he receive only one half of my estate, and that the residue thereof go to the said Arabella Tantavul, who has made her home with me since childhood and occupied the relationship of daughter to me."

"H'm," I returned the document, "this looks as if he really wanted you to marry your cousin, even though—"

"And see here, sir," Dennis interrupted, "here's an envelope we found in Father's papers."

Sealed with red wax, the packet of heavy, opaque parchment was addressed:

> "To my children, Dennis and Arabella Tantavul, to be opened by them upon the occasion of the birth of their first child."

De Grandin's small blue eyes were snapping with the flickering light they showed when he was interested. "Monsieur Dennis," he took the thick envelope from the caller, "Dr. Trowbridge has told me something of your father's death-bed scene. There is a mystery about this business. My suggestion is you read the message now—"

"No, sir. I won't do that. My father didn't love me—sometimes I think he hated me—but I never disobeyed a wish that he expressed, and I don't feel at liberty to do so now. It would be like breaking faith with the dead. But"—he smiled a trifle shamefacedly—"Father's lawyer Mr. Bainbridge is out of town on business, and it will be his duty to probate the will. In the meantime I'd feel better if the will and this envelope were in other hands than mine. So we came to Dr. Trowbridge to ask him to take charge of them till Mr. Bainbridge gets back, meanwhile—"

"Yes, Monsieur, meanwhile?" de Grandin prompted as the young man paused.

"You know human nature, Doctor," Dennis turned to me; "no one can see farther into hidden meanings than the man who sees humanity with its mask off, the way a doctor does. D'ye think Father might have been delirious when he warned me not to marry Arabella, or—" His voice trailed off, but his troubled eyes were eloquent.

"H'm," I shifted uncomfortably in my chair, "I can't see any reason for hesitating, Dennis. That bequest of all your father's property in the event you marry Arabella seems to indicate his true feelings."

I tried to make my words convincing, but the memory of old Tantavul's dying words dinned in my ears. There had been something gloating in his voice as he told the picture that his son and niece would marry.

De Grandin caught the hint of hesitation in my tone. "Monsieur," he asked Dennis, "will not you tell us of the antecedents of your father's warning? Dr. Trowbridge is perhaps too near to see the situation clearly. Me, I have no knowledge of your father or your family. You and Mademoiselle are strangely like. The will describes her as having lived with you since childhood. Will you kindly tell us how it came about?"

The Tantavuls were, as he said, strangely similar. Anyone might easily have taken them for twins. Like as two plaster portraits from the same mold were their small straight noses, sensitive mouths, curling pale-gold hair.

Now, once more hand in hand, they sat before us on the sofa, and as Dennis spoke I saw the frightened, haunted look creep back into their eyes.

"Do you remember us as children, Doctor?" he asked me.

"Yes, it must have been some twenty years ago they called me out to see you youngsters. You'd just moved gossip about the strange gentleman from the West into the old Stephens house, and there was a deal of with his two small children and Chinese cook, who greeted all the neighbors' overtures with churlish rebuffs and never spoke to anyone."

"What did you think of us, sir?"

"H'm; I thought you and your sister—as I thought her then—had as fine a case of measles as I'd ever seen."

"How old were we then, do you remember?"

"Oh, you were something like three; the little girl was half your age, I'd guess."

"Do you recall the next time you saw us?"

"Yes, you were somewhat older then; eight or ten, I'd say. That time it was the mumps. You were queer, quiet little shavers. I remember asking if you thought

you'd like a pickle, and you said, 'No, thank you, sir, it hurts.'"

"It did, too, sir. Every day Father made us eat one; stood over us with a whip till we'd chewed the last morsel."

"*What?*"

The young folks nodded solemnly as Dennis answered, "Yes, sir; every day. He said he wanted to check up on the progress we were making."

For a moment he was silent, then: "Dr. Trowbridge, if anyone treated you with studied cruelty all your life—if you'd never had a kind word or gracious act from that person in all your memory, then suddenly that person offered you a favor—made it possible for you to gratify your dearest wish, and threatened to penalize you if you failed to do so, wouldn't you be suspicious? Wouldn't you suspect some sort of dreadful practical joke?"

"I don't think I quite understand."

"Then listen: in all my life I can't remember ever having seen my father smile, not really smile with friendliness, humor or affection, I mean. My life—and Arabella's, too—was one long persecution at his hands. I was two years or so old when we came to Harrisonville, I believe, but I still have vague recollections of our Western home, of a house set high on a hill overlooking the ocean, and a wall with climbing vines and purple flowers on it, and a pretty lady who would take me in her arms and cuddle me against her breast and feed me ice cream from a spoon, sometimes. I have a sort of recollection of a little baby sister in that house, too, but these things are so far back in babyhood that possibly they were no more than childish fancies which I built up for myself and which I loved so dearly and so secretly they finally came to have a kind of reality for me.

"My real memories, the things I can recall with certainty, begin with a hurried train trip through hot, dry, uncomfortable country with my father and a strangely silent Chinese servant and a little girl they told me was my cousin Arabella.

"Father treated me and Arabella with impartial harshness. We were beaten for the slightest fault, and we had faults a-plenty. If we sat quietly we were accused of sulking and asked why we didn't go and play. If we played and shouted we were whipped for being noisy little brats.

"As we weren't allowed to associate with any of the neighbors' children we made up our own games. I'd be Geraint and Arabella would be Enid of the dove-white feet, or perhaps I'd be King Arthur in the Castle Perilous, and she'd be the kind Lady of the Lake who gave him back his magic sword. And though we never mentioned it, both of us knew that whatever the adventure was, the false knight or giant I contended with was really my father. But when actual trouble came I wasn't an heroic figure.

"I must have been twelve or thirteen when I had my last thrashing. A little brook ran through the lower part of our land, and the former owners had widened it into a lily-pond. The flowers had died out years before, but the outlines of the pool remained, and it was our favorite summer play place. We taught ourselves to swim—not very well, of course, but well enough—and as we had no bathing suits we used to go in in our underwear. When we'd finished swimming we'd lie in the sun until our underthings were dry, then slip into our outer clothing. One afternoon as we were splashing in the water, happy as a pair of baby otters, and nearer to shouting with laughter than we'd ever been before, I think, my father suddenly appeared on the bank.

" 'Come out o' there!' he shouted to me, and there was a kind of sharp, dry hardness in his voice I'd never heard before. "So this is how you spend your time?' he asked as I climbed up the bank. 'In spite of all I've done to keep you decent, you do a thing like this!'

" 'Why, Father, we were only swimming—' I began, but he struck me on the mouth.

" 'Shut up, you little rake!' he roared. 'I'll teach you!' He cut a willow switch and thrust my head be-

tween his knees; then while he held me tight as in a vice he flogged me with the willow till the blood came through my skin and stained my soaking cotton shorts. Then he kicked me back into the pool as a heartless master might a beaten dog.

"As I said, I wasn't an heroic figure. It was Arabella who came to my rescue. She helped me up the slippery bank and took me in her arms. 'Poor Dennie,' she said. 'Poor, poor Dennie. It was my fault, Dennie, dear, for letting you take me into the water!' Then she kissed me—the first time anyone had kissed me since the pretty lady of my half-remembered dreams. 'We'll be married on the very day that Uncle Warburg dies,' she promised, 'and I'll be so sweet and good to you, and you'll love me so dearly that we'll both forget these dreadful days.'

"We thought my father'd gone, but he must have stayed to see what we would say, for as Arabella finished he stepped from behind a rhododendron bush, and for the first time I heard him laugh. 'You'll be married, will you?' he asked. 'That would be a good joke—the best one of all. All right, go ahead—see what it gets you.'

"That was the last time he ever actually struck me, but from that time on he seemed to go out of his way to invent mental tortures for us. We weren't allowed to go to school, but he had a tutor, a little rat-faced man named Ericson, come in to give us lessons, and in the evening he'd take the book and make us stand before him and recite. If either of us failed a problem in arithmetic or couldn't conjugate a French or Latin verb he'd wither us with sarcasm, and always as a finish to his diatribe he'd jeer at us about our wish to be married, and threaten us with something dreadful if we ever did it.

"So, Dr. Trowbridge, you see why I'm suspicious. It seems almost as if this provision in the will is part of some horrible practical joke my father prepared deliberately—as if he's waiting to laugh at us from the grave."

"I can understand your feelings, boy," I answered, "but—"

"'But' be damned and roasted on the hottest griddle in hell's kitchen!" Jules de Grandin interrupted. "The wicked dead one's funeral is at 2 tomorrow afternoon, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"*Très bien.* At 8 tomorrow evening—or earlier, if it will be convenient—you shall be married. I shall esteem it a favor if you permit that I be best man; Dr. Trowbridge will give the bride away, and we shall have a merry time, by blue! You shall go upon a gorgeous honeymoon and learn how sweet the joys of love can be—sweeter for having been so long denied! And in the meantime we shall keep the papers safely till your lawyer returns.

"You fear the so unpleasant jest? *Mais non.* I think the jest is on the other foot, my friends, and the laugh on the other face!"

Warburg Tantavul was neither widely known nor popular, but the solitude in which he had lived had invested him with mystery; now the bars of reticence were down and the walls of isolation broken, upward of a hundred neighbors, mostly women, gathered in the Martin funeral chapel as the services began. The afternoon sun beat softly through the stained glass windows and glinted on the polished mahogany of the casket. Here and there it touched upon bright spots of color that marked a woman's hat or a man's tie. The solemn hush was broken by occasional whispers: "What'd he die of? Did he leave much? Were the two young folks his only heirs?"

Then the burial office: "Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another . . . for a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday . . . Oh teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom . . ."

As the final Amen sounded one of Mr. Martin's frock-coated young men glided forward, paused beside the casket, and made the stereotyped an-

nouncement: "Those who wish to say good-bye to Mr. Tantavul may do so at this time."

The grisly rite of the passing by the bier dragged on. I would have left the place; I had no wish to look upon the man's dead face and folded hands; but de Grandin took me firmly by the elbow, held me till the final curiosity-impelled female had filed past the body, then steered me quickly toward the casket.

He paused a moment at the bier, and it seemed to me there was a hint of irony in the smile that touched the corners of his mouth as he leant forward. "*Eh bien,* my old one; we know a secret, thou and I, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked the silent form before us.

I swallowed back an exclamation of dismay. Perhaps it was a trick of the uncertain light, perhaps one of those ghastly, inexplicable things which every doctor and embalmer meets with sometimes in his practice—the effect of desiccation from formaldehyde, the pressure of some tissue gas within the body, or something of the sort—at any rate, as Jules de Grandin spoke the corpse's upper lids drew back the fraction of an inch, revealing slits of yellow eye which seemed to glare at us with mingled hate and fury.

"Good heavens; come away!" I begged. "It seemed as if he *looked* at us, de Grandin!"

"*Et puis*—and if he did? I damn think I can trade him look for look, my friend. He was clever, that one, I admit it; but do not be mistaken, Jules de Grandin is nobody's imbecile."

The wedding took place in the rectory of St. Chrysostom's. Robed in stole and surplice, Dr. Bentley glanced benignly from Dennis to Arabella, then to de Grandin and me as he began: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this company to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony. . . ." His round and ruddy face grew slightly stern as he admonished, "If any man can show just cause why they should not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter for ever hold his peace."

He paused the customary short, dramatic moment,

and I thought I saw a hard, grim look spread on de Grandin's face. Very faint and far-off seeming, so faint that we could scarcely hear it, but gaining steadily in strength, there came a high, thin, screaming sound. Curiously, it seemed to me to resemble the long-drawn, wailing shriek of a freight train's whistle heard miles away upon a still and sultry summer night, weird, wavering and ghastly. Now it seemed to grow in shrillness, though its volume was no greater.

I saw a look of haunted fright leap into Arabella's eyes, saw Dennis' pale face go paler as the strident whistle sounded shriller and more shrill; then, as it seemed I could endure the stabbing of that needle sound no longer, it ceased abruptly, giving way to blessed, comforting silence. But through the silence came a burst of chuckling laughter, half breathless, half hysterical, wholly devilish: *Huh—hu-u-uh—hu-u-u-uh!* the final syllable drawn out until it seemed almost a groan.

"The wind, *Monsieur le Curé;* it was nothing but the wind," de Grandin told the clergyman sharply. "Proceed to marry them, if you will be so kind."

"Wind?" Dr. Bentley echoed. "I could have sworn I heard somebody laugh, but—"

"It is the wind, Monsieur; it plays strange tricks at times," the little Frenchman insisted, his small blue eyes as hard as frozen iron. "Proceed, if you will be so kind. We wait on you."

"Forasmuch as Dennis and Arabella have consented to be joined together in holy wedlock . . . I pronounce them man and wife," concluded Dr. Bentley, and de Grandin, ever gallant, kissed the bride upon the lips, and before we could restrain him, planted kisses on both Dennis' cheeks.

"*Cordieu,* I thought that we might have the trouble, for a time," he told me as we left the rectory.

"What *was* that awful shrieking noise we heard?" I asked.

"It was the wind, my friend," he answered in a hard, flat, tone-less voice. "The ten times damned, but wholly ineffectual wind."

"So, then, little sinner, weep and wail for the burden of mortality you have assumed. Weep, wail, cry and breathe, my small and wrinkled one! Ha, you will not? *Pardieu,* I say you shall!"

Gently, but smartly, he spanked the small red infant's small red posterior with the end of a towel wrung out in hot water, and as the smacking impact sounded the tiny toothless mouth opened and a thin, high, piping squall of protest sounded. "Ah, that is better, *mon petit ami,*" he chuckled. "One cannot learn too soon that one must do as one is told, not as one wishes, in this world which you have just entered. Look to him, Mademoiselle," he passed the wriggling, bawling morsel of humanity to the nurse and turned to me as I bent over the table where Arabella lay. "How does the little mother, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked.

"U'm'mp," I answered noncommittally. "Bear a hand, here, will you? The perineum's pretty badly torn—have to do a quick repair job . . ."

"But in the morning she will have forgotten all the pain," laughed de Grandin as Arabella, swathed in blankets, was trundled from the delivery room. "She will gaze upon the little monkey-thing which I just caused to breathe the breath of life and vow it is the loveliest of all God's lovely creatures. She will hold it at her tender breast and smile on it, she will—*Sacré nom d'un rat vert,* what is that?"

From the nursery where, ensconced in wire trays, a score of newborn fragments of humanity slept or squalled, there came a sudden frightened scream—a woman's cry of terror.

We raced along the corridor, reached the glass-walled room and thrust the door back, taking care to open it no wider than was necessary, lest a draft disturb the carefully conditioned air of the place.

Backed against the farther wall, her face gone gray with fright, the nurse in charge was staring at the skylight with terror-widened eyes, and even as we entered she opened her lips to emit another scream.

"Desist, *ma bonne,* you are disturbing your small

charges!" de Grandin seized the horrified girl's shoulder and administered a shake. Then: "What is it, Mademoiselle?" he whispered. "Do not be afraid to speak; we shall respect your confidence—but speak softly."

"It—it was up there!" she pointed with a shaking finger toward the black square of the skylight. "They'd just brought Baby Tantavul in, and I had laid him in his crib when I thought I heard somebody laughing. "Oh"—she shuddered at the recollection—"it was awful! not really a laugh, but something more like a long-drawn-out hysterical groan. Did you ever hear a child tickled to exhaustion—you know how he moans and gasps for breath, and laughs, all at once? I think the fiends in hell must laugh like that!"

"Yes, yes, we understand," de Grandin nodded, "but tell us what occurred next."

"I looked around the nursery, but I was all alone here with the babies. Then it came again, louder, this time, and seemingly right above me. I looked up at the skylight, and—there it was!"

"It was a face, sir—just a face, with no body to it, and it seemed to float above the glass, then dip down to it, like a child's balloon drifting in the wind, and it looked right past me, down at Baby Tantavul, and laughed again."

"A face, you say, Mademoiselle—"

"Yes, sir, yes! The awfullest face I've ever seen. It was thin and wrinkled—all shriveled like a monkey—and as it looked at Baby Tantavul its eyes stretched open till their whites glared all around the irises, and the mouth opened, not widely, but as if it were chewing something it relished—and it gave that dreadful, cackling, jubilating laugh again. That's it! I couldn't think before, but it seemed as if that bodiless head were laughing with a sort of evil triumph, Dr. de Grandin!"

"H'm," he tweaked his tightly waxed mustache, "I should not wonder if it did, Mademoiselle." To me he whispered, "Stay with her, if you will, my friend, I'll see the supervisor and have her send another nurse to

keep her company. I shall request a special watch for the small Tantavul. At present I do not think the danger is great, but mice do not play where cats are wakeful."

"Isn't he just lovely?" Arabella looked up from the small bald head that rested on her breast, and ecstacy was in her eyes. "I don't believe I ever saw so beautiful a baby!"

"*Tiens*, Madame, his voice is excellent, at any rate," de Grandin answered with a grin, "and from what one may observe his appetite is excellent, as well."

Arabella smiled and patted the small creature's back. "You know, I never had a doll in my life," she confided. "Now I've got this dear little mite, and I'm going to be so happy with him. Oh, I wish Uncle Warburg were alive. I know this darling baby would soften even his hard heart.

"But I mustn't say such things about him, must I? He really wanted me to marry Dennis, didn't he? His will proved that. You think he wanted us to marry, Doctor?"

"I am persuaded that he did, Madame. Your marriage was his dearest wish, his fondest hope," the Frenchman answered solemnly.

"I felt that way, too. He was harsh and cruel to us when we were growing up, and kept his stony-hearted attitude to the end, but underneath it all there must have been some hidden stratum of kindness, some lingering affection for Dennis and me, or he'd never have put that clause in his will—"

"Nor have left this memorandum for you," de Grandin interrupted, drawing from an inner pocket the parchment envelope Dennis had entrusted to him the day before his father's funeral.

She started back as if he menaced her with a live scorpion, and instinctively her arms closed protectively around the baby at her bosom. "The—that—letter?" she faltered, her breath coming in short, smothered gasps. "I'd forgotten all about it. Oh, Dr. de

Grandin, burn it. Don't let me see what's in it. I'm afraid!"

It was a bright May morning, without sufficient breeze to stir the leaflets on the maple trees outside the window, but as de Grandin held the letter out I thought I heard a sudden sweep of wind around the angle of the hospital, not loud, but shrewd and keen, like wind among the graveyard evergreens in autumn, and, curiously, there seemed a note of soft malicious laughter mingled with it.

The little Frenchman heard it, too, and for an instant he looked toward the window, and I thought I saw the flicker of an ugly sneer take form beneath the waxed ends of his mustache.

"Open it, Madame," he bade. "It is for you and Monsieur Dennis, and the little *Monsieur Bébé* here."

"I—I daren't—"

"*Tenez*, then Jules de Grandin does!" With his penknife he slit the heavy envelope, pressed suddenly against its ends so that its sides bulged, and dumped its contents on the counterpane. Ten fifty-dollar bills dropped on the coverlet. And nothing else.

"Five hundred dollars!" Arabella gasped. "Why—"

"A birthday gift for *petit Monsieur Bébé*, one surmises," laughed de Grandin. "*Eh bien*, the old one had a sense of humor underneath his ugly outward shell, it seems. He kept you on the tenterhooks lest the message in this envelope contained dire things, while all the time it was a present of congratulation."

"But such a gift from Uncle Warburg—I can't understand it!"

"Perhaps that is as well, too, Madame. Be happy in the gift and give your ancient uncle credit for at least one act of kindness. *Au 'voir.*"

"Hanged if I can understand it, either," I confessed as we left the hospital. "If that old curmudgeon had left a message berating them for fools for having offspring, or even a new will that disinherited them both, it would have been in character, but such a gift— well, I'm surprised."

Amazingly, he halted in midstep and laughed until the tears rolled down his face. "*You* are surprised!" he told me when he managed to regain his breath, "*Cordieu*, my friend, I do not think that you are half as much surprised as Monsieur Warburg Tantavul!"

Dennis Tantavul regarded me with misery-haunted eyes. "I just can't understand it," he admitted. "It's all so sudden, so utterly—"

"*Pardonnez-moi*," de Grandin interrupted from the door of the consulting room, "I could not help but hear your voice, and if it is not an intrusion—"

"Not at all, sir," the young man answered. "I'd like the benefit of your advice. It's Arabella, and I'm terribly afraid she's—"

"*Non*, do not try it, *mon ami*," de Grandin warned. "Do you give us the symptoms, let us make the diagnosis. He who acts as his own doctor has a fool for a patient, you know."

"Well, then, here are the facts: this morning Arabella woke me up, crying as if her heart would break. I asked her what the trouble was, and she looked at me as if I were a stranger—no, not exactly that, rather as if I were some dreadful thing she'd suddenly found at her side. Her eyes were positively round with horror, and when I tried to take her in my arms to comfort her she shrank away as if I were infected with the plague.

"'Oh, Dennie, don't!' she begged and positively cringed away from me. Then she sprang out of bed and drew her kimono around her as if she were ashamed to have me see her in her pajamas, and ran out of the room.

"Presently I heard her crying in the nursery, and when I followed her in there—" He paused and tears came to his eyes. "She was standing by the crib where little Dennis lay, and in her hand she held a long sharp steel letter-opener. 'Poor little mite, poor little flower of unpardonable sin,' she said. 'We've got to go, Baby darling; you to limbo, I to hell—oh, God wouldn't, *couldn't* be so cruel as to damn you for our

sin!—but we'll all three suffer torment endlessly, because we didn't know!'

"She raised the knife to plunge it in the little fellow's heart, and he stretched out his hands and laughed and cooed as the sunlight shone on the steel. I was on her in an instant, wrenching the knife from her with one hand and holding her against me with the other, but she fought me off.

" 'Don't touch me, Dennie, please, *please* don't,' she begged. I know it's mortal sin, but I love you so, my dear, that I just can't resist you if I let you put your arms about me.'

"I tried to kiss her, but she hid her face against my shoulder and moaned as if in pain when she felt my lips against her neck. Then she went limp in my arms, and I carried her, unconscious but still moaning piteously, into her sitting room and laid her on the couch. I left Sarah the nurse-maid with her, with strict orders not to let her leave the room. Can't you come over right away?"

De Grandin's cigarette had burned down till it threatened his mustache, and in his little round blue eyes there was a look of murderous rage. *"Bête!"* he murmured savagely. *"Sale chameau;* species of a stinking goat! This is his doing, undoubtlessly. Come, my friends, let us rush, hasten, fly. I would talk with Madame Arabella."

"Naw, suh, she'd done gone," the portly nursemaid told us when we asked for Arabella. "Th' baby started squealin' sumpin awful right after Mistu Dennis lef', an 'Ah knowed it wuz time fo' his breakfas', so Mis' Arabella wuz layin' nice an' still on the' sofa, an' Ah says ter her, Ah says, 'Yuh lay still dere, honey, whilst Ah goes an' sees after yo' baby;' so Ah goes ter th' nursery, an' fixes him all up, an' carries him back ter th' settin'-room where Mis' Arabella wuz, an' she ain't there no more. Naw, suh."

"I thought I told you—" Dennis began furiously, but de Grandin laid a hand upon his arm.

"Do not upbraid her, *mon ami,* she did wisely,

though she knew it not; she was with the small one all the while, so no harm came to him. Was it not better so, after what you witnessed in the morning?"

"Ye-es," the other grudgingly admitted, "I suppose so. But Arabella—"

"Let us see if we can find a trace of her," the Frenchman interrupted. "Look carefully, do you miss any of her clothing?"

Dennis looked about the pretty chintz-hung room. "Yes," he decided as he finished his inspection, "her dress was on that lounge and her shoes and stockings on the floor beneath it. They're all gone."

"So," de Grandin nodded. "Distracted as she seemed, it is unlikely she would have stopped to dress had she not planned on going out. Friend Trowbridge, will you kindly call police headquarters and inform them of the situation? Ask to have all exits to the city watched."

As I picked up the telephone he and Dennis started on a room-by-room inspection of the house.

"Find anything?" I asked as I hung up the 'phone after talking with the missing persons bureau.

"*Corbleu,* but I should damn say yes!" de Grandin answered as I joined them in the upstairs living room. "Look yonder, if you please, my friend."

The room was obviously the intimate apartment of the house. Electric lamps under painted shades were placed beside deep leather-covered easy chairs, ivory-enameled bookshelves lined the walls to a height of four feet or so, upon their tops was a litter of gay, unconsidered trifles—cinnabar cigarette boxes, bits of hammered brass. Old china, blue and red and purple, glowed mellowly from open spaces on the shelves, its colors catching up and accenting the muted blues and reds of antique Hamadan carpet. A Paisley shawl was draped scarfwise across the baby grand piano in one corner.

Directly opposite the door a carven crucifix was standing on the bookcase top. It was an exquisite bit of Italian work, the cross of ebony, the corpus of old ivory, and so perfectly executed that though it was a

scant six inches high, one could note the tense, tortured muscles of the pendent body, the straining throat which overfilled with groans of agony, the brow all knotted and bedewed with the cold sweat of torment. Upon the statue's thorn-crowned head, where it made a bright iridescent halo, was a band of gem-encrusted platinum, a woman's diamond-studded wedding ring.

"*Hélas,* it is love's crucifixion!" whispered Jules de Grandin.

Three months went by, and though the search kept up unremittingly, no trace of Arabella could be found. Dennis Tantavul installed a fulltime highly-trained and recommended nurse in his desolate house, and spent his time haunting police stations and newspaper offices. He aged a decade in the ninety days since Arabella left; his shoulders stooped, his footsteps lagged, and a look of constant misery lay in his eyes. He was a prematurely old and broken man.

"It's the most uncanny thing I ever saw," I told de Grandin as we walked through West Forty-second Street toward the West Shore Ferry. We had gone over to New York for some surgical supplies, and I do not drive my car in the metropolis. Truck drivers there are far too careless and repair bills for wrecked mudguards far too high. "How a full-grown woman would evaporate this way is something I can't understand. Of course, she may have done away with herself, dropped off a ferry, or—"

"*S-s-st,*" his sibilated admonition cut me short. "That woman there, my friend, observe her, if you please." He nodded toward a female figure twenty feet or so ahead of us.

I looked, and wondered at his sudden interest at the draggled hussy. She was dressed in tawdry finery much the worse for wear. The sleazy silken skirt was much too tight, the cheap fur jaquette far too short and snug, and the high heels of her satin shoes were shockingly run over. Makeup was fairly plastered on her cheeks and lips and eyes, and short black hair bristled untidily beneath the brim of her abbreviated

hat. Written unmistakably upon her was the nature of her calling, the oldest and least honorable profession known to womanhood.

"Well," I answered tartly, "what possible interest can you have in a—"

"Do not walk so fast," he whispered as his fingers closed upon my arm, "and do not raise your voice. I would that we should follow her, but I do not wish that she should know."

The neighborhood was far from savory, and I felt uncomfortably conspicuous as we turned from Forty-second Street into Eleventh Avenue in the wake of the young strumpet, followed her provocatively swaying hips down two malodorous blocks, finally pausing as she slipped furtively into the doorway of a filthy, unkempt "rooming house."

We trailed her through a dimly lighted barren hall and up a flight of shadowy stairs, then up two further flights until we reached a sort of oblong foyer bounded on one end by the stair-well, on the farther extremity by a barred and very dirty window, and on each side by sagging, paint-blistered doors. On each of these was pinned a card, handwritten with the many flourishes dear to the chirography of the professional card-writer who still does business in the poorer quarters of our great cities. The air was heavy with the odor of cheap whiskey, bacon rind and fried onions.

We made a hasty circuit of the hall, studying the cardboard labels. On the farthest door the notice read *Miss Sieglinde*.

"*Mon Dieu,*" he exclaimed as he read it, "*c'est le mot propre!*"

"Eh?" I returned.

"Sieglinde, do not you recall her?"

"No-o, can't say I do. The only Sieglinde I remember is the character in Wagner's *Die Walküre* who unwittingly became her brother's paramour and bore him a son—"

"*Précisément.* Let us enter, if you please." Without

pausing to knock he turned the handle of the door and stepped into the squalid room.

The woman sat upon the unkempt bed, her hat pushed back from her brow. In one hand she held a cracked teacup, with the other she poised a whiskey bottle over it. She had kicked her scuffed and broken shoes off; we saw that she was stockingless, and her bare feet were dark with long-accumulated dirt and black-nailed as a miner's hands. "Get out!" she ordered thickly. "Get out o' here, I ain't receivin'—" a gasp broke her utterance, and she turned her head away quickly. Then: "Get out o' here, you lousy bums!" she screamed. "Who d'ye think you are, breakin' into a lady's room like this? Get out, or—"

De Grandin eyed her steadily, and as her strident command wavered: "Madame Arabella, we have come to take you home," he announced softly.

"Good God, man, you're crazy!" I exclaimed. "Arabella? This—"

"Precisely, my old one; this is Madame Arabella Tantavul whom we have sought these many months in vain." Crossing the room in two quick strides he seized the cringing woman by the shoulders and turned her face up to the light. I looked, and felt a sudden swift attack of nausea.

He was right. Thin to emaciation, her face already lined with the deep-bitten scars of evil living, the woman on the bed was Arabella Tantavul, though the shocking change wrought in her features and the black dye in her hair had disguised her so effectively that I should not have known her.

"We have come to take you home, *ma pauvre,*" he repeated. "Your husband—"

"My husband!" her reply was half a scream. "Dear God, as if I had a husband—"

"And the little one who needs you," he continued. "You cannot leave them thus, Madame."

"I can't? Ah, that's where you're wrong, Doctor, I can never see my baby again, in this world or the next. Please go away and forget you've seen me, or I shall have to drown myself—I've tried it twice al-

ready, but the first time I was rescued, and the second time my courage failed. But if you try to take me back, or if you tell Dennis you saw me—"

"Tell me, Madame," he broke in, "was not your flight caused by a visitation from the dead?"

Her faded brown eyes—eyes that had been such a startling contrast to her pale-gold hair—widened. "How did you know?" she whispered.

"*Tiens,* one may make surmises. Will not you tell us just what happened? I think there is a way out of your difficulties."

"No, no, there isn't; there can't be!" Her head drooped listlessly. "He planned his work too well; all that's left for me is death—and damnation afterward."

"But if there were a way—if I could show it to you?"

"Can you repeal the laws of God?"

"I am a very clever person, Madame. Perhaps I can accomplish an evasion, if not an absolute repeal. Now tell us, how and when did Monsieur your late but not at all lamented uncle come to you?"

"The night before—before I went away. I woke about midnight, thinking I heard a cry from Dennie's nursery. When I reached the room where he was sleeping I saw my uncle's face glaring at me through the window. It seemed to be illuminated by a sort of inward hellish light, for it stood out against the darkness like a jack-o'-lantern, and it smiled an awful smile at me. 'Arabella,' it said, and I could see its thin dead lips writhe back as if all the teeth were burning-hot, 'I've come to tell you that your marriage is a mockery and a lie. The man you married is your brother, and the child you bore is doubly illegitimate. You can't continue living with them, Arabella. That would be an even greater sin. You must leave them right away, or'—once more his lips crept back until his teeth were bare—'or I shall come to visit you each night, and when the baby has grown old enough to understand I'll tell him who his parents really are. Take your choice, my daughter. Leave them and let me go back to the grave, or stay and see me every

night and know that I will tell your son when he is old enough to understand. If I do it he will loathe and hate you; curse the day you bore him.'

"'And you'll promise never to come near Dennis or the baby if I go?' I asked.

"He promised, and I staggered back to bed, where I fell fainting.

"Next morning when I wakened I was sure it had been a bad dream, but when I looked at Dennis and my own reflection in the glass I knew it was no dream, but a dreadful visitation from the dead.

"Then I went mad. I tried to kill my baby, and when Dennis stopped me I watched my chance to run away, came over to New York and took to this." She looked significantly around the miserable room. "I knew they'd never look for Arabella Tantavul among the city's whores; I was safer from pursuit right here than if I'd been in Europe or China."

"But, Madame," de Grandin's voice was jubilant with shocked reproof, "that which you saw was nothing but a dream; a most unpleasant dream, I grant, but still a dream. Look in my eyes, if you please!"

She raised her eyes to his, and I saw his pupils widen as a cat's do in the dark, saw a line of white outline the cornea, and, responsive to his piercing gaze, beheld her brown eyes set in a fixed stare, first as if in fright, then with a glaze almost like that of death.

"Attend me, Madame Arabella," he commanded softly. "You are tired—*grand Dieu*, how tired you are! You have suffered greatly, but you are about to rest. Your memory of that night is gone; so is all memory of the things which have transpired since. You will move and eat and sleep as you are bidden, but of what takes place around you till I bid you wake you will retain no recollection. Do you hear me, Madame Arabella?"

"I hear," she answered softly in a small tired voice.

"*Très bon*. Lie down, my little poor one. Lie down to rest and dreams of love. Sleep, rest, dream and forget.

"Will you be good enough to 'phone to Dr. Wyckoff?" he asked me. "We shall place her in his sanitorium, wash this *sacré* dye from her hair and nurse her back to health; then when all is ready we can bear her home and have her take up life and love where she left off. No one shall be the wiser. This chapter of her life is closed and sealed for ever.

"Each day I'll call upon her and renew hypnotic treatments that she may simulate the mild but curable mental case which we shall tell the good Wyckoff she is. When finally I release her from hypnosis her mind will be entirely cleared of that bad dream that nearly wrecked her happiness."

Arabella Tantavul lay on the sofa in her charming boudoir, an orchid negligée about her slender shoulders, an eiderdown rug tucked round her feet and knees. Her wedding ring was once more on her finger. Pale with a pallor not to be disguised by the most skillfully applied cosmetics, and with deep violet crescents underneath her amber eyes, she lay back listlessly, drinking in the cheerful warmth that emanated from the fire of apple-logs that snapped and crackled on the hearth. Two months of rest at Dr. Wyckoff's sanitorium had cleansed the marks of dissipation from her face, and the ministrations of beauticians had restored the pale-gold luster to her hair, but the listlessness that followed her complete breakdown was still upon her like the weakness from a fever.

"I can't remember anything about my illness, Dr. Trowbridge," she told me with a weary little smile, "but vaguely I connect it with some dreadful dream I had. And"—she wrinkled her smooth forehead in an effort at remembering—"I think I had a rather dreadful dream last night, but—"

"Ah-*ha*?" de Grandin leant abruptly forward in his chair. "What was it that you dreamed, Madame?"

"I—don't—know," she answered slowly. "Odd, isn't it, how you can remember that a dream was so unpleasant, yet not recall its details?" Somehow, I connect it with Uncle Warburg; but—"

"*Parbleu,* do you say so? Has he returned? *Ah bah,* he makes me to be so mad, that one!"

"It is time we went, my friend," de Grandin told me as the tall clock in the hall beat out its tenth deliberate stroke; "we have important duties to perform."

"For goodness' sake," I protested, "at this hour o' night?"

"Precisely. At Monsieur Tantavul's I shall expect a visitor tonight, and—we must be ready for him.

"Is Madame Arabella sleeping?" he asked Dennis as he answered our ring at the door.

"Like a baby," answered the young husband. "I've been sitting by her all evening, and I don't believe she even turned in bed."

"And you did keep the window closed, as I requested?"

"Yes, sir; closed and latched."

"*Bien.* Await us here, *mon brave;* we shall rejoin you presently."

He led the way to Arabella's bedroom, removed the wrappings from a bulky parcel he had lugged from our house, and displayed the object thus disclosed with an air of inordinate pride. "Behold him," he commanded gleefully. "Is he not magnificent?"

"Why—what the devil?—it's nothing but an ordinary window screen," I answered.

"A window screen, I grant, my friend; but not an ordinary one. Can not you see it is of copper?"

"Well—"

"*Parbleu,* but I should say it is well," he grinned. "Observe him, how he works."

From his kit bag he produced a roll of insulated wire, an electrical transformer, and some tools. Working quickly he passe-patouted the screen's wooded frame with electrician's tape, then plugged a wire in a nearby lamp socket, connected it with the transformer, and from the latter led a double strand of cotton-wrapped wire to the screen. This he clipped firmly to the copper meshes and led a third strand to

the metal grille of the heat register. Last of all he filled a bulb-syringe with water and sprayed the screen, repeating the performance till it sparkled like a cobweb in the morning sun. "And now, *Monsieur le Revenant,*" he chuckled as he finished, "I damn think all is ready for your warm reception!"

For something like an hour we waited, then he tiptoed to the bed and bent over Arabella.

"Madame!"

The girl stirred slightly, murmuring some half-audible response, and:

"In half an hour you will rise," he told her. "You will put your robe on and stand by the window, but on no account will you go near it or lay hands on it. Should anyone address you from outside you will reply, but you will not remember what you say or what is said to you."

He motioned me to follow, and we left the room, taking station in the hallway just outside.

How long we waited I have no accurate idea. Perhaps it was an hour, perhaps less; at any rate the silent vigil seemed unending, and I raised my hand to stifle back a yawn when:

"Yes, Uncle Warburg, I can hear you," we heard Arabella saying softly in the room beyond the door.

We tiptoed to the entry: Arabella stood before the window, and from beyond it glared the face of Warburg Tantavul.

It was dead, there was no doubt about that. In sunken cheek and pinched-in nose and yellowish-gray skin there showed the evidence of death and early putrefaction, but dead though it was, it was also animated with a dreadful sort of life. The eyes were glaring horribly, the lips were red as though they had been painted with fresh blood.

"You hear me, do you?" it demanded. "Then listen, girl; you broke your bargain with me, now I'm come to keep my threat: every time you kiss your husband"—a shriek of bitter laughter cut his words, and his staring eyes half closed with hellish merri-

ment—"or the child you love so well, my shadow will be on you. You've kept me out thus far, but some night I'll get in, and—"

The lean dead jaw dropped, then snapped up as if lifted by sheer will-power, and the whole expression of the corpse-face changed. Surprise, incredulous delight, anticipation as before a feast were pictured on it. "Why"—its cachinnating laughter sent a chill up my spine—"why your window's open! You've changed the screen and I can enter!"

Slowly, like a child's balloon stirred by a vagrant wind, the awful thing moved closer to the window. Closer to the screen it came, and Arabella gave ground before it and put up her hands to shield her eyes from the sight of its hellish grin of triumph.

"*Saprīsti,*" swore de Grandin softly. "Come on, my old and evil one, come but a little nearer—"

The dead thing floated nearer. Now its mocking mouth and shriveled, pointed nose were almost pressed against the copper meshes of the screen; now they began to filter through the meshes like a wisp of fog—

There was a blinding flash of blue-white flame, the sputtering gush of fusing metal, a wild, despairing shriek that ended ere it fairly started in a sob of mortal torment, and the sharp and acrid odor of burned flesh!

"Arabella—darling—is she all right?" Dennis Tantavul came charging up the stairs. "I thought I heard a scream—"

"You did, my friend," de Grandin answered, "but I do not think that you will hear its repetition unless you are unfortunate enough to go to hell when you have died."

"What was it?"

"*Eh bien,* one who thought himself a clever jester pressed his jest too far. Meantime, look to Madame your wife. See how peacefully she lies upon her bed. Her time for evil dreams is past. Be kind to her, *mon jeune.* Do not forget, a woman loves to have a lover, even though he is her husband." He bent and kissed

the sleeping girl upon the brow. "*Au 'voir,* my little lovely one," he murmured. Then, to me:

"Come, Trowbridge, my good friend. Our work is finished here. Let us leave them to their happiness."

An hour later in the study he faced me across the fire. "Perhaps you'll deign to tell me what it's all about now?" I asked sarcastically.

"Perhaps I shall," he answered with a grin. "You will recall that this annoying Monsieur Who Was Dead Yet Not Dead, appeared and grinned most horrifyingly through windows several times? Always from the outside, please remember. At the hospital, where he nearly caused the *guarde-malade* to have a fit, he laughed and mouthed at her through the glass skylight. When he first appeared and threatened Madame Arabella he spoke to her through the window—"

"But her window was open," I protested.

"Yes, but screened," he answered with a smile. "Screened with iron wire, if you please."

"What difference did that make? Tonight I saw him almost force his features through—"

"A copper screen," he supplied. "Tonight the screen was copper; me, I saw to that."

Then, seeing my bewilderment: "Iron is the most earthy of all metals," he explained. "It and its derivative, steel, are so instinct with the earth's essence that creatures of the spirit cannot stand its nearness. The legends tell us that when Solomon's Temple was constructed no tool of iron was employed, because even the friendly *jinn* whose help he had enlisted could not perform their tasks in close proximity to iron. The witch can be detected by the pricking of an iron pin—never by a pin of brass.

"Very well. When first I thought about the evil dead one's reappearances I noted that each time he stared outside the window. Glass, apparently, he could not pass—and glass contains a modicum of iron. Iron window-wire stopped him. 'He are not a true ghost, then,' I inform me. 'They are things of spirit

only, they are thoughts made manifest. This one is a thing of hate, but also of some physical material as well; he is composed in part of emanations from the body which lies putrefying in the grave. *Voilà*, if he have physical properties he can be destroyed by physical means.'

"And so I set my trap. I procured a screen of copper through which he could effect an entrance, but I charged it with electricity. I increased the potential of the current with a step-up transformer to make assurance doubly sure, and then I waited for him like the spider for the fly, waited for him to come through that charged screen and electrocute himself. Yes, certainly."

"But is he really destroyed?" I asked dubiously.

"As the candle-flame when one has blown it out. He was—how do you say it?—short-circuited. No malefactor in the chair of execution ever died more thoroughly than that one, I assure you."

"It seems queer, though, that he should come back from the grave to haunt those poor kids and break up their marriage when he really wanted it," I murmured wonderingly.

"Wanted it? Yes, as the trapper wants the bird to step within his snare."

"But he gave them such a handsome present when little Dennis was born—"

"*La, la,* my good, kind, trusting friend, you are *naïf*. The money I gave Madame Arabella was my own. I put it in that envelope."

"Then what was the real message?"

"It was a dreadful thing, my friend; a dreadful, wicked thing. The night that Monsieur Dennis left that package with me I determined that the old one meant to do him injury, so I steamed the cover open and read what lay within. It made plain the things which Dennis thought that he remembered.

"Long, long ago Monsieur Tantavul lived in San Francisco. His wife was twenty years his junior, and a pretty, joyous thing she was. She bore him two fine children, a boy and girl, and on them she bestowed

the love which he could not appreciate. His surliness, his evil temper, his constant fault-finding drove her to distraction, and finally she sued for divorce.

"But he forestalled her. He spirited the children away, then told his wife the plan of his revenge. He would take them to some far off place and bring them up believing they were cousins. Then when they had attained full growth he would induce them to marry and keep the secret of their relationship until they had a child, then break the dreadful truth to them. Thereafter they would live on, bound together by their fear of censure, or perhaps of criminal prosecution, but their consciences would cause them endless torment, and the very love they had for each other would be like fetters forged of white-hot steel, holding them in odious bondage from which there was no escape. The sight of their children would be a reproach to them, the mere thought of love's sweet communion would cause revulsion to the point of nausea.

"When he had told her this his wife went mad. He thrust her into an asylum and left her there to die while he came with his babies to New Jersey, where he reared them together, and by guile and craftiness nurtured their love, knowing that when finally they married he would have his so vile revenge."

"But, great heavens, man, they're brother and sister!" I exclaimed in horror.

"Perfectly," he answered coolly. "They are also man and woman, husband and wife, and father and mother."

"But—but—" I stammered, utterly at loss for words.

"But me no buts, good friend. I know what you would say. Their child? *Ah bah*, did not the kings of ancient times repeatedly take their own sisters to wife, and were not their offspring sound and healthy? But certainly. Did not both Darwin and Wallace fail to find foundation for the doctrine that cross-breeding between healthy people with clean blood is productive of inferior progeny? Look at little Monsieur Dennis. Were you not blinded by your silly, unrealistic

training and tradition—did you not know his parents' near relationship—you would not hesitate to pronounce him an unusually fine, healthy child.

"Besides," he added earnestly, "they love each other, not as brother and sister, but as man and woman. He is her happiness, she is his, and little Monsieur Dennis is the happiness of both. Why destroy this joy—*le bon Dieu* knows they earned it by a joyless childhood—when I can preserve it for them by simply keeping silent?"

# Stealthy Death

## 1. The Second Murder

"Parade—*rest!* Sound off!" Playing in quick time, the academy band marched across the field, executed a perfect countermarch and returned to its post at the right of the ordered ranks of cadets. As the bandsmen came to a halt the trumpets of the drum corps, gay with fringed tabards, tolled forth the slow, appealing notes of retreat, and: "Battalion—*'tention!* Present—*arms!*" came the adjutant's command as *The Star-Spangled Banner* sounded and the national color floated slowly from its masthead.

Jules de Grandin's white-chamois gloved right hand cupped itself before his right ear in a perfect French army salute, his narrow, womanish shoulders squared back and his little, pointed chin thrust up and forward as the evening sun picked half a thousand answering beams from the burnished bayonets on the presented rifles. *"Parfait, exquis; magnifique!"* he applauded. *"C'est très beau,* that, my friend. You have here a fine aggregation of young men. Certainly."

I nodded absently. My thoughts were not on the stirring spectacle of the parade, nor upon the excellence of Westover Military Academy's student body. I was dreading the ordeal which lay before me when, the parade dismissed, I must tell Harold Pancoast of his father's awful death. "He'll take it better than you, Doctor Trowbridge!" the widow had whispered between tremulous lips, and:

"Poor boy, this is tragic!" the headmaster had told me deprecatingly. "Won't you wait till after parade,

Doctor? Pancoast is Battalion Adjutant, and I think it would be kinder to let him complete his duties at parade before we break the news."

"Confound it!" I complained bitterly more than once; "why did they have to give me this job? The family lawyer, or——"

"*Mais non,* my friend," de Grandin comforted. "It is the way of life. We are born in others' pain; we perish in our own, and between beginning and end stands the physician. We help them into the world, we watch beside their sickbeds, we make their exits into immortality as painless as possible—at the last we stay to comfort those who remain. These are the obligations of our trade." He sighed. "It is, *hélas,* too true. Had kindly heaven given me a son I should have sternly forbid him to study medicine—and I should most assuredly have cracked his neck had he done otherwise!"

The last gold rays of the dying October sun were slanting through the red and russet leaves of the tree-lined avenue leading to the administration building as we waited in the headmaster's office for young Pancoast. At last he came, sauntering easily along the red-brick walk, plainly in no haste to answer the official summons, laughing as only carefree youth can laugh, and looking with more than friendly regard into the face of his companion. Indeed, she was a sight to brighten any eye. A wistful, seeking look was on her features, her fine dark hair lay round her delicate, pale face like a somber nimbus, and the Chinese coat of quilted black satin she wore against the evening chill was lined and collared with soft orange-pink which set off her brunette pallor to perfection. "*Parbleu,* he chooses nicely, that one," de Grandin approved as the lad bade his companion adieu with a smart military salute and turned to mount the steps to the headmaster's sanctum.

I drew a deep breath and braced myself, but I might have known the boy would take the blow like the gentleman he was. "Dead—*my* Dad?" he mur-

mured slowly, unbelievingly as I concluded my evil tidings. "How? When?"

"Last night, *mon pauvre,*" de Grandin took the conversation from me. "Just when, we do not know, but that he met his death by foul play there is no room for doubting. The steel of the assassin struck him from behind—a sneaking, cowardly blow, but a mighty one, *mon brave*—so that he died instantly, without pain or struggle. It is for us—you and us—to find the one responsible and give him up to justice. Yes. Certainly. You accept the challenge? Good! Bravely spoken, like the soldier and the gentleman you are; I do salute you—" He drew himself to rigid attention, raising his hand with precise military courtesy.

Admiringly, I saw the Gallic subtlety with which he had addressed the lad. Had I been telling him, I should have minimized the tragic aspects of his father's death as much as possible. The Frenchman, on the contrary, had thrown them brutally before the boy, and then, with sure psychology, diverted thoughts of grief and horror by holding out the lure of vengeance.

"You're right!" the youngster answered, his chin thrust forth belligerently. "I don't know who'd want to harm my Dad—he never hurt a fly that didn't bite him first—but when we find the one who did it, we—by God, sir, we'll hang him high as Haman!"

Arrangements were quickly made. Indefinite leave was granted Harold, and I parked my car before his dormitory while he completed hurried packing for the journey to his desolated home.

"Strikes me he's taking an unconscionable time to stuff his bags," I grumbled when we had waited upward of an hour. "Perhaps he's broken down, de Grandin—I've seen sturdier lads than he collapse like deflated balloons in similar circumstances—will you excuse me while I run in and see if he's all right?"

The little Frenchman nodded and I hastened to the upper-story room young Pancoast shared with a classmate.

"Pancoast? No, sir," his roommate replied to my hurried inquiry. "He came in about an hour ago and told me his trouble, then stuffed his gear into his kit bag there"—he indicated the great pigskin valise resting in a corner of the room—"and said he had to see someone before he left for home. I thought perhaps he'd decided to go on without his grip and would send for it later. Terrible thing, his father's death, wasn't it, sir?"

"Quite," I answered. "You've no idea where he went, or why, I suppose?"

The lad colored slightly. "I—" he began, then stopped, embarrassed.

"Out with it!" I ordered curtly. "His mother's on the verge of collapse at home, and he's needed there. It's the better part of three hours' steady drive, too."

"I'm not sure, sir," the cadet answered, evidently of divided mind whether to hold fast the confidence imposed in him or break the school's unwritten law in deference to the emergency; "I'm not *certain* where he went, but—well, he's been pretty spoony on a *femme* ever since the semester started, and—maybe—he ran over to say good-bye. But it shouldn't take him this long, and—"

"All right," I broke in brusquely, "never mind the details. Where's this young woman likely to be found? We're in a hurry, son." I bent and seized the waiting kit-bag as I spoke, then paused significantly at the door.

"I haven't her address, sir," the lad replied, "Panny never mentioned it to me, but you'll be likely to find him down in Rogation Walk—that's the little lane south of the campus by the old Military Road, you know—they usually meet there between retreat and tattoo."

"Very well, I'll hunt him there," I answered. "Thanks for the information. Good-night."

Harold Pancoast lay as he had fallen, his uniform cap, top down, on the bricks of the shaded walk, the black-braided collar and gray shoulders of his blouse

stained rusty red. Transversely across the back of his head, where hair-line joined the neck, gaped a long incised wound from which blood, already beginning to congeal, was welling freely, and in which there showed a trace of the grayish-white of cerebro-spinal fluid. His hands were stretched above him and clenched convulsively. The blow which struck him down must have been a brutally powerful one, delivered with some sharp, heavy instrument and wielded with monstrous force, for it had hacked its way half through the atlas of his spine and, glancing upward, cut deeply in the lower occiput. No need to ask if he were dead; the guillotine could scarcely have worked with more efficiency upon the poor lad's neck.

As I gazed at him in horror another horror crept over me. Though I had not inspected his father's injuries, Parnell, the coroner's physician, had described them with the ghoulish gusto of his trade, and there before me on the son lay the very reproduction of the wound which cost the father's life not twenty hours earlier!

"Good heavens!" I gasped, and my pounding heartbeats almost stopped my breath. "This is devilish!"

I turned and raced along the quiet, tree-rimmed walk in search of Jules de Grandin.

## 2. The Third Murder

"Sure, Doctor de Grandin, sōr, 'tis th' divil's own puzzle we've got here, an' no mistake," confided Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello as he knocked an inch of ash from his cigar and turned worried blue eyes on the diminutive Frenchman. "First off, we've got th' murther o' this here now Misther Pancoast—an' th' devil's own murther it were, too, sor—an' now we've got th' case of his kid to consider; though, th' blessèd saints be praised, *that* case is what ye might call academic, since it happened outside me jurisdiction en-

tirely, an' catchin' o' th' scoundrel as done it is none o' me official business, unless, belike—"

Jules de Grandin nodded shortly. "It is very exceedingly belike, indeed, my friend," he interrupted. "Consider, if you please. What are the facts?" He raised his small left hand and spread the fingers fanwise, then counted on them in succession. "First we have this Monsieur Pancoast the elder, a fine and honest gentleman, if all reports be true. Very good. Night before last he leaves the dinner table for a meeting of his lodge, and drives off in his motor car. He shows no sign of worriment at the meeting; he is his usual smiling self. Very well. Precisely at eleven o'clock he leaves, for they have worked the third degree, and food is being served, but he is on a diet and can not stay to eat. That is too bad. Two fellow members see him enter his sedan and drive away toward home. What happens afterward we do not surely know; but in the morning he is found beside the door of his garage, face downward on the ground, and weltering in blood. His neck is chopped across the back, his spine is all but severed and the instrument of death has cloven through his skull and struck the *corpus dentatum* of his brain."

He nodded solemnly. "'Why has this thing been done?' I ask. To find the criminal in this case means we must find the motive, but where can it be found? We can not say. This Monsieur Pancoast is a most estimable citizen, a member of the church and of the Rotary Club, a bank director, a one-time city councilman. Yet he is dead—murdered. The case is veiled in mystery.

"*Eh bien,* if the father's case is obscure, what shall we think of the son's? A fine young man, who had harmed no one, and whom no one could reasonably wish to harm. Yet he, too, is dead—murdered—and murdered with the same strange technique as that which killed his father.

"Attend me: You, *Sergent,* have seen much killing, both in war and peace; Trowbridge, my friend, you are a surgeon and anatomist; can either of you match

the wounds which slew these poor ones in all of your experience?"

I shook my head. "Not I," I answered. "I can understand how a blow might be delivered in such a way as to cut the tip of the spine, or how the base of the skull could be cut through, but these wounds are beyond me. Parnell described Pancoast's injuries to me, and it seems they were identical with Harold's. His opinion was that no such upward-slanting blow could have been struck unless the victim lay prone, and even then the weapon used would have to be curved, like a carpenter's adz, for instance, to permit the course these incisions followed."

"*Ah bah,* Parnell, he is an old woman in trousers!" de Grandin shot back. "Better would he exercise such talents as he has in a butcher shop, I think. Consider him: he says the victim must be prone. *Grand dieu des cochons!* Did we not examine the poor *petit Monsieur?* But certainly. And did we not find him stretched face downward on the earth? Yes, again. But with his tight-clenched hands above his head, as though he clutched at nothing while he fell? Of course. His attitude was one of having fallen, and he who lies upon the earth must find it impossible to fall. *Voilà,* he was killed standing; for had he lain flat upon the ground when he was struck, he must inevitably have writhed in reflex death-agony when that blow shore through his spine and skull; but standing he would have made a single wild clutch for support, then stiffened as he fell upon his face. His nerves and muscles were disposed to hold him upright, and when death comes from sudden wounding of the brain, reaction of rigidity is almost instant. You have seen it, *Sergent;* so have I. A soldier in the charge, by example, is drilled through the head by a rifle ball. He staggers on a step or two, perhaps, and then he falls, or it is better to say he topples forward, stiff and straight as though at attention, and hours afterward his poor, dead hands still grasp his musket tightly. But if that same man lies on the earth when he meets death that way, the chances are nine hundred in a

thousand that he will twist and writhe, at least in one final spasm, before he stiffens. But certainly. It is for that reason that the condemned one is strapped tight to the cradle of the guillotine. If he were not, the reflex nervous action consequent upon decapitation—which is no more than a sudden injury to the spine, my friends—would surely cause him to roll sidewise on the scaffold floor, and that would rob the execution of its dignity. Yes, it is undoubtlessly so."

"Well, be gob, sor, ye're makin' th' dose harder to take than ever," Costello muttered. "First ye tell us that th' same felly kilt th' both o' them; then ye demonstrate beyant th' shadder o' a doubt that no one livin' could 'a' struck th' blows as kilt 'em. What's th' answer, if anny?"

"*Hélas,* as yet there is none," de Grandin returned. "Tomorrow, when the funeral has been held, I shall investigate, and probably I shall be wiser when I finish. Until that time we only know that some one for some motive as yet unguessed has done away with son and father, and from the difficult technique of both the murders, I am most confident it was the same assassin who perpetrated them. As for the motive——"

"That's just it, sor," Costello interrupted. "There ain't none."

"*Précisément, mon vieux,* as I was saying, this seeming absence of motive may prove most helpful to us in our researches. It is better to be lost in the midst of impenetrable night than to be witch-led by will-o'-the-wisps. So in this case. With no false leads, we commence from the beginning—start from scratch, as your athletes say. Yes, it is better so."

"Ye—ye mean to say because there's nayther hide nor hair o' motive, nor rime nor reason to these here killins', th' case is easier?" Costello demanded.

"You have removed the words from my lips, *mon brave.*"

"Glory be to God—'tisn't Jerry Costello who'd like to see what ye'd be afther callin' a har-rd case, then!" the Irishman exclaimed.

The little Frenchman grinned delightedly. "Forgive me if I seem to jerk your leg, my old one," he apolized. "Let us gather here tomorrow at this time, and we shall talk more straightly to the point, for we shall then know what we know not now."

"Be gob, 'tis meself that's hopin' so," Costello responded with none too much optimism in his tone.

A motorcade of black and shining limousines was ranked beneath the Lombardy poplars which stood before the Pancoast house. Frock-coated gentlemen and ladies in subdued attire ascended the front steps, late floral deliveries were unostentatiously shunted to the kitchen door and signed for by a black-coated, gray-gloved gentleman. The air in the big drawing-room was heavy with the scent of carnations and tuberoses.

"Good afternoon, Doctor Trowbridge; how are you, Doctor de Grandin?" Coroner Martin, officiating in his private capacity of funeral director, met us in the hall. "There are two seats over by that window," he added in an undertone. "Take my advice and get them while you can, the air in here is thick enough to choke you."

"*Bien merci,*" de Grandin murmured, treading an assortment of outstretched feet as he wove his way between the rows of folding chairs to the vacant seats beside the window. Arrived, he perched on the extreme forward rim of the chair, his silk hat held tenderly with both hands on his knees, his little, round blue eyes fixed unwinkingly upon the twin caskets of polished mahogany, as though he would drag their secrets from them by very force of will.

The funeral rites began. The clergyman, a man in early middle life who liked to think that Beecher's mantle had fallen on him, was more than generous with his words. Unrelated and entirely inapposite excerpts from Scripture were sandwiched between readings from the poets, his voice broke and quavered artistically as he spoke feelingly of "these our dear de-

parted brethren;" when the time came for final prayer I was on the verge of sleep.

"*Capote d'une anguille,*" de Grandin murmured angrily, "does he take the good God for a fool? Must he be telling him these poor ones met their deaths by murder? Does *le bon Dieu* not yet know what every one in Harrisonville already knows by heart? Bid him say 'Amen' and cease, Friend Trowbridge; my neck is breaking; I can no longer bow my head!"

"*S-s-s-sh!*" I ordered in a venomous whisper, reinforcing my order with a sharp dig of my elbow in his ribs. "Be quiet; you're irreverent!"

"*Mordieu,* I am worse; I am impatient," he breathed in my ear, and raised his head to cast a look of far from friendly import on the praying divine.

"*Ah!*" I heard him breathe between his teeth. "*A-a-ah!*" Abruptly he bowed his head again, but I could see his sidelong glance was fixed on someone seated by the farther window.

When the interminable service was at length concluded and the guests had filed out, de Grandin made excuse to stay. The motor cars had left, and only one or two assistants of the mortician remained to set the funeral room in order, but still he lingered in the hall. "This cabinet, my friend," he drew me toward an elaborate piece of furniture finished in vermilion lacquer and golf-leaf, "is it not a thing of beauty? And this"—he pointed to another piece of richly inlaid brass and tortoise-shell—"surely this is a work of art."

I shrugged impatiently. "Do you think it good taste to take inventory of the furniture at such a time?" I asked acidly.

"One wonders how they came here, and when," he answered, ignoring my remark; then, as a servant hurried by with brush and dustpan, "Can you tell me whence these came?" he asked.

The maid, a woman well past middle life, gave him a look which would have withered any one but Jules de Grandin, but he met her frown with a smile of such frank artlessness that she relented despite herself.

"Yes, sir," she returned. "Mr. Carlin—Mr. Pancoast, sir—God rest him!—brought them home with him when he returned from India. We used to have a ruck of such-like things, but he sold most all of 'em; these two are all that's left."

"Indeed, then Monsieur Pancoast was once a traveler?"

"Well, I don't rightly know about that, sir. I only know the talk around the house; you see, I've only been here twenty years, and he came back long before that. It's only what Mrs. Hussy—she used to cook here, and had worked for the family long before I came—it's only what she told me that I know for certain, sir, and even that's just hearsay."

"*Bien,* quite so, *exactement,*" he answered thoughtfully and slipped a folded bill into her hand, "And can you by some happy chance tell one where he may find this queen among cooks, this peerless Madame Hussé?"

"Yes, sir, that I can; she's living at the Bellefield Home. She bought an an-uty and——"

"A which?" de Grandin asked.

"An an-uty—a steady income, sir. She bought it when she left service and went to live at the home. She's past eighty years old, and——"

"*Parbleu,* then we must hurry if we wish to speak with her!" de Grandin interrupted with a bow. "I thank you for the information.

"Expect me when I return, my friend," he told me as we reached the street. "I may be early or I may be late; that depends entirely upon this Madame Hussé's powers as a conversationist. At any rate, it would be wiser if you did not wait for me at dinner."

It was fortunate we did not wait on him, for nine o'clock had struck and dinner was long over when he came bursting in the door, his little round blue eyes alight with excitement, a smile of satisfaction on his lips. "Has the good Costello yet arrived?" he asked as he looked hastily around the study as though he half-

suspected the great Irishman might be hidden beneath the couch or desk.

"Not yet," I answered, but—" The ringing of the doorbell cut me short, and the big detective entered. A parenthesis of worry-wrinkles lay between his brows, and the look he gave de Grandin was almost one of appeal.

"Well, Doctor de Grandin, sor," he remarked, brightening as he noted the little Frenchman's expression, "what's in th' news-bag? There's sumpin' up yer sleeve beside yer elbow, I can see it be th' look o' ye."

"You have right, my friend," de Grandin answered. "Did not I tell you that the absence of a motive was a cheerful sign for us? But yes. Attend me!

"At Monsieur Pancoast's late abode this afternoon I chanced to spy two objects of *vertu* the like of which we do not ordinarily find outside of museums. Jules de Grandin, he has traveled much, and what he knows he knows. The importation of such things is rare, for they are worth their weight in gold and—a thousand pardons if I give offense—Americans as a class are not yet educated to their beauty. Only those who have lived long in the East appreciate them, and few have brought them home. Therefore I asked a most excellently garrulous maidservant who was passing if she could tell me whence they came, and though she knew but little she gave to me the clue for which I searched, for she said first that Monsieur Pancoast brought them from India—which was not so—and that she had heard as much from a former cook which was indubitably true.

"*Alors,* to Bellefield I did go to interview this Madame Hussé who had once been cook for Monsieur Pancoast, and she did tell me much. *Mais oui,* she told me a very great deal, indeed.

"She told me, by example, that he had studied for the ministry as a young man, and had gone to preach the Gospel in Burma. She had known him from a lad, and much surprised she was when he decided on the missioner's vocation, for he had been a—how do you

say? a gay dog?—among the ladies, and such behavior as his and the minister's black coat did not seem to her in harmony.

"*Eh bien,* there is no sinner so benighted he can not see the light if he will but look toward it, and so it was with this one. Young Pancoast assumed the ministry and off he went to battle with the Evil One and teach the heathen to wear clothes.

"Now what transpired in the East she does not know; but that he returned home again and not with empty pockets, she knows full well, for great was the surprise of every one when the erstwhile poor clergyman returned and set himself up in business. And he did prosper mightily. *Tiens,* it was the wonder of the city how everything he touched seemed transmuted into gold. Yes. And then, though well along in years for marrying, he wedded Mademoiselle Griggsby, whose father was most wealthy and whose social standing was above reproach. By her he had one son, whose name was Harold. Does not an explanation, or at least a theory, jump to your eye?"

"Because he married Griggsby's daughter an' had a son named Harold?" Costello asked with heavy sarcasm. "Well, no sor; I can't say as how me eye is troubled with anny explanation jumpin' in it yet awhile."

"*Zut,* it is permissible to be stupid, but you abuse the privilege!" the little Frenchman snapped. "You know something of the East, I take it? Monsieur Kipling has neatly phrased it:

"'. . . somewheres East of Suez,
Where the best is like the worst,
And there ain't no Ten Commandments—'

"Ah? You begin to perceive? In that sun-flogged land of Burma the best *is* like the worst, or becomes so shortly after arrival. The white man's morale—and morals—break down, the saint becomes a sinner overnight. The native men are worse than despicable, the native women—*eh bien,* who suffers hunger in an orchard or dies of thirst amid running brooks, my

friends? Yes, strange things happen in the East. The laws of man may be enforced, but those of God are flouted. The man who is respectable at home has no shame in betraying any woman whose skin bears the sun's kissmarks or at turning any shabby deal which lines his purse with gold and takes him home again in affluence. No. And *Pencoast quit the ministry in Burma.* A Latin or a Greek or Anglican priest may not quit his holy orders unless he is ecclesiastically unfrocked, but clergymen of the Protestant sects may lay their office down as lightly as a businessman resigning his position. Pancoast did. He said as much to Madame Hussé when once he had a bursting-out of confidence. Remember, she had known him from a little lad.

"Now, what have you to say?"

"Well, sor," Costello answered slowly, "I know ye're speakin' truth about th' East. I served me time in th' Philippines, an' seen many a man go soft in morals underneath that sun, which ain't so different from th' sun in Burma. I'm afther thinkin', but—"

"There is a friend of Monsieur Pancoast, a boyhood chum, who went in business with him after his return," de Grandin broke in. "By good chance it may be that you know him; his name is Dalky, and he was associated with Pancoast until some ten years since, when they had a quarrel and dissolved their partnership. This Monsieur Dalky, perhaps, can be of ser—"

The strident ringing of the telephone cut through his narrative.

"It's you they want," I told Costello, handing him the instrument.

"Hullo? Sure—been here fer—Howly Mither, is it so? I'll be right over!"

He clashed the monophone into its hooks and turned on us with blazing eyes.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "here's wor-rk fer us, an' no time to delay. Whilst we've been settin' here like three dam' fools, talkin' o' this an' that, there's murther bein' done. 'Tis Missis Pancoast. They got

her. Th' Lord help us—they've wiped out the whole family, sors, right beneath our very noses!"

### 3. The Message on the Card

The servant we had talked with after the funeral met us in the hall when we reached the Pancoast home. "No, sir," she answered Costello's inquiries, "I can't tell you much about it. Mrs. Pancoast came back from the cemet'ry in a terrible state—not crying nor taking on, but sort o' all frozen up inside, you know. I didn't hear her speak a word, except once. She'd gone into her bow-duer upstairs and laid down on the couch, and along about four o'clock I thought maybe a cup o' tea might help her some, so I went up with it. She'd got up, and was standing looking at a picture o' Mr. Harold in his uniform that hung on the wall—an almost life-sized portrait it is. Just as I come into the room—I didn't knock, for I didn't want to disturb her if she was sleeping—she said, 'O, my baby; my beloved baby boy!' Just that and nothing else, sir. No crying or anything, you understand. Then she turned and seen me standing there with the tea, and said, 'Thank you, Jane, put it on the table, please,' and went back and lay down on the couch. She was calm and collected as she always was, but I could see the heart of her was breaking inside her breast, all the same.

"She didn't come down to supper, of course, so I took some toast and eggs up to her. The tea I'd brought earlier was standing stone-cold on the table, sir; she hadn't poured a drop of it. When I went in she thanked me for the supper and had me set it on the table, and I left.

"It was something after nine o'clock, maybe, when the young woman called."

"Eh? A young woman? Do you tell me? This is of interest. Describe her, if you please," de Grandin ordered.

"I can't say as I can, sir," the woman answered.

"She wasn't very tall, and she wasn't exactly what you'd call short, either. She was just medium, not tall nor short, thin nor fat. Her hair, as far as I could see, was dark, and her face was rather pale. I guess you'd call her pretty, though there was a sort o' queer, goggle-eyed expression to her that made me think—well, sir, you know how young folks are these days, what with Prohibition and cocktail parties and all—if I'd smelled anything, I'd have said she'd been drinking too much, but there wasn't any odor of alcohol about her, though she did have some kind o' strong, sweet perfume. She asked to see Mrs. Pancoast, and when I said I didn't think she could be seen, she said it was most urgent; that Mrs. Pancoast would surely see her if I'd take her card up. So she handed me a little note in an envelope—not just a visiting-card, sir—and I took it up, though I didn't feel right about doing it.

"Mrs. Pancoast didn't want to be bothered at first; told me to send the young lady away, but when she read what was written on the card her whole manner changed. She seemed all nervous and excited-like, right away, and told me to show the visitor right up.

"They stayed there talking about fifteen minutes, I should judge; then the two of 'em came down, the young lady still blear-eyed and sort o' dazed-looking and Mrs. Pancoast in an awful hurry. She was more excited than I'd ever seen her in all the twenty years I've worked here. It seemed to me like she was all trembly and twitching-like, sir. They got into the taxi, and—"

"Oh ho, there wuz a taxi, wuz there?" Costello interrupted.

"Why, yes, sir; didn't I say the young lady came in a taxi?"

"Ye did not; an' ye're neglecting to tell whether 'twas th' same one she came in that took them off, but—"

"Yes, sir, it was. She kept it waiting, sir."

"Oh, did she, now? I don't suppose ye noted its 'umber?"

"No, sir, I didn't; but—"

"Or what kind it wuz—yellow, blue or—"

"I'm not exactly certain it *was* a taxi, sir, now I come to think of it. It was sort o' dark-colored, and—"

"An' had four wheels wid rubber tires on each o' em, I suppose? Ye're bein' mighty helpful to us, so ye are, I must say. Now git on wid it. What happened next?"

"Nothing happened, sir. They drove off, and I went on about my work. First I tidied up the bow-duer and took away the supper tray—Mrs. Pancoast hadn't touched a bite—then I came downstairs and—"

"Howly St. Bridget! *Will* ye be gittin' on wid it?" Costello almost roared. "We'll admit fer th' sake o' argyment that ye done yer duties and done 'em noble, but what we're afther tryin' to find out, if ye'd please be so kind as to tell us, is when ye first found out Mrs. Pancoast had been kilt, and how ye found it out."

The woman's eyes snapped angrily. "I was coming to that," she answered tartly. "I'd come down to the basement to wash the supper things from Mrs. Pancoast's tray, when I heard a ringing at the lower front door—the tradesmen's door, you know. I went to answer it, for Cook had gone, and—oh, Mary, Mother! It was terrible!

"She lay there, gentlemen, head-foremost down the three steps that leads to the gate under the porch stairs, and blood was running all over the steps. I almost fainted, but luckily I remembered to call the coroner to come and take it—her, I mean—away. Oh, I'll never, never be able to go up those service steps again!"

"Ten thousand small and annoying active little blue devils!" de Grandin swore. "Do you tell me they took her away—removed the body before we had a chance to view it?"

"Yes, sir; of course. I knew the proper thing to do was not to touch it—her, I mean—until the coroner had come, so I 'phoned him right away and—"

"Oh, ye did, did ye?" Costello broke in. "I don't sup-

pose ye ever heard that th' city pays policemen to catch those that commits murther? Ye called th' coroner and had him spoil what little clues we might o' found, an'—"

The goaded woman turned on him in fury. "The city may pay police to catch murderers," she blazed, "but if it does it's wasting its money on the likes o' you! Do you know who killed Mr. Carlin? No! Do you know who killed Mr. Harold? No! Will you find out who murdered poor, innocent Mrs. Pancoast? Don't make me laugh! You couldn't catch cold on a rainy day, let alone catch a sneaking murderer like the one which did these killings! You and your talk o' spoiled clues!" She tossed her head disdainfully. "Was I to leave the poor lady's remains laying by her own front door while you looked round for fingerprints and the like o' that? Not for all the police in Harrisonville would I—"

"*Tiens,* my friend, this is interesting, but not instructive. There is little to be gained from calling hard names, and time presses. Had you first notified the police, *Mademoiselle,* you would have rendered apprehension of the miscreants more certain, but as it is we must make the best of what we have to work with. No amount of weeping will restore spilled milk."

To Costello he added: "Let us inspect Madame Pancoast's boudoir. Perhaps we shall find something."

A bright fire burned behind the brass fender in the cheerful apartment Maria Pancoast had quit to go to her death an hour earlier; pictures, mostly family portraits, adorned the walls, the windows were gay with bright-figured chintz. A glance at the mahogany table revealed nothing. The gaily painted wastebasket contained only a few stray wisps of crumpled notepaper; the Colonial escritoire which stood between the windows was kept with spinsterish neatness; nothing like a hastily opened note or visiting-card showed on its fresh green blotter.

"*Voilà,* my friends, I think I have it!" de Grandin

cried, peering into the bed of glowing coke as he crouched on hands and knees before the fireplace. "It is burned, but—careful, very careful, my friend, a strong breath may destroy it!" He motioned Costello back, took up the brazen fire-tongs and, gently as a chemist might handle an explosive mixture, lifted a tiny curl of crackling gray-black ash from the blue flames. "*Prie Dieu* she wrote in ink!" he muttered as he bore his find to the table and laid it tenderly upon the sheet of clean white paper Costello spread before him.

The parchment shades were stripped from the lamps and at Costello's order Jane, the maid, ran to the dining-room to fetch stronger electric bulbs. Meanwhile de Grandin reached into his waistcoat pocket and took out a pair of delicate steel tweezers and a collapsible-framed jeweler's loop which he inserted in his right eye.

Carefully, almost without breathing, lest the gentle current of air from lips or nostrils destroy the carbonized cardboard, he turned the blackened relic underneath the lens of his glass.

"*M—i—s—s— A—l—l,*" he spelled out slowly, then fell to studying the cone of blackened paper intently again. "No use, my friends, the printing is effaced by the fire beyond that part," he told us. "Now for the message on the card. If she used ink all is well, for the metallic pigment in it will have withstood the heat. If she wrote in pencil—we are luckless, I fear. Let us see."

For several minutes he turned the little cone of ash beneath the lights, then with a shrug of impatience laid it on the paper, and holding one end in a gentle, steady grip with the tweezers, dipped his fingers in a tumbler and let fall a drop of water on the charred pasteboard. The burned paper trembled like a living thing in torture as the liquid touched it, and a tiny crackling rose from it. But after a moment the moisture seemed to spread through the burned fiber, rendering it a thought less brittle. Twice more he repeated the experiment, each time increasing the

pressure of his tweezers. At length he succeeded in prying the cone of heat-contorted paper partly open.

"*Ah!*" he exclaimed exultantly. "It was prepared beforehand. See, she did use ink—thanks be to God!"

Again he studied the charred pasteboard and spelled out slowly: "*lp—ho—ban—so——*"

"Name of a name; it is plain as any flagpole!" he cried. "In vain is the evidence of crime burned, my friends. We have them, we know the bait by which they lured poor Madame Pancoast to her death! You see?" He turned bright eyes on Costello and me in turn.

"Not I," I answered.

"Nor I," the Irishman confessed.

"*Mordieu,* must I then teach school to you great stupid-heads?" he asked. "Consider:

"A young woman comes to see poor Madame Pancoast, scarcely four hours after she has laid away all that remained to her of son and husband. Would *Madame* be likely to see a stranger in such circumstances? Mademoiselle Jane, the maid, thought not, and she was undoubtlessly right. But Madame Pancoast saw this visitor. For why? Because of something written on a card. Now, what could move a woman with a shattered heart to see an unknown visitor—more, to go away with her, seemingly in a fever of impatience? The answer leaps to the eye. Certainly. It is this: Fill in the missing letters of these words, and though they make but fragments of a sentence, they speak to us in trumpet-tones. Four parts of words we have, the first of which is '*lp.*' Add two letters to it, and we have '*help.*' *N'est-ce-pas?* But certainly. Perform the same office for the other three and we have this portion of the message: '*help—who—husband—son.*' What more is needed? Tonight came one who promised—in writing, *grâce à Dieu*—to help the stricken wife and mother bring to justice the slayer of her husband and her son! Is it to be wondered that she went with her? *Pardieu,* though she had known for certainty that the path led to the death she met tonight, she would have gone. Yes.

"Madame Pancoast"—he wheeled and faced a portrait of the murdered woman which hung upon the wall and brought his hand up in salute—"your sacrifice shall not be in vain. Although they know it not, these vile miscreants who lured you to your death have paved the way for Jules de Grandin to seek them out. I swear it!"

To us he ordered peremptorily: "Come, let us go!"

"Where?" Costello and I demanded in chorus.

"To Monsieur Dalky's, of course. I think that he can do us a favor. I know we can do him one, if it be not already too late. *Allez-vous-en!*"

## 4. The Warning

No, sir, Mr. Dalky's not in," the butler answered de Grandin's impatient inquiry. "He went out about fifteen or twenty minutes ago, and—

"Really, I couldn't say, sir," the man's manner was eloquent of outraged dignity as de Grandin demanded his employer's destination. "Mr. Dalky was not accustomed to tell me where he intended—"

"*Dix mille moustiques,* what do we care of his customs?" the Frenchman cut in. "This is of importance. We must know whither he went at once, right away—"

"I really couldn't say, sir," the butler returned imperturbably, and swung the door to.

"Listen here, young felly," Costello inserted the broad toe of his boot in the rapidly diminishing space between door and jamb and brought his broad shoulder against the panels, "d'ye see this?" He turned back the lapel of his jacket, displaying his badge. "Ye'll tell us where Dalky went, an' tell it quick, or else—"

Statement of the alternative was unnecessary. "I'll ask Mrs. Dalky, sir," the man began, but:

"Ye'll not," Costello denied. "Ye'll take us to her, an' we'll do our own askin', savvy?" The butler led us to the room where Mrs. Dalky sat beneath a read-

ing-lamp conning the current issue of *The New Yorker.*

"A thousand pardons, *Madame,*" de Grandin apologized, "but we come in greatest haste to consult *Monsieur* your husband. It is in relation to the so strange deaths of Monsieur Pancoast and—"

"Mr. Pancoast!" Mrs. Dalky dropped her magazine and her air of slight hauteur at once. "Why, that's what Herbert went to see about."

"Ten thousand crazy monkeys!" de Grandin swore beneath his breath, then, aloud: "When? Where, if you please? It is important!"

"We were sitting here reading," the lady replied, "when the telephone rang. Some one wanted to speak with Mr. Dalky privately, concerning the murder of Mr. Pancoast and his son. It seemed, from what I overheard, that this person had stumbled on the information accidentally and wanted to consult my husband about one or two phases of the case before they went to the police. Mr. Dalky wanted him to come here, but he said they must act at once if they were to catch the murderers, so he would meet my husband at Tunlaw and Emerson Streets in twenty minutes, then they could go directly to police headquarters, and—"

"Your pardon, *Madame,* we must go!" de Grandin almost shouted, and seizing Costello with one hand and me with the other, he fairly dragged us from the room.

"Rush, hasten, fly, my friend!" he bade me. "We have perhaps five little minutes of grace. Let us make the most of it. To those Tunlaw and Emerson Streets, with all celerity, if you please!"

The gleaming, baleful eyes of a city ambulance's red-lensed headlights bore down upon us from the opposite direction as we raced to the designated corner, and the *r-r-r-rang!* of its gong warned traffic from the road. A crowd had already begun to congregate at the curb, staring with hang-jawed wonder at something on the sidewalk.

"Jeez, Sergeant," exclaimed the patrolman who stood guard above the still figure lying on the concrete, "I never seen nothing like it. Talk about puttin' 'em on th' spot! Lookit this!" He put back the improvised shroud covering Dalky's features, and I went sick at the sight. The left side of the man's head, from brow to hair-line, was scooped away, like an apple bitten into, and from the awful, gaping wound flowed mingled blood and brain. "No need for you here, Doc," the officer added to the ambulance surgeon as the vehicle clanged to a halt and the white-jacketed intern elbowed his way through the crowd. "What this pore sucker needs is th' morgue wagon."

"How'd it happen?" Costello asked.

"Well, sir, it was all so sudden I can't rightly tell you," the patrolman answered. "I seen this here bird standin' on th' corner, kind o' lookin' round an' pullin' out his watch every once in a while, like he had a heavy date with some one, when all of a sudden a car comes rushin' round th' corner, goin' like th' hammers o' hell, an' before I knew it, it's swung up that way through Emerson Street, and this pore feller's layin' on th' sidewalk with half his face missin'." He passed a hand meditatively across his hard-shaven chin. "It musta been th' car hit 'im," he added, "though I can't see how it could 'a' cut him up that way, but I'd 'a' swore I seen sumpin' sort o' jump out o' th' winder at him as th' automobile dashed past, just th' same. I suppose I'm all wet, but—"

"By no means, *mon vieux*," de Grandin interrupted. "What was it you saw flash from the passing car, if you please?"

"That's hard to say, sir," the officer responded. "I can say what it *looked* like, though."

"*Très bien*. Say on; we are all attention."

"Well, sir, don't think I'm a nut; but it *looked* like a sad-iron hitched onto a length o' clothesline. I'd 'a' swore some one inside th' car flung th' iron out th' winder, mashed th' pore chap in th' face with it, an' yanked it back—all in one motion, like. Course, it couldn't 'a' been, but—"

"What kind o' car wuz it?" demanded Costello.

"Looked like a taxi, sir. One o' them new, shiny black ones with a band o' red an' gold checkers runnin' round the tonneau, you know. It had more speed than any taxi I ever saw, an' it got clear away before I got a good look at it, for I was all taken up with this pore man, but——"

"All right, turn in your report when th' coroner's car comes for him," Costello ordered. "Annything ye'd like to ask, Doctor de Grandin?"

"I think not," the Frenchman answered. "But, if you please, I should like to have you put a guard in Mrs. Dalky's house. In no circumstances is any one not known to the servants to be allowed to see her, and no telephone calls whatever are to be put through to her. You will do this?"

"H'm, I'll try, sor. If th' lady objects, o' course, there's nothin' we can do, for she's not accused o' crime, an' we can't isolate her that way agin' her will; but I'll see what we can do.

"This burns me up," he added dismally. "Here this felly, whoever he is, goes an' pulls another murther off, right while we're lookin' at 'im, ye might say. It's monkeys he's makin' out o' us, nothin' less!"

"By no means," de Grandin denied. "True, he has accomplished his will, but for the purpose of his final apprehension, it is best that he seems to have the game entirely his own way. Our seeming inability to cope with him will make him bold, and boldness is akin to foolishness in a criminal. Consider: we were at fault concerning Monsieur Pancoast's murder; the murder of his son likewise gave us naught to go upon; almost while we watched he lured poor Madame Pancoast from her house and slew her, and as far as he can know, we know no more about the bait he used in her case than we knew of the other killings. Now comes Monsieur Dalky. The game seems all too easy; he thinks that he can kill at will and pass among us unsuspected and unmolested. Assuredly he will try that trick again, and when he does—*parbleu,* the

strongest pitcher comes to grief if it be taken to the well too often! Yes."

"What made ye think that Dalky'd be th' next to go?" Costello asked as we drove slowly through the quiet street to notify the widow.

"A little by-play which I chanced to notice at the funeral this afternoon," de Grandin answered. "It happened that I raised my head while the good clergyman was broadcasting endlessly, and as I did so I perceived a hand reach through the open window and drop a wad of paper at Monsieur Dalky's feet. He did not seem to notice it at first, and when he did he thrust it unread into his waistcoat pocket.

"There I was negligent, I grant you. I should have followed him and asked to see the contents of the note—for a note of some kind it was undoubtlessly. Why else should it have been dropped before him while he was at the funeral of his one-time partner? But I did not follow my intention. Although the incident intrigued me, I had more pressing business to attend to in searching out Monsieur Pancoast's antecedents that we might find some motive for his murder. It was not till I had interviewed Madame Hussé at the Bellefield Home that I learned of the former partnership between Pancoast and Dalky, and even then I did not greatly apprehend the danger to the latter; for though he was associated with the murdered man, he, at least, had never traveled to the East. But when the vengeful one slew Madame Pancoast, who was most surely innocent of any wrong, my fears for Monsieur Dalky were roused, and so we hastened to his house—too late, *hélas*."

We drove in silence a few moments, then: "What we have seen tonight confirms my suspicions almost certainly," he stated.

"Umph!" grunted Costello.

"Precisely, exactly, quite so. The chenay throwing-knife, do you know him?"

"Can't say I do."

"Very good. I do. On more than one occasion I had dodged him, and he requires artful dodging, I assure

you. Yes. *Couteau de table du diable*—the devil's table knife—he has been called, and rightly so. Something like the bolo of your Filipinos it is, but with a curved blade, a blade not curved like a saber, but bent lengthwise, the point toward the hilt, so that the steel describes an arc. Sharpened on both edges like a razor—five inches across its widest part, weighted at the handle, it is the weapon of the devil—or of *Dakaits,* who are the foul fiend's half-brothers. They fling it with lightning speed and such force that it will sheer through iron—or one's skull. Then with a thin, tough cord of gut they pull it back again. Yes, it is true. Very well. Such a blade, Friend Trowbridge, hurled at a man's back would cut his spine and also cleave his lower skull. You apprehend me?"

"You mean it was a knife like that—"

"*Précisément.* No less. I did not at first identify it by the wound it made on the poor Pancoasts, but when I saw the so unfortunate Monsieur Dalky's cloven face, my memory bridged the gulf of years and bore me back to Burma—and the throwing-knives. With Pancoast's history in our minds, with these knife wounds to bear it out, the conclusion is obvious. The Oriental mind is flexible, but it is also conservative. Having started on a course of action, it will carry it through without the slightest deviation. I think we shall soon lay this miscreant by the heels, my friends."

"How?" Costello asked.

"Attend me carefully, and you shall see. Jules de Grandin has sworn an oath to poor, dead Madame Pancoast, and Jules de Grandin is no oath-breaker. By no means. No."

The shock was almost more than Mrs. Dalky could bear. Both de Grandin and I were busy for upward of an hour with sedatives and soothing words. Meanwhile her condition simplified the Frenchman's program, for a policewoman who also held a nurse's license was installed beside her bed with orders to turn away all callers, and a plain-clothes man was posted in the hall.

"And now, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin told the butler, "you will please get me at once the formal coat and waistcoat Monsieur Dalky wore to the Pancoast funeral this afternoon. Hasten; my time is short, and my temper shorter!"

Feverishly he turned the dead man's pockets out. In the lower left waistcoat pocket was a tiny wad of crumpled ricepaper, the kind of thin, gray-white stuff which Eastern merchandise is wrapped in. Across it, roughly scrawled in red was the grotesque figure of a pointing man, a queer-looking figure in tight trousers and a conical cap, pointing with clenched fists at a row of smaller figurines. Obviously three of the smaller characters were men, their bifurcated garments proclaimed as much. Two more, judging by the crudely pictured skirts, were women. Two of the male figures had toppled over, the third and the two women stood erect.

"*Ha,* the implication here is plain. You see it?" de Grandin asked excitedly. "It was a warning, though the poor Dalky knew it not, apparently. Observe"—he tapped the two prone figures with his finger tip—"here lie the Pancoasts, *père et fils.* There, ready for the sacrifice is Madame Pancoast, and here is Monsieur Dalky, the sole remaining man. The last one in the group, the final woman, is who? Who but Madame Dalky, my friends? All, all are designed to die, and two are already dead, according to this drawing. Yes." He glared across the room as though in challenge to an invisible personage. "*Ha,* Monsieur Murderer, you may propose, but Jules de Grandin will dispose of this case and of you. I damn think I shall take you in your own trap and call your vengeance down on your own head. May Satan serve me stewed with parsley if I do not so!"

## 5. Allura

"Sure it was an elegant job Coroner Martin did on Misther Dalky," Sergeant Costello commented as he

stretched his feet to the fire of birch logs crackling on my study hearth and drew appreciatively at the cigar de Grandin gave him. "Were ye mindin' th' way he'd patched th' pore gentleman's face up so ye'd never notice how th' haythen murtherer done 'im in, Doctor Trowbridge, sor?"

I nodded. "Martin's a clever man at demisurgery," I answered, "one of the best I've ever seen, and—"

"Excuse me, sor," Nora McGinnis, who is nominally my cook and household factotum, but who actually rules both my house and me with a hand of iron, appeared in the study doorway, "there's a lady in th' consultin'-room askin' to see Doctor de Grandin."

"Me?" the Frenchman asked. "You are sure? I do not practice medicine here; it must be Doctor Trowbridge whom she—"

"Th' divil a bit," Nora contradicted. "Sure, she's askin' fer the little gentleman wid light hair an' a waxed mustache, an' Doctor Trowbridge has nayther light nor anny other kind o' hair, nor does he wax his mustache."

"You win, *ma belle*, certainly it is I," de Grandin answered with a laugh and rose to follow her.

A moment later he rejoined us, walking softly as a cat, his little round blue eyes alight with excitement. "Trowbridge, Costello, my friends," he whispered almost soundlessly, "come; come quietly, *comme une souris*, and see who is within. Adhere your ears to the keyhole, my friends, and likewise your eyes; I would that you should hear, as well as see!" He turned and left us and, as quietly as we could, we followed through the passage.

The writing-lamp burned on my office desk, its emerald shade picking out a spot of glowing green in the shadows of the room, and de Grandin moved it deftly so that its light fell full upon the visitor, yet left his face in dusk. At the door between the surgery and consulting-room we paused and watched the tableau. Despite myself I started as my eyes rested on the face turned toward the Frenchman.

Devoid of rouge or natural coloring, save for the

glowing carmine of the painted lips, the face was pale as death's own self and the texture of the fine white skin seemed more that of a Dresden blond than a brunette, although the hair beneath the modishly small hat was almost basalt-black. The nose was delicate, with slender nostrils that seemed to palpitate above the crimson lips. The face possessed a strange, compelling charm, its ivory pallor enhanced by the shadow of the long, silken lashes that lay against the cheeks, half-veiling, half-revealing purple eyes which slanted downward at the outer corners, giving the countenance a quaint, pathetic look. "It's she!" I murmured, forgetting that Costello could not understand, since he had never looked on her before. But I recognized her instantly. When first I saw her, she had walked with Harold Pancoast an hour or less before he met his tragic death.

"It is my uncle, sir," she told de Grandin as we halted at the door. "He suffers from an obscure disease he contracted in the Orient years ago. The attacks are more violent at changes of the season—spring and autumn always affect him—and at present he's suffering acutely. We've had several doctors already, but none of them seems to understand the case. Then we heard of you." She folded her slender pale hands in her lap and looked placidly at him, and it seemed to me there was an odd expression in her gaze, like that of a person just aroused and still heavy with sleep, or one suffering from a dose of some narcotic drug.

The little Frenchman twisted the waxed tips of his diminutive blond mustache, obviously much pleased. "How was it they bade you come to me, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked.

"We heard—my uncle heard, that is—that you were a great traveler and had studied in the clinics of the East. He thought if any one could give him relief it would be you." There was a queer, indefinable quality to her speech, her words were short, close-clipped, and seemed to stand out individually, as though each were the expression of a separate thought, and her se-

mivowels and aspirates seemed insufficiently stressed.

For a long moment de Grandin studied her, and I thought I saw a look of wondering speculation in his face as he gazed directly into her luminous dark-blue eyes. Then: "Very well, *Mademoiselle,* I will come," he assented. "Do but wait a moment while I write out this prescription——" he took a pad of notepaper from the corner of the blotter and drew it toward him.

*Crash!* The atmosphere seemed shattered by the detonation and the room was plunged in sudden darkness.

I leaped forward, but a sharp, warning hiss from de Grandin stopped me in my tracks, and next instant I felt his little hand against my shoulder, pushing me insistently back to my hiding-place. Hardly had I regained the shelter of the door when the lights in the ceiling chandelier snapped on, flooding the room with brightness. Amazement almost froze me as I looked.

Calm and unmoved as a graven image the girl sat in her chair, her mild, impersonal gaze still fixed on Jules de Grandin. No change in expression or attitude had taken place, though the desk lamp lay shattered on the floor, its shade and bulbs smashed into a thousand fragments.

"Right away, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin remarked, as though he also were unaware of any untoward happening. "Come, let us go."

A long, black taxicab, its tonneau banded with squares of alternate gold and red, stood waiting at the curb before my door. The engine must have been running all the while, for de Grandin and the girl had hardly entered before it was away, traveling at a furious pace.

"Howly Moses, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, can't ye tell me what it's all about?" Costello asked as we reentered the consulting-room and gazed upon the havoc.

"I'm afraid not," I returned, "but it looks as though a twenty-dollar lamp has been ruined, and——" I stopped, gazing at the two white spots upon my green

desk-blotter. One was a woman's visiting-card, engraved in neat block letters:

MISS ALLURA BATA

The other was a scribbled note from Jules de Grandin:

"Friend Trowbridge:

"In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, and I am not caught napping by their ruse. I think the murderer suspects I am too hot upon his trail, and has decided to dispose of me; but his chances of success are small. Await me. I shall return.

"J. DE G."

"Lord knows I hope his confidence is justified," I exclaimed fervently. The thought of my little friend entering the lair of the pitiless killer appalled me.

"Wurra, if I'd 'a' known it, he'd never gone off wid her unless I went along," Costello added. "He's a good little divil, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, an' if they do 'im injury, I'll——"

"*Merci,* my friend, you are most complimentary," de Grandin's laughing voice came from the doorway. "You did think I had the chance of the sparrow in the cat's mouth, *hein? Eh bien,* I fear this sparrow proved a highly indigestible morsel, in that event. Yes.

"If by any chance you should go to a corner not so far away, my friend, you will find there a taxicab in a most deplorable state of disrepair. It is not healthy for the chauffeur to try conclusions with a tree, however powerful his motor may be. As for that one——" he paused, and there was something more of grimness than merriment in his smile.

"Where is he?" Costello asked. "If he tried any monkey-business——"

"*Tiens,* he surely did," de Grandin interrupted, "but with less success than a monkey would have had, I think. As for his present whereabouts"—he raised his narrow shoulders in an expressive shrug—"let us be

charitable and say he is in heaven, although I fear that would be too optimistic. Perhaps I should have waited, but I had but little time to exercise my judgment, and so I acted quickly. I did not like the way he put speed to his motor the moment we had entered it, and as he was increasing the distance between you and me with each turn of his wheels, I acted on an impulse and struck him on the head. I struck him very hard, I fear, and struck him with a blackjack. It seemed to bother him considerably, for he lost control of his wheel immediately and ran into a tree. The vehicle stopped suddenly, but he continued on. The windshield intervened, but he continued on his way. Yes. He was a most unpleasant sight when last I looked at him.

"It took but half my eye," he continued, "to tell me the fellow was a foreigner, an Indian or Burmese. The trap was evidently well oiled, but so was I. *Alors,* I did escape.

"*Eh bien,* they are clever, those ones. It was a taxicab I entered, a new and pretty taxicab with lines of red and gold squares round its tonneau. The wrecked car from which I crawled a few minutes later had no such marks. No. By a device easily controlled from the driver's cab a shutter, varnished black to match the body of the car, could be instantly raised over the red and golden checkers, thus transforming what was patently a taxicab into a sumptuous private limousine. Had I not come back, you might have searched long for the taxi I was last seen in, but your search would have been in vain. It was a taxi, so the maid thought, which bore poor Madame Pancoast to her death, and it was a taxi, according to the officer, from which the death-knife was hurled at Monsieur Dalky, but neither of them could identify it accurately, and if instant chase had been given in either instance, the vehicle could have changed its identity almost while the pursuers watched, and gotten clean away. A clever scheme, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Well, sor, I'll be—" began Costello.

"Where's the girl?" I interrupted.

He looked at us with something like wonder in his eyes. "Do you recall how she sat stone-still, and seemed to notice not at all when I hurled your desk-lamp to the floor, and plunged the room in darkness?" he asked irrelevantly. "You saw that, for all she seemed to notice, nothing had happened, and that she took up the conversation where we left off when I turned on the lights again?"

"Yes, but where *is*—"

"*Parbleu,* you have as yet seen nothing, or at the most, but very little," he returned. "Come."

The girl sat calmly on the sofa in the study, her lovely, violet eyes staring with bovine placidity into the fire.

The little Frenchman tiptoed in and took up his position before her. "*Mademoiselle?*" he murmured questioningly.

"Doctor de Grandin?" she asked, turning her odd, almost sightless gaze on him.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle.*"

"I've come to see you about my uncle. He suffers from an obscure disease he contracted in the Orient years ago. The attacks are most violent at changes of the season—spring and autumn always affect him—and at present he is suffering acutely. We've had several doctors already, but none of them seems to understand the case. Then we heard of you."

Sergeant Costello and I looked at her, then at each other in mute astonishment. Obviously unaware that she had seen him before, the girl had stated her errand in the precise words employed in the consulting-room not half an hour earlier.

The Frenchman looked at me above her head and his lips formed a single soundless word: "Morphine."

I regarded him questioningly a moment, and he repeated the silent disyllable, holding his hand beside his leg and going through the motion of making an injection at the same time, then glancing significantly at the girl.

I nodded understandingly at last and went to fetch the drug. She seemed not to be aware of what tran-

spired as I took a fold of skin between my thumb and finger, pinched it lightly, and thrust the needle in.

"We heard—my uncle heard, that is—that you were a great traveler and had studied in the clinics of the East," she was telling de Grandin as I shot the plunger home, and still repeating her message parrot-wise, word for word as she had delivered it before, she fell asleep beneath the power of three-quarters of a grain of alkaloid of *somniferum.*

## 6. The Death-Dealer

"And now, my excellent one," de Grandin told Costello as he and I returned from putting the unconscious girl to bed, "I would that you telephone headquarters and have them send us two good men and a *chien de police* without delay. We shall need them, I damn think, and that without much waiting, for the spider will be restless when the fly comes not, and will undoubtlessly be seeking explanations here."

"Be dad, sor, if he comes here lookin' for flies he'll find a flock o' horseflies, an' th' kind that can't be fooled, at that!" Costello answered with a grin as he picked up the 'phone.

"Now, *mes amis,* you can not be too careful," de Grandin warned the two patrolmen who answered Costello's summons. "This is a vicious one we deal with, and a clever one, as well. He thinks no more of murder than you or I consider the extermination of a bothersome gnat, and he is also quick and subtle. Yes. It is late for any one to call. Should a visitor mount the steps, one of you inquire his business, but let the other keep well hidden and have his pistol ready. At the first hostile move you shoot, and shoot to hit. Remember, he has already killed three men and a defenseless woman. No mercy is deserved by such as he."

The officers nodded understandingly, and we disposed our forces for defense. Costello, de Grandin

and I were to join the policemen alternately on the outside watch, relieving each other every hour. The two remaining in the house were to stay in the room where the girl Allura lay in drugged sleep, for the Frenchman had a theory the killer would attempt to find her if he managed to elude the guard outside. "She who was bait for us will now be bait for him," he stated as he concluded arrangements. "Let us proceed, my friends, and remember what I said, let no false notions of the preciousness of life delay your hands—*he* is troubled with no such scruples, I assure you."

Midnight passed and one o'clock arrived, still no indications of the visitant's approach. Costello had gone to join the outside guard, I lounged and yawned in the armchair by the bed where Allura lay, de Grandin lighted cigarette from cigarette, beat a devil's tattoo on his chair-arm and gazed impatiently at his watch from time to time.

"I'm afraid it's no use, old chap," I told him. "This fellow probably took fright when his messenger and chauffeur failed to return—he's very likely putting as much distance between himself and us as possible this very minute. If——"

*Bang!* the thunderous detonation drowned my voice as an explosion, almost under our window, shook the air. I leaped to my feet with a cry, but:

"Not the window, my friend—keep away, it is death!" de Grandin warned, seizing me by the arm and dragging me back. "This way—it is safest!"

As we raced downstairs the sharp, staccato discharge of a revolver sounded, followed by a mocking laugh. The Frenchman opened the front door, and dropping to his hands and knees glanced out into the night. Another pistol shot, followed by a cry of pain, sounded from the farther end of the yard; then the deep, ferocious baying of the police dog and a crashing in the rhododendron bushes told us contact of some sort had been made with the enemy.

"D'je get hit, Clancy?" called one of the policemen, charging across the lawn.

"Never mind me, git *him!*" the other cried, and his mate rushed toward the thicket where the savage dog was worrying something. A nightstick flashed twice in the rays of a street lamp, and two dull, heavy thuds told us the locust club struck flesh both times.

"Here he is, Sergeant!" the patrolman called. "Shall I bring 'im in?"

"Sure, let's have a look at him," Costello answered. "Are ye hurt bad, Clancy?"

"Not much, sir," the other answered. "He flang a knife or sumpin at me, but Ludendorff jumped 'im so quick it spoilt his aim. I could do with a bit o' bandage, though."

While Costello and the uninjured policeman dragged the infuriated dog from the unconscious man and prepared to bring him into the house, de Grandin and I assisted Clancy to the surgery. He was bleeding profusely from a long, crescent-shaped incised wound in the right shoulder, but the injury was superficial, and a first-aid pack of boric and salicylic acid held in place by a figure-eight bandage quickly reduced the hemorrhage.

"I'll say he's cute, sir," Clancy commented as de Grandin deftly pinned the muslin bandage into place. "We none o' us suspected he was anywheres around—he must 'a' walked on his hands, for he surely didn't make no footsteps we could hear—when all of a sudden we heard sumpin go *bang!* alongside th' house, an' a flare o' fire like a Fourth o' July rocket went up. I yanks out me gun an' fires, like you told us, an' then some one laughs at me, right behind me back, an' sumpin comes whizzin' through th' air like a little airplane an' I feels me shoulder getting numb an' blood a-runnin' down me arm.

"Lucky thing for me old Ludendorff was with me. The son-of-a-gun could make a monkey out o' me, flingin' his contact bomb past me an' drawin' me out in th' open with me back turned to 'im, so's he could fling his knife into me, but he couldn't fool th' dawg. No, sir! He smelt th' feller forty feet away an' made

a bee-line for him, draggin' 'im down before you could say Jack Robinson."

The Frenchman nodded. "You were indeed most fortunate," he agreed. "In a few minutes the ambulance will come, and you may go. Meantime—you will?"

"I'm tellin' th' cock-eyed world I will!" Officer Clancy responded as de Grandin moved the brandy bottle and a glass toward him. "Say, Doc, they can cut me up every night o' th' week, if I git this kind o' medicine afterward!"

"*Mon vieux,* your comrade waits in the next room," de Grandin told the other officer. "He is wounded but happy, and I suspect you would like to join him—" he glanced invitingly through the opened door, and as the officer beheld the treatment Clancy was taking for his hurt, he nearly overset the furniture in hasty exit.

"Now, my friends—to business," the Frenchman cried as he closed the surgery door on the policemen and turned to eye our prisoner.

I held a bottle of sal volatile under the man's nose, and in a moment a twitching of the nostrils and fluttering of lids told us he was coming round. He clutched both chair-arms and half heaved himself upright, but:

"Slowly, my friend; when your time comes to depart, you will not go alone," de Grandin ordered, digging the muzzle of his pistol into the captive's ribs. "Be seated, rest yourself, and give us information which we much desire, if you please."

"Yes, an' remember annything ye say may be used agin ye at yer trial," Costello added officially.

"Pains of a dyspeptic Billy-goat! Must you always spoil things?" de Grandin snapped, but:

"It's quite all right, sir, the game seems played, and I appear to have lost," the prisoner interrupted. "What is it you would like to know?"

He was a queer figure, one of the queerest I had ever seen. A greatcoat of plum-colored cloth, collared

and cuffed with kolinsky, covered him from throat to knees, and beneath the garment his massive legs, arrayed in light gray trousers, stuck forward woodenly, as though his joints were stiff. He was big, huge; wide of shoulder, deep of chest and almost obscenely gross of abdomen. His head was oversized, even for his great body, and nearly round, with out-jutting, sail-like ears. Somehow, his face reminded me of one of those old Japanese terror-masks, mahogany-colored, mustached with badger hair, and snarling malignantly. A stubble of short, gray hair covered his scalp, the fierce gray mustache above his mouth was stiff as bristles from a scrubbing-brush, and the smile he turned on Jules de Grandin was frozen cruelty warmed by no slightest touch of human pity, while terrible, malignant keenness lurked in his narrow, onyx-black eyes. A single glance at him convinced me that the ruthless murderer of four innocent people was before us, and that his trail of murder would be ended only with his further inability to kill. He waved a hand, loosely, wagging it from the wrist as though it were attached to his forearm by a well-oiled hinge, and I caught the gleam of a magnificent octagonal emerald—a gem worth an emperor's ransom—on his right forefinger. "What was it you wished to know?" he repeated. Then: "May I smoke?"

The Frenchman nodded assent, but kept the prisoner covered with his weapon until sure he meant to draw nothing more deadly than a silver cigarette case from his pocket.

"Begin at the beginning, if you please, *Monsieur,*" he bade. "We know how you did slay Monsieur Pancoast and his poor son, and how you murdered his defenseless widow, also the poor Monsieur Dalky, but *why,* we ask to know. For why should four people you had never seen be victims of your lust for killing? Speak quickly; we have not long to wait."

The prisoner smiled, and once again I felt the chills run down my back at sight of the grimace.

"East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet."

he quoted ironically. "I suppose it's no use attempting to make you share my point of view?"

"That depends on what your viewpoint is," de Grandin answered. "You killed them—why?"

"Because they deserved it, richly," the other returned calmly. "Listen to this charming little story, if you can spare the time:

"I was born in Mangadone. My father was a *chetty*—they call them *bania* in India. A money-lender—usurer—in fact. You know the breed; unsavory lot they are, extracting thirty and forty per cent on loans and keeping whole generations in their debt. Yes, my father was one of them.

"He was Indian by birth, but took up trade in Burma, and flourished at it like the proverbial green bay tree. His ideas for me, though, were different from the usual Indian's. He wanted me to be a *burra sahib*—a 'somebody,' as you say. So when the time came he packed me off to England and college to study Shakespeare and the musical glasses, but particularly law and finance. I came back a licensed barrister and with a master's degree in economics.

"But"—again his evil smile moved across his features—"I came back to a desolated home, as well. My father had a daughter by a second wife, a lovely little thing called Mumtaj, meaning moonflower. He cherished her, was rather more fond of her than the average benighted Indian is of his girl-children, and because of the wealth he had amassed, looked forward to a brilliant match for her.

" 'Man proposes but God disposes,' it has been said, you know. In this case it was the White Man's God, through one of his accredited ministers, who disposed. In the local American mission was an earnest young *sahib* known as the Reverend Carlin Pancoast, a personable young man who wrestled mightily with Satan, and made astonishing progress at it. My father was liberal-minded; he saw much good in the ways of the *sahiblog*, believing that our ancient customs were outmoded; so it was not difficult to induce him to send my little sister Moonflower to the mission school.

"But though he was progressive, my father still adhered to some of the old ways. For instance, he kept the bulk of his wealth in precious metals and jewels, and much of it in gold and silver currency—this last was necessary in order to have ready cash for borrowers, you see. So it was not very difficult for Pancoast *Thakin* and my sister to lay hands on gold and jewels amounting to three lakhs of rupees—about a hundred thousand dollars—quite a respectable little sum, and virtually every farthing my father had.

"They fled to 'China, 'cross the bay,' where no one was too inquisitive and British extradition would not reach, except in the larger cities. Then they went inland and to the sea by boat. At Shanghai they parted. It was impossible for a *sahib*, especially an American preacher-*sahib*, to take a black girl home with him as wife. But it was not at all embarrassing for him to take home her father's money, which she had stolen for him, plus my sister's *purchase price*.

"What? Oh, dear me, yes. He sold her. She was 'damaged goods,' of course, but proprietors of the floating brothels that ply the China coasts and rivers aren't over-particular concerning the kind of woman-flesh they buy, provided the price is low enough. So the Reverend Pancoast *Sahib* was rid of an embarrassing incumbrance, and in a little cash to boot by the deal. Shrewd businessmen, these Yankees.

"My father was all for prosecuting in the *sahibs'* way, but I had other plans. A few odd bits of precious metals were dug up here and there—literally dug up, gentlemen, for Mother Earth is Mother India's most common safe deposit vault—and with these we began our business life all over again. I profited by what I'd learned in England, and we prospered from the start. In fifteen years we were far wealthier than when the Reverend Carlin Pancoast eloped with my father's daughter and fortune.

"But as the Chinese say, 'we had lost face'—the memory of the insult put on us by the missionary still rankled, and I began to train myself to wipe it out. From fakirs I learned the arts of hypnotism and jug-

glery, and from *Dakaits* whom I hired at fabulous prices I acquired perfect skill at handling the throwing-knife. Indeed, there was hardly a *budmash* in all lower Burma more expert in the murderer's trade than I when I had completed my training.

"Then I came here. Before the bloody altar of Durga—you know her as Kali, goddess of the *thags*—I took an oath that Pancoast and all his tribe should perish at my hands, and that every one who had profited by what he stole from my father should also die.

"And—I can't expect you to appreciate this subtlety—I brought along a very useful tool in addition to my knives. I called her Allura. Not bad, eh? She certainly possessed allure, if nothing else.

"I found her in a London slum, a miserable, undernourished brat without known father and with a gin-soaked female swine for mother. I bought her for thirty shillings, and could have had her for half that, except it pleased me to make sure her dam would drink herself to death, and so I gave her more cash than she had ever seen at one time for the child.

"I almost repented of my bargain at first, for the child, though beautiful according to Western standards, was very meagerly endowed with brains, almost a half-wit, in fact. But afterward I thanked whatever gods may be that it was so.

"Her simplicity adapted her ideally to my plan, and I began to practise systematically to kill what little mind she had, substituting my own will for it. The scheme worked perfectly. Before she had reached her twelfth year she was nothing but a living robot—a mechanism with no mind at all, but perfectly responsive to my lightest wish. With only animal instinct to guide her to the simplest vital acts, she would perform any task I set her to, provided I explained in detail just what she was to do. I've sent her on a five-hundred-mile journey, had her buy a particular article in a particular shop, and return with it, as if she were an intelligent being; then, when the task was done, she lapsed once more into idiocy, for she has become

a mere idiot whenever the support of my will is withdrawn.

"It was rare sport to send her to be made love to by Pancoast's cub. The silly moon-calf fell heels over head in love with her at sight, and every day I made her rehearse everything he said—she did it with the fidelity of a gramophone—and told her what to say and do at their next meeting. When I had disposed of his father I had Allura bring the son to a secluded part of the campus and—how is it you say in French, Doctor de Grandin? Ah, yes, there I administered the *coup de grâce*. It was really droll. She didn't even notice when I cut him down, just stood there, looking at the spot where he had stood, and saying, 'Poor Harold; dear Harold; I'm so sorry, dear!'

"She was useful in getting Pancoast's widow out of the house and into my reach, too.

"Dalky I handled on my own, using the telephone in approved American fashion to 'put him on the spot,' as your gangsters so quaintly phrase it.

"Your activities were becoming annoying, though, Doctor de Grandin, so I reluctantly decided to eliminate you. Tell me, how did you suspect my trap? Did Allura fail? She never did before."

"I fear you underestimated my ability to grasp the Oriental viewpoint, my friend," de Grandin answered dryly. "Besides, although it had been burned, I rescued Mademoiselle Allura's card from Madame Pancoast's fire, and read the message on it. That, and the warning we found in Monsieur Dalky's waistcoat pocket—I saw it thrown through the window to him at the Pancoast funeral—these gave me the necessary clues. Now, if you have no more to say, let us be going. The Harrisonville *gendarmerie* will be delighted to provide you entertainment, I assure you."

"A final cigarette?" the prisoner asked, selecting one of the long, ivory-tipped paper tubes from his case with nice precision.

"*Mais oui*, of course," de Grandin agreed, and held his flaming lighter forward.

"I fear you *do* underestimate the Oriental mind, af-

ter all, de Grandin," the prisoner laughed, and thrust half the cigarette into his mouth, then bit it viciously. "*Mille diables*, he has tricked us!" the Frenchman cried as a strong odor of peach kernels flooded the atmosphere and the captive lurched forward spasmodically, then fell back in his chair with gaping mouth and staring, death-glazed eyes. "He was clever, that one. All camouflaged within his cigarette he had a sac of hydrocyanic acid. Less than one grain produces almost instant death; he had at least ten times that amount ready for emergency.

"*Eh bien*, my friend," he turned to Costello with a philosophical shrug, "it will save the state the expense of a trial and of electric current to put him to death. Perhaps it is better so. Who knows?"

"What about the girl, Allura?" I asked.

He pondered a moment, then: "I hope he was mistaken," he returned. "If she could be made intelligent by hypnotism, as he said, there is a chance her seeming idiocy may be entirely cured by psychotherapy. It is worth the trial, at all events. Tomorrow we shall begin experiments.

"Meantime, I go."

"Where?" Costello and I asked together.

"Where?" he echoed, as though surprised at our stupidity. "Where but to see if those so thirsty gentlemen of the police have left one drink of brandy in the bottle for Jules de Grandin, *pardieu!*"

# A Gamble in Souls

We crossed the big, cement-floored room with its high-set, steel-barred windows and whitewashed walls, and paused before the heavy iron grille stopping the entrance to a narrow, tunnel-like corridor. Our guide cast a sidelong, half-apologetic look in our direction. "Visitors aren't—er—usually permitted past this point," he told us. "This is the 'jumping-off place,' you know, and the fellows in there aren't ordinary convicts, so——"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur,*" Jules de Grandin's voice was muted to a whisper in deference to our surroundings, but had lost none of its authoritativeness with lessened volume. "One understands; but you will recall that we are not ordinary visitors. Me, I have credentials from the *Service Sûreté,* and in addition the note from *Monsieur le Gouverneur,* does it not say——"

"Quite so," the warden's secretary assented hastily. Distinguished foreign criminologists with credentials from the French Secret Police and letters of introduction from the governor of the state were not to be barred from the penitentiary's anteroom of death, however irregular their presence might be. "Open the gate, Casey," he ordered the uniformed guardian of the grille, standing aside politely to permit us to precede him.

The death house was L-shaped, the long bar consisting of a one-story corridor some sixteen feet in width, its south wall taken up by a row of ten cells, each separated from its neighbor by a twelve-inch brick wall and from the passageway by steel cage-

doors. Through these the inmates looked upon a blank, bleak whitewashed wall of brick, pierced at intervals by small, barred windows set so high that even the pale north light could not strike directly into the cells. Each few feet, almost as immobile as sentries on fixed post, blue-uniformed guards backed against the northern wall, somnolent eyes checking every movement of the men caged in the little cells which lined the south wall. Straight before us at the passage end, terrifying in its very commonplaceness, was a solid metal door, wide enough for three to pass abreast, grained and painted in imitation of golden oak. SILENCE, proclaimed the legend on its lintel. This was the "one-way door" leading to the execution chamber which, with the autopsy room immediately adjoining, formed the foot-bar of the building's L. The air was heavy with the scent peculiar to inefficient plumbing, poor ventilation and the stale smoke of cigarettes. The place seemed shadowed by the vulture-wings of hopelessness.

We paused to gaze upon the threshold, nostrils stinging with the acrid effluvium of caged humanity, ears fairly aching with the heaviness of silence which weighed upon the confined air. "Oh, my dear, my darling"—it was a woman's sob-strangled voice which came to us from the gateway of the farthest cell—"I just found out. I—I never knew, my dear, until last night, when he told me. Oh, what shall I do? I—I'll go to the governor—tell him everything! Surely, surely, he'll—"

The man's low-voiced reply cut in: "No use, my dear; there's nothing but your word, you know, and Larry has only to deny it. No use; no use!" He bowed his head against the grating of his cell a moment; then, huskily: "This makes it easier though, Beth dear; it's been the thought that you didn't know, and never could, that hurt, hurt more than my brother's perfidy, even. Oh, my dear, I—"

"I love you, Lonny," came the woman's hoarse avowal. "Will it help you to know that—to hear it from my lips?"

"Help?" A seraphic smile lighted up the tired, lined face behind the bars. "Help? Oh, my darling, when I walk that little way tomorrow night I'll *feel* your love surrounding me; feel the pressure of your hand in mine to give me courage at the end—" He broke off shortly, sobs knotting in his throat, but through his eyes looked such love and adoration that it brought the tears unbidden to my lids and raised a great lump in my throat.

He reached his long, artistically fine hands across the little space which separated his cell door from the screen of strong steel mesh which guards had set between him and the woman, and she pressed her palms against the wire from her side. A moment they stood thus; then:

"Please, *please!*" she turned beseechingly to the man in blue who occupied a chair behind her. "Oh, please take the screen away a moment. I—I want so to kiss him good-bye!"

The man looked undecided for a moment, then, sudden resolution forming in his immobile face, put forth his hand to move the wire netting.

"Here!" began our guide, but the word was never finished, for quicker than a striking snake, de Grandin's slim, white hand shot out, seized him by the neck immediately below the *medulla oblongata*, exerting sudden steel-tight pressure so that the hail stopped abruptly on a strangled, inarticulate syllable and the man's mouth hung open, round and empty as the entrance to a cave. "*Monsieur,*" the little Frenchman promised in an almost soundless whisper, "if you bid him stop I shall most surely kill you." He relaxed the pressure momentarily, and:

"It's against the regulations!" our guide expostulated softly. "He knows he's not allowed to—"

"Nevertheless," de Grandin interrupted, "the screen shall be removed, *Monsieur*. Name of a little blue man, would you deny them one last kiss—when he stands upon death's door-sill? But no!"

The screen had been removed, and, although the steel bars intervened, the man and woman clung and

kissed, arms circled round each other, lips and hearts together in a final, long farewell. "Now," gasped the prisoner, releasing the woman's lips from his for an instant, "one long, long kiss, my dearest dear, and then good-bye. I'll close my eyes and stop my ears so I can't hear you leaving, and when I open them again, you'll be gone, but I'll have the memory of your lips on mine when—when—" He faltered, but:

"My dear; my *dear!*" the woman moaned, and stopped his mouth with burning kisses.

"*Parbleu,* it is sacrilege that we should look at them—about face!" whispered Jules de Grandin, and swung himself about so that his back was to the cells. Obedient to his hands upon our elbows, the warden's secretary and I turned, too, and stood thus till the soft tap-tap of the woman's heels informed us she had left the death house.

We followed slowly, but ere we left the place of the condemned I cast a last look at the prisoner. He was seated at the little table which, with a cot and chair, constituted the sole furniture of his cell. He sat with head bowed, elbow on knee, knuckles pressed against his lips, not crying, but staring dry-eyed straight ahead, as though he could already vision the long vistas of eternity into which the state would hurl him the next night.

A long line of men in prison uniform marched through the corridor as we reentered the main building of the penitentiary. Each bore an empty tin cup in one hand, an empty tin plate in the other. They were going to their evening meal.

"Would you care to see 'em eat?" the warden's secretary asked as the files parted at the guard's hoarse "Gangway!" and we walked between the rows of men.

"*Mais non,*" de Grandin answered. "Me, I, too, desire to eat tonight, and the spectacle of men eating like caged brutes would of a certainty destroy my appetite. Thank you for showing us about, *Monsieur,* and please, I beg, do not report the guard's infraction

of the regulations in taking down that screen. It was a work of mercy, no less, my friend!"

The miles clicked swiftly off on my speedometer as we drove along the homeward road. De Grandin was for the most part sunk in moody silence, lighting one evil-smelling French cigarette from the glowing stump of another, occasionally indulging in some half-articulate bit of highly individualized profanity; once or twice he whipped the handkerchief from his left cuff and wiped his eyes half-furtively. As we neared the outskirts of Harrisonville he turned to me, small eyes blazing, thin lips retracted from small, even teeth.

"Hell and furies, and ten million small blue devils in the bargain, Friend Trowbridge," he exclaimed, "why must it be? Is there no way that human justice can be vindicated without the punishment descending on the innocent no less than on the guilty? Me, I damn think—" He turned away for a moment, and:

"*Mordieu,* my friend, be careful!" he 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 wind-blown leaf across the spot of luminance cast by my headlights.

"*Cordieu,* she will not die of senility if she persists in such a way of walking—" he continued, then interrupted himself with a shout as he flung both feet over the side of the car and rushed down the road to grapple with the woman whose sudden appearance had almost sent us skidding into the wayside ditch.

Nor was his intervention a split-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 to the rushing stream which foamed among a bed of jagged rocks some fifty feet below.

"Stop it, *Mademoiselle!* Desist!" he ordered sharply, seizing her shoulders in his small, strong hands and

dragging her back from her perilous perch 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 to break loose of no avail, writhed suddenly around and clawed at his cheeks with desperation-strengthened fingers. "Let me go; I want to die; I must die; I *will* die, I tell you! Let me go!"

De Grandin shifted his grip from her shoulders to her wrists and shook her roughly, as a terrier might shake a rat. "Silence, *Mademoiselle;* be still!" he ordered curtly. "Cease this business of the monkey at once, or *pardieu*"—he administered another vigorous shake—"I shall be forced to tie you!"

I added my efforts to his, grasping the struggling woman by the elbows and forcing her into the twin shafts of light thrown by the car's driving-lamps.

Stooping, the Frenchman retrieved her hat and placed it on her dark head at a decidedly rakish angle, then regarded her speculatively a moment. "Will you promise to restrain yourself if we release you, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked after a few seconds' silent scrutiny.

The girl—she was little more—regarded us sullenly a moment, then burst into a sharp, cachinnating laugh. "You've just postponed it for a while," she answered with a shrug of her narrow shoulders. "I'll kill myself as soon as you leave me, anyway. You might as well have saved yourselves the trouble."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured. "Exactly, precisely, quite so, *Mademoiselle*. I had that very thought in mind, and it is for that reason that we shall not leave you for a little so small moment. Pains of a dyspeptic pig, are we then murderers? But of course not. Tell us where you live, and we shall do ourselves the honor of escorting you there."

She faced us with quivering nostrils and heaving, tumultuous bosom, anger flashing from her eyes, a diatribe of invective seemingly ready to spill from her

parted lips. She had a rather pretty, high-bred face; unnaturally large, dark eyes, seeming larger because of the violet half-moons under them; death-pale skin contrasting sharply with the little tendrils of dark, curling hair which hung about her cheeks beneath the rim of her wide leghorn hat. There was something vaguely familiar about her features, about the soft, throaty contralto of her voice, about the way she moved her hands to emphasize her words. I drew my brows together in an effort at remembrance, even as de Grandin spoke.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he told her with a bow, "you are too beautiful to die, accordingly—ah, *parbleu,* I know you now!

"It is the lady of the prison, my good Trowbridge!" He turned to me, wonder and compassion struggling for the mastery of his face. "But certainly." To her: "Your change of dress deceived me at the first, *ma pauvre.*"

He drew away a pace, regarding her intently. "I take back my remark," he admitted slowly. "You have an excellent reason for desiring to be rid of this cruel world of men and man-made justice, *Mademoiselle,* nor am I any stupid, moralistic fool who would deny you such poor consolation as death may bring, but"—he made a deprecating gesture—"this is not the time nor the place nor manner, *Mademoiselle.* It were a shame to break your lovely body on those rocks down there, and—have you thought of this?—there is a poor one's body to be claimed and given decent burial when the debts of justice have been paid. Can not you wait until that has been done, then——"

"Justice?" cried the woman in a shrill, hard voice. "*Justice?* It's the most monstrous miscarriage of justice there ever was! It's murder, I tell you; wilful murder, and——"

"Undoubtlessly," he assented in a soothing voice, "but what is one to do? The law's decree——"

"The law!" she scoffed. "Here's one time where the strength of sin really is the law! Law's supposed to punish the guilty and protect the innocent, isn't it?

Why doesn't the law let Lonny go, and take that red-handed murderer who did the killing in his place? Because the law says a wife can't testify against her husband! Because a perjured villain's testimony has sent a blameless man to death—that's why!"

De Grandin turned a fleeting glance on me and made a furtive, hardly noticeable gesture toward the car. "But certainly, *Mademoiselle*," he nodded, "the laws of men are seldom perfect. Will not you come with us? You shall tell us your story in detail, and if there is aught that we can do to aid you, please be assured that we shall do it. At any rate, if you will give consideration to your plan to kill yourself, and having talked with us still think you wish to die, I promise to assist you, even in that. We are physicians, and we have easily available some medicines which will give you swift and painless release, nor need any one be the wiser. You consent? Good, excellent, *bien*. If you please, *Mademoiselle*." He bowed with courtly, Continental courtesy as he assisted her into my car.

She sat between us, her hands lying motionless and flaccid, palms upward, in her lap. There was something monotonous, flat and toneless, in her deep and rather husky voice as she began her recitation. I had heard women charged with murder testifying in their own defense in just such voices. Emotion played upon too harshly and too long results in a sort of anesthesia, and emphasis becomes impossible.

"My name's Beth Cardener—Elizabeth Cardener," she began without preliminary. "I am the wife of Lawrence Cardener, the sculptor. You know him? No? No matter.

"I am twenty-nine years old and have been married three years. My husband and I have known each other since childhood. Our families had adjoining houses in the city and adjoining country places at Seagirt. My husband and I and his twin brother, Alonzo, played together on the beach and in the ocean in summer and went to school together in the winter, though the boys were two grades above me,

being three years older. They looked so much alike that no one but their family and I—who was with them so much that I was almost like a sister—could tell them apart, and Lonny was always getting into trouble for things which Larry did. Sometimes they'd change clothes and one would go to call on the girl with whom the other had an engagement, and no one ever knew the difference. They never fooled me, though; I could usually tell them by a slight difference in their voices, but if I weren't quite sure, there was one infallible clue. Lonny had a little scar behind his left ear. I struck him there with a sand-spade when he was six and I was three. He and Larry had been teasing me, and I flew into a fury. He happened to be nearer, and got the blow. I was terribly frightened after I'd done it, and cried far more than he did. The wound wasn't really serious, but it left a little, white scar, not more than half-an-inch in length, which never disappeared. So, when the boys would try to play a joke on me I'd make them let me turn their ears forward; then I could be certain which was Lonny and which Larry.

"When the war came and the boys were seventeen, both were wild to go, but their father wouldn't let them. Finally Larry ran away and joined the Canadians—they weren't particular in checking up on ages in Canada those days. Before Larry had been gone three weeks his brother joined him, and they were both assigned to the same regiment. Larry was given a lieutenancy shortly after he joined up and Lonny was made a subaltern before they sailed for France.

"Both boys were slightly gassed at the second battle of the Marne and were in recuperation camp until the termination of hostilities. They came back together, in uniform, of course, in '19, and I was in a perfect frenzy of hero-worship. I fell madly in love with both of them. Both loved me, too, and each asked me to marry him. It was hard to choose between them, but Lonny—the one I'd 'marked' with my spade when we were kids—was a little sweeter, a little gentler than his brother, and finally I accepted him.

Larry showed no bitterness, and the three of us continued as close, firm friends, even after the engagement, as we'd been before.

"Lonny was determined to become a painter, while Larry had ambitions to become a sculptor, and they went off to Paris for a year of study, together, as always. We were to be married when they returned, and Larry was to be best man. We'd hoped to have a June wedding, but the boys' studies kept them abroad till mid-August, so we decided to postpone it till Thanksgiving Day, and both the boys came down to Seagirt to spend the remainder of the season.

"There was a girl named Charlotte Dey stopping at a neighbor's house, a lovely creature, exquisitely made, with red-gold hair and topaz eyes and skin as white as milk. Larry seemed quite taken with her, and she with him, and Lonny and I began to think that he'd found consolation there. We even wished in that romantic way young lovers have that Larry'd hurry up and pop the question so we could have a double wedding in November.

"You remember I told you our houses stood beside each other? We'd always been so intimate that I'd been like a member of the Cardener family, even before I was engaged to Lonny. We never thought of knocking on each other's doors, and if I wanted anything from the Cardeners or they wanted anything from our house, we were as apt to enter through one of the French windows opening on the verandas as we were to go through the front door.

"One evening, after Lonny and I had said goodnight, I happened to remember that I'd left a book in the Cardener library, and I especially wanted that book early next morning; for it had a recipe for sally lunn in it, and I wanted to get up early and make some as a surprise for Lonny next morning at breakfast. So I just ran across the intervening lawn and up the veranda steps, intent on going through the library window, getting the book and going back to bed without saying anything to anybody. I'd just mounted the steps and started down the porch toward the li-

brary when Lonny loomed up in front of me. He'd slipped on his pajamas and beach robe, and had been sitting on a porch rocker. 'Beth!' he exclaimed in a sort of nervous, almost frightened way.

"'Why, yes, it's I,' I answered, putting my hand in his and continuing to walk toward the library window.

"'You mustn't come any farther,' he suddenly told me, dragging me to a stop by the hand which he'd been holding. 'You must go back, Beth.'

"'Why, Lonny!' I exclaimed in amazement. Being told I couldn't go and come at will in the Cardener house was like being slapped in the face.

"'You must go back, please,' he answered in a sort of embarrassed, stubborn way. 'Please, Beth; I can't explain, dear; but please go, quickly.'

"There was nothing else to do, so I went. I couldn't speak, and I didn't want him to see me crying and know how much he'd hurt me.

"I didn't go back to my room. Instead I walked across the stretch of lawn behind the house, down to the beach, and sat there on the sand. It was a bright September night, and the full moon made it almost light as day; so I couldn't help seeing what followed. I'd sat there on the beach for fifteen minutes, possibly, when I happened to look back. The boys' rooms opened on the side veranda and to reach the library one had to pass them. Part of the porch was full-roofed, and consequently in shadow; the remainder was roofed with slats, like a pergola, and the moonlight illuminated it almost as brightly as it did the beach and the back lawn. As I glanced back across my shoulder I saw two figures emerge from one of the French windows leading to the boys' rooms; which one I couldn't be sure, but it looked like Lonny's. One was a man in pajamas and beach robe, the other was a woman, clothed only in a light nightdress, kimono and sandals. I sat there in a sort of stupor, too surprised and horrified to move or make a sound, and as

I looked the moonlight glinted on the girl's gold hair. It was Charlotte Dey.

"While I sat watching them I saw him take her in his arms and kiss her; then she ran down the steps with a little laugh, calling back across her shoulder, 'See you in the morning, Lonny.'

" 'Lonny!' I couldn't believe it. There must be some mistake; the twins were still as like as reflections in a mirror, people were always mistaking them, but—'See you in the morning, Lonny!' kept dinning in my brain like the surging of the surf at my feet. The world seemed crumbling into dust beneath me, while that endless, laughing refrain kept singing in my ears: 'See you in the morning, Lonny.'

"The man on the porch stood looking after the retreating figure of the girl as she ran across the lawns to the house where she was stopping, then drew a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from the pocket of his robe. As he bent to light the cigarette he turned toward the ocean and saw me sitting on the sand. Next instant he turned and fled, ran headlong to the window of his room, and disappeared in the darkness.

"What I had seen made me sick—actually physically sick. I wanted to run into the house and fling myself across my bed and cry my heart out, but I was too weak to rise, so I just slumped down on the sand, buried my face in my arms and began to cry. I didn't know how long I'd been lying there, praying that my heart actually would break and that I'd never see another sunrise, when I felt a hand upon my shoulder.

" 'Why, Beth,' somebody said, 'whatever is the matter?'

"It was one of the boys, which one I couldn't be sure, and he was dressed in corduroy slacks, a sweater and a cap. The bare-head craze hadn't struck the country in those days.

" 'Who are you?' I sobbed, for my eyes were full of tears, and I couldn't see very plainly. 'Is it Larry, or—'

" 'Larry it is, old thing,' he assured me with a laugh. 'Old Lawrence in the flesh and blood, ready to

do his Boy Scout's good daily deed by comforting a lady in distress. I've been taking a little tramp down the beach, looking at the moon and feeling grand and lonesome and romantic, and I come home to find you crying here, as if these sands didn't get enough salt water every day. Where's Lonny?'

"'Lonny—' I began, but he cut in before I had a chance to finish.

"'Don't tell me you two've quarreled! Why, this was to have been his big night—one of his big nights. The old cuss intimated that he'd be able to bear my absence with true Christian fortitude this evening, as he had some very special spooning to do; so I sought consolation of the Titian-haired Charlotte, only to be told that she, too, had a heavy date. *Ergo,* as we used to say at college, here is Lawrence by his lone, after walking over ten miles of beach and looking over several thousand miles of ocean. Want to go for a swim before you turn in? Go get your bathing-clothes; I'll be with you in a jiff.' He turned to run toward the house, but I called him back.

"'Larry,' I asked, 'you're sure Lonny hinted that he'd like to be alone tonight?'

"'Certain sure; honest true, black and blue, cross my heart and hope to die!' he answered. 'The old duffer almost threw me out bodily, he was so anxious to see me go.'

"'And Charlotte,' I persisted, 'did she say what—with whom—her engagement for this evening was?'

"'Why, no,' he answered. 'I say, see here, old girl, you're not getting green-eyed, are you? Why, you know there's only one woman in the world for Lonny, and—'

"'Is there?' I interrupted grimly.

"'I'll say there is, and you're It, spelled with a capital I, just as Charlotte is the one for me. Have I your blessing when I ask her to be Mrs. Lawrence Cardener tomorrow, Beth? I'd have done it tonight, if she hadn't put me off.'

"I couldn't stand it. Lonny had betrayed us both, made a mockery of the love I'd given him and de-

bauched the girl his brother loved. Before I realized it, I'd sobbed the whole tale out on Larry's shoulder, and before I was through we were holding each other like a pair of lost babes in the wood, and Larry was crying as hard as I.

"He was the first to recover his poise. 'No use crying over a tin of spoiled beans, as we used to say in the army,' he told me. 'He and Charlotte can have each other, if they want. I'm through with her, and him, too, the two-faced, double-crossing swine! Keep your tail up, old girl, don't let him know you know how much he's hurt you; don't let him know you know about it at all; just give him back his ring and let him go his way without an explanation.'

"'Will you take the ring back to him now?' I asked.

"'Surest thing,' he promised, 'but don't ask me to make explanations; I'm digging out tomorrow. Off to Paris the day after. Good-bye, old dear, and—better luck next time.'

"I was up early next morning, too. By sunrise I was back in Harrisonville, breaking every speed regulation on the books on the drive up from Seagirt. By noon I had my application filed for a passport; three days later I sailed for England on the *Vauban*.

"An aunt of mine was married to a London barrister and I stopped with her a while. Lonny wrote me every day, at first, but I sent his letters back unopened. Finally he came to see me, but I wouldn't meet him. He came back twice, but before he could call the third time I packed and rushed off to the country.

"Larry wrote me frequently, and from him I learned that Lonny had joined the Spanish Foreign Legion which was fighting the Riffs, later that he had been discharged and was making quite a name for himself as a painter of Oriental landscapes. He did some quite good portraits, too, and was almost famous when I came back to America after being four years abroad. Lonny tried to see me, but I managed

to avoid him, except at parties when there were others about, and finally he stopped annoying me.

"Three years ago I was married to Larry Cardener, but Lonny wasn't our best man. Indeed, we had a very quiet wedding, timed to take place while he was away.

"Larry seemed to have forgotten all his rancor against Lonny, and Lonny was at our house a great deal. I avoided him at first, but gradually his old sweetness and gentleness won me back, and though I could never quite forget his perfidy to me, somehow, I think that I forgave him."

"He was a changed man, *Madame?*" de Grandin asked softly as the woman halted in her narrative and sat passively, staring sightlessly ahead, hands folded motionless in her lap.

"No," she answered in that oddly uninflected tone, "he was less changed than Larry. A little older, a little more serious, perhaps, but still the same sweet, ingenuous lad I'd known and loved so long ago. Larry had become quite gray—early grayness runs in the Cardener family—while Lonny had only a single gray streak running backward from his forehead where a Riff saber had slashed his scalp. He'd picked up an odd trick, too, of brushing his mustache ever so lightly with his bent forefinger when he was puzzled. He explained this by the fact that most of the officers in the Spanish Legion wore full mustaches, different from the close-cropped ones affected by the British, and that he'd followed the custom, but never got quite used to the extra hair on his face. Now, though he'd gone back to the clipped mustache of his young manhood, the Legion mannerism persisted. I can see him now when he and Larry were having an argument over some point of art technique and Larry got the best of it—he was always cleverer than Lonny—how he'd raise his bent finger and brush first one side of his mustache, then the other."

"U'm," de Grandin commented, and as he did so, unconsciously raised his hand to tweak the needle-pointed ends of his own trimly waxed wheat-blond

mustache. "One quite understands, *Madame.* And then?"

"Larry had done well with his art," she answered. "He'd had some fine commissions and executed all successfully, but somehow he seemed changing. For one thing, since prohibition, he'd taken to drinking rather heavily—said he had to do it entertaining business prospects, though that was no excuse for his consuming a bottle of port and half a pint of whisky nearly every evening after dinner——"

"*Quel magnifique!*" de Grandin broke in softly, then: "Pray proceed, *Madame.*"

"He was living beyond our means, too. As soon as he began to be successful he discarded the studio at the house and rented a pretentious one downtown. Often he spent the night there, and though I didn't actually know it for a fact, I understood he often gave elaborate parties there at night; parties which cost a lot more than we could afford.

"I never understood it, for Larry didn't take me into his confidence at all, but early this spring he seemed desperately in need of money. He tried to borrow everywhere, but no one would lend to him; finally he went to his father.

"Mr. Cardener was a queer man, easygoing in most ways, but very hard in others. He absolutely refused to lend Larry a cent, but offered to advance him what he needed on his share of his inheritance. He'd made a will in which the boys were co-legatees, each to have one-half the estate, you see. Larry accepted eagerly, then went back for several more advances, until his share was almost dissipated. Then——" she paused, not in a fit of weeping, not even with a sob, but rather as though she had come to an impasse.

"Yes, *Madame;* then?" de Grandin prompted softly.

"Then came the scandal. Mr. Cardener was found dead—murdered—in his library one morning, slashed and cut almost to ribbons with a painter's palette knife. The second man, who answered the door the night before they found him, was a new servant, but he had seen Larry several times and Lonny once. He testified

that Lonny came to the house about ten o'clock, quarreled violently with his father, and left in a rage twenty minutes or half an hour later. He identified Lonny positively by the gray streak in his hair, which was otherwise dark brown, and by the fact that he brushed his mustache nervously with the knuckle of his right forefinger, both when he demanded to see his father and when he left. After Lonny'd gone, the servant went to the library, but found the door locked and received no answer to his rapping. He thought Mr. Cardener was in a rage, as he had been on several occasions when Larry had called; so he made no attempt to break into the room. But next morning when they found Mr. Cardener hadn't slept in his bed and the library door was still locked, they broke in, and found him murdered."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured noncommittally. "And were there further clues, *Madame?*"

"Yes, unfortunately. On the library table, so plainly marked in blood that it could not be mistaken, was the print of Lonny's whole left hand. Not just a fingerprint, but the entire palm and fingers. Also, on the palette knife with which the killing had been done, they found Lonny's fingerprints."

"U'm," repeated Jules de Grandin. "He was at pains to put the noose around his neck, this one."

"So it seemed," agreed our passenger. "Lonny denied being at his father's house that night, or any night within a month, but there was no way he could prove an alibi. He lived alone, having his studio in his house, and his servants, a man and wife, went home every night after dinner. They weren't there the night of the murder, of course. Then there was that handprint and those finger-marks upon the knife."

"*Eh bien, Madame,*" de Grandin answered, "that is the hardest nut of all to crack, the deepest river of them all to ford. Human witnesses may lie, human memories may fail, or be woefully inexact, but fingerprints—handprints? No, it is not so. Me, I was too many years associated with the *Service Sûreté* not to learn as much. What laymen commonly deride as cir-

cumstantial evidence is the best evidence of them all. I would rather base a case on it than on the testimony of a hundred human witnesses, all of whom might be either honestly mistaken or most unmitigated liars. If you can but explain away—"

"I *can*," the girl broke in with her first show of animation. "Listen: Last year, six months before the murder, three months before Larry made his first request for funds from his father, he began making a collection of casts of famous hands as a hobby. When he told Lonny he wanted to include his among them, Lonny nearly went into hysterics at the idea. But he consented to let Larry take a cast. I don't know much about such things, but isn't it customary to take such impressions directly in plaster of Paris?"

"Plaster of Paris? But certainly," the Frenchman answered with a puzzled frown. "Why is it that you ask?"

"Because Larry took the impression of his brother's hands in gelatin."

"*Grand Dieu des artichauts!*" exclaimed de Grandin. "In *gélatine?* Oh, never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized treachery! One begins to see the glimmer of a little so small gleam of light in this dark case, *Madame*. Say on. I shake, *parbleu*, I quiver with attention!"

For the first time she looked directly at him, nodding her small head. "At the trial Larry admitted that he'd had advances from his father, but declared he'd gotten them for Lonny. He proved it, too."

"Proved it?" de Grandin echoed. "How do you mean, *Madame?*"

"Just what I say. The canceled checks were shown in court by Mr. Cardener's executor, and every one of them had been endorsed and cashed by Lonny. Lonny swore Larry asked him to cash them for him so that no one could trace the money, because he was afraid of attachment proceedings, but Larry denied this under oath and offered his bank books in substantiation of his claim. None of them showed deposits of any such amounts as he'd had from his father."

De Grandin clenched his little hands to fists and beat the knuckles against his temples. "*Mon Dieu,*" he moaned, "this case will be the death of me, *Madame.* See if I apprehend you rightly:

"It appeared to those who sat in court"—he checked the items off upon his fingers—"that Monsieur Lawrence, at the risk of incurring paternal displeasure, secured loan after loan on his inheritance, ostensibly for himself, but actually for his brother. He proves he turned his father's loans intact over to Monsieur Alonzo. His brother says he cashed the checks and gave the cash back. This is denied. Furthermore, proof, or rather lack of proof, that the brother ever banked such sums is offered. Sitting as we do behind the scenes, we may suspect that Monsieur Lawrence is indulging in double-dealing; but did we sit out in the theater as did that judge and jury, should we not have been fooled, as well? I think so. What makes you sure that they were wrong and we are right, *Madame?* I do not cast aspersion on your intuition; I merely ask to know."

"I have proof," she answered levelly. "When Lonny had been sentenced and the governor refused to intervene, even to commute his sentence to life imprisonment, it seemed to me that I'd go wild. All these years I'd thought I hated Lonny for what he did that night so long ago; when I finally brought myself to see and talk with him, I thought the hatred had lulled to mere resentment, passive dislike. I was wrong. I never hated Lonny; I'd always loved him, only I loved my foolish, selfish pride more. What if he did—what if he and Charlotte Dey—oh, you understand! Lots of men—most men, I suppose—have affairs before marriage, and their wives and the world think nothing of it. Why should I have set myself up as the exception and demanded greater purity in the man I took to husband than most wives ask—or get? When I realized there was no hope for Lonny, I was nearly frantic, and last night after dinner I begged Larry to try to think of some way we could save him.

"He'd been drinking more than ever lately; last

night he was sottish, beastly. 'Why should I try to save the poor fool?' he asked. 'D'ye think I've been to all the trouble to put him where he is just to pull him out?' Then, drunkenly, boastfully, he told me everything.

"It wasn't Lonny whom I'd seen with Charlotte Dey that night at Seagirt. It was Larry. When Lonny said good-night to me and went into the house, he heard Larry and Charlotte in Larry's room, which was next to his. He knocked upon the door and demanded that Larry take her out of there at once, even threatening to tell their father if his order weren't obeyed immediately. Larry tried to argue, but finally agreed, for he seemed frightened when Lonny threatened to tell Mr. Cardener.

"Lonny, furious with his brother and the Dey girl, came out on the veranda to see that Charlotte actually left, and was sitting there when I came up the porch to get the cook-book. He wanted to spare me the humiliation of seeing Larry that way, and demanded that I go back at once. The poor lad was so anxious to help me that his manner was unintentionally rough.

"I'd just been gone a moment when Larry and Charlotte came out. Larry saw me crying on the sand, and the whole scheme came to him like an inspiration. 'Call me Lonny!' he whispered to Charlotte as they said good-night, and the spiteful little minx did it. Then he rushed back to his room, pulled outdoor clothes on over his pajamas and made a circuit of the house, waiting in the shadows till he saw me bow my head upon my arm, then running noiselessly across the lawn and beach till he was beside me and ready to play his little comedy.

"He hated Lonny for taking me away from him, and—you know how the old proverb says those whom we have injured are those whom we hate most?—his hatred seemed to grow and grow as time went on. Finally he evolved this scheme to murder Lonny. After he'd made the gelatine mold of Lonny's hands, he made a rubber casting from it, like a rubber stamp,

you know, and then began importuning his father for money. Each time he'd get a check he'd have Lonny cash it for him, then put the money in some secret place. Finally, exactly as he'd planned, his father refused to advance him any more, and they quarreled. Then, knowing that the butler, who had known them both since they were little boys, would be away that night, he stained his hair to imitate Lonny's, called at the house and impersonated his brother. When his father demanded what he meant by the masquerade, he answered calmly that he'd come to kill him, and intended Lonny should be executed for the crime. He stabbed his father with a palette knife he'd stolen from Lonny's studio almost a year before, hacked and slashed the body savagely, and made a careful print of the rubber hand in blood on the library table. Lonny's left-handed, you know, and it was the print of his left hand they found on the table, and the prints of his left fingers which were found marked in blood upon the handle of the knife.

"Now Larry wins either way. Lonny can't take his legacy under his father's will, for he's been convicted of murdering him; therefore, he can't make a will and dispose of his half of the estate. Larry takes Lonny's share as his father's sole surviving next of kin capable of inheriting, and he's already got most of his own through the advances he's received and hidden away. A wife can't testify against her husband in a criminal case; but even if I could repeat what he's confessed to me in court, who'd believe me? He need only deny everything, and I'd not only be ridiculed for inventing such a fantastic story, but publicly branded as my brother-in-law's mistress, as well. Larry told me that last night when I threatened to repeat his story to the governor, and Lonny agreed with him today. Oh, it's dreadful, ghastly, hideous! An innocent man's going to a shameful death for a crime he didn't commit, and a perfidious villain who admits the crime goes scot-free, enjoying his brother's heritage and gloating over his immunity from punishment. There isn't any God, of course; if there were, He'd never let such things

occur; but there ought to be a hell, somewhere, where such things can be adjusted."

"*Madame,*" de Grandin returned evenly, "do not be deceived. God is not made mock of, even by such scheming, clever rogues as him to whom you're married. Furthermore, it is possible that we need not wait the flames of hell to furnish an adjustment of this matter."

"But what can you or any one do?" the girl demanded. "No one will believe me; this story is so utterly bizarre—"

"It is certainly decidedly unusual," de Grandin answered non-committally.

"Oh? You think that I've invented it, too?" she wailed despairingly. "Oh, God, if there is a God, help, *please* help us in our trouble!"

"Quickly, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin cried. "Assist me with her. She has swooned!"

We drew up at my door even as he spoke, and, the girl's form trailing between us, ascended the steps, let ourselves in and hastened to the consulting-room. The Frenchman eased our light burden down upon the divan while I got sal volatile and aromatic ammonia.

"*Madame,*" de Grandin told her when she had recovered consciousness, "you must let us take you home."

"Home?" she echoed almost vaguely, as though the word were strange to her. "I haven't any home. The house where *he* lives isn't home to me, nor is—"

"Nevertheless, *Madame,* it is to that house which you must let us take you. It would be too much to ask that you dissemble affection for one who did so vile a thing, but you can at least pretend to be reconciled to making the best of your helplessness. Please, *Madame,* I beg it of you."

"But why?" she answered wonderingly. "I only promised to delay my suicide till Lonny is—till he doesn't need me any more. Must I endure the added torture of spending my last few hours with *him?* Must my agony be intensified by having him gloat over

Lonny's execution?—oh, he'll do it, never doubt that! I know him——"

"Perhaps, *Madame*, it may be that you shall see that which will surprise you before this business is finished," the Frenchman interrupted. "I can not surely promise anything—that would be too cruel—but be assured that I shall do my utmost to establish justice in this case. How? I do not surely know, but I shall try.

"Attend me carefully." He crossed the office, rummaged in the medicine cabinet a moment, then returned with a small phial in his hand. "Do you know what this is?" he asked.

"No," wonderingly.

"It is mercuric cyanide, a poison infinitely stronger and more swift in action than potassium cyanide or mercuric chloride, commonly called corrosive sublimate. You could not buy it, the law forbids its sale to laymen, yet here it is. A little so small pinch of this white powder on your tongue and *pouf!* unconsciousness and almost instant death. You want him, *hein?*"

"Oh, yes—yes!" she stretched forth eager hands, like a child begging for a sweetmeat.

"Very good. You shall go home and hide your intentions as ably as you can. You shall be patient under cruelty; you shall make no bungling effort to destroy yourself like that we caught you at tonight. Meanwhile, we shall do what we can for you and Monsieur Lonny. If we fail—*Madame*, this little bottle shall be yours when you demand it of me. Do you agree?"

"Yes," she responded, then, falteringly, as though assenting to her own execution: "I'm ready to go any time you wish to take me."

Cardener's big house was dark when we arrived, but our companion nodded understandingly. "He's probably in the library," she informed us. "It's at the back, and you can't see the lights from here. Thank you so much for what you've done—and what you've

promised. Good-night." She alighted nimbly and held her hand out in farewell.

De Grandin raised her fingers to his lips, and: "It may well be that we must see your husband upon business, *Madame,*" he whispered. "When is he most likely to be found at home?"

"Why, he'll probably be here till noon tomorrow. He's usually a late riser."

"*Bien, Madame,* it may be that we shall be forced to put him to the inconvenience of rising earlier than usual," he answered enigmatically as he brushed her fingers with his lips again.

"Now, what the devil are you up to?" I demanded reproachfully as we drove away. "You know there's nothing you can do for that poor chap in jail, or for that woman, either. It was cruel to hold out hope, de Grandin. Even your promise of the poison is unethical. You're making yourself an accessory before the fact to homicide by giving her that cyanide, and dragging me into it, too. We'll be lucky if we see the end of this affair without landing in prison."

"I think not," he denied. "I scarcely know how I shall go about it, but I propose a gamble in souls, my friend. Perhaps, with Hussein Obeyid's assistance we may yet win."

"Who the deuce is Hussein Obeyid?"

"Another friend of mine," he answered cryptically. "You have not met him, but you will. Will you be good enough to drive into East Melton Street? I do not know the number, but I shall surely recognize the house when we arrive."

East Melton Street was one of those odd, forgotten backwaters common to all cities where a heterogeneous foreign population has displaced the ancient "quality" who once inhabited the brownstone-fronted houses. Italians, Poles, Hungarians, with a sprinkling of other European miscellany dwelt in Melton Street, each nationality occupying almost definite portions of the thoroughfare, as though their territories had been meted out to them. Far toward the water-end, where

rotting piers projected out into the oily waters of the bay and the far from pleasant odors of trash-laden barges were wafted landward on every puff of superheated summer breeze, was the Syrian quarter. Here Greeks, Armenians, Arabians, a scattering of Persians and a horde of indeterminate mixed-breeds of the Levant lived in houses which had once been mansions but were now so sunk in disrepair that the wonder was they had not been condemned long since. Here and there was a house which seemed relatively untenanted, being occupied by no more than ten or a dozen families; but for the most part the places swarmed with patently unwashed humanity, children whose extreme vocality seemed matched only by their total unacquaintance with soap and water sharing steps, windows and iron-slatted fire escapes with slattern women of imposing avoirdupois, arrayed in soiled white nightgowns and unlaced shoes shockingly run over at the heels.

De Grandin called a halt before a house set back in what had been a lawn between a fly-blown restaurant where coatless men played dominoes and consumed great quantities of heavy, deadly-looking food, and a "billiard academy" where rat-faced youths in corset-waisted trousers knocked balls about or perused blatantly colored foreign magazines. The house before which we drew up was so dark I thought it tenantless at first, but as we mounted the low step which stood before its door I caught a subdued gleam of light from its interior. A moment we paused, inhaling the unpleasant perfume of the dark and squalid street while de Grandin pulled vigorously at the brass bell-knob set in the stone coping of the doorway.

"It looks as though nobody's home," I hazarded as he rang and rang again, but:

"*Salaam aleikum,*" a soft voice whispered, and the door was opened, not wide, but far enough to permit our entrance, by a diminutive individual in black satin waistcoat, loose, bloomer-like trousers and a red tarboosh several sizes too large for him.

"*Aleikum salaam,*" de Grandin answered, returning

the salute the other made. "We should like to see your uncle on important business. Is he to be seen?"

"*Bissahi!*" the other answered in a high-pitched, squeaking voice, and hurried down the darkened hall toward the rear of the house.

"Is your friend his uncle?" I asked curiously, for the fellow was somewhere between sixty-five and seventy years of age, rather well-advanced to possess an uncle, it seemed to me.

The little Frenchman chuckled. "By no means," he assured me. " 'Uncle' is a euphemism for 'master' with these people, and used in courtesy to servants."

I was about to request further information when the little old man returned and beckoned us to follow him.

"*Salaam*, Hussein Obeyid," de Grandin greeted as we passed through a curtained doorway, "*es salaat wes salaam aleik!*—Peace be with thee, and the glory!"

A portly, bearded man in flowing robe of striped linen, red tarboosh and red Morocco slippers rose from his seat beside the window, touching forehead, lips and breast with a quick gesture as he crossed the room to take de Grandin's outstretched hand. This, I learned as the Frenchman introduced us formally, was Doctor Hussein Obeyid, "one of the world's ten greatest philosophers," and a very special friend of Jules de Grandin's. Doctor Obeyid was a big man, not only stout, but tall and strongly built, with massive, finely-chiseled features and a curling, square-cut beard of black which gave him somewhat the appearance of an Assyrian andro-sphinx.

The room in which we sat was as remarkable in appearance as its owner. It was thirty feet, at least, in length, being composed of the former front and back "parlors" of the old house, the partitions having been knocked out. Casement windows, glazed with richly painted glass, opened on a small back yard charmingly planted with grass and flowering shrubs; three electric fans kept the air pleasantly in motion. Persian rugs were on the polished floor and the place was dimly lighted by two lamps with pierced brass

shades of Turkish fashion. The furniture was an odd conglomeration, lacquered Chinese pieces mingling with Eastern ottomans like enormously overgrown boudoir cushions, with here and there a bit of Indian cane-ware. Upon a stand was an aquarium in which swam several goldfish of the most gorgeous coloring I had ever seen, while near the opened windows stood what looked like an ancient refectory table with bits of chemical apparatus scattered over it. The walls were lined from floor to ceiling with bookcases laden with volumes in unfamiliar bindings and glassed-in cabinets in which was ranged a miscellany of unusual objects—mummified heads, hands and feet, bits of clay inscribed with cuneiform characters, odd weapons and utensils of ancient make, fit to be included in the exhibitions of our best museums. A human skeleton, completely articulated, leered at us from a corner of the room. Such was the rest room and workshop of Doctor Hussein Obeyid, "one of the world's ten greatest philosophers."

De Grandin lost no time in coming to the point. Briefly he narrated Beth Cardener's story, beginning with our first glimpse of her in the penitentiary and ending with our leaving her upon her doorstep. "Once, years ago, my friend," he finished, "on the ancient Djebel Druse—the stronghold of that strange and mystic people who acknowledge neither Turk nor Frenchman as their overlord—I saw you work a miracle. Do you recall? A prisoner had been taken, and—"

"I recall perfectly," our host cut in, his deep voice fairly booming through the room. "Yes, I well remember it. But it is not well to do such things promiscuously, my little one. The Ineffable One has His own plans for our goings and our comings; to gamble in men's souls is not a game which men should play at."

"*Misère de Dieu!*" de Grandin cried, "this is no petty game I ask that you should play, *mon vieux.* Madame Cardener? Her plight is pitiful, I grant; but women's hearts have broken in the past, and they will break till time shall be no more. No, it is not for her I

ask this thing, but for the sake of justice. Shall ninety-million-times-damned perfidy vaunt itself in pride at the expense of innocence? 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' truly; but consider: does He not ever act through human agencies when He performs his miracles? Damn yes. If there were any way this poor one's innocence could be established, even after death, I should not be here; but as it is he is enmeshed in webs of treachery. No sixty-times-accursed 'reasonable' man could be convinced he did not do that murder, and the so puerile Anglo-Saxon law of which the British and Americans prate so boastfully has its hard rules of evidence which for ever bar the truth from being spoken. This monstrous-great injustice must not—can not—be allowed, my friend."

Doctor Obeyid stroked his black beard thoughtfully, "I hesitate to do it," he replied, "but for you, my little birdling, and for justice, I shall try."

"*Triomphe!*" de Grandin cried, rising from his chair and bounding across the room to seize the other in his arms and kiss him on both cheeks. "*Ha,* Satan, thou art stalemated; tomorrow we shall make a monkey of your plans and of the plans of that so evil man who did your work, by damn!" Abruptly he sobered. "You will go with us tomorrow morning?" he demanded.

Doctor Obeyid inclined his head in acquiescence. "Tomorrow morning," he replied.

Then the diminutive, wrinkle-bitten "nephew" who performed the doctor's household tasks appeared with sweet, black coffee and execrable little tarts compounded of pistachio nuts, chopped dates and melted honey, and we drank and ate and smoked long, amber-scented cigarettes until the tower-clock of the nearby Syrian Catholic church beat out the quarter-hour after midnight.

It was shortly after ten o'clock next morning when we called at Cardener's. Doctor Obeyid, looking more imposing, if possible, in a suit of silver-gray corduroy and a wide-brimmed black-felt hat than he had in

Eastern robes, towered a full head above de Grandin and six inches over me as he stood between us and beat a soft tattoo on the porch floor with the ferule of his ivory-headed cane. It was a most remarkable piece of personal adornment, that cane. Longer by a half-foot than the usual walking-stick, it was more like the exaggerated staffs borne by gentlemen of the late Georgian period than any modern cane, and its carven ivory top was made to simulate a serpent's head, scales being reproduced with startling fidelity to life, and little beads of some green-colored stone—jade, I thought—being inlaid for the eyes. The wood of the staff was a kind which I could not classify. It was a vague, indefinite color, something between an olive-green and granite-gray, and overlaid with little intersecting lines which might have been in imitation of a reptile's scales or might have been a part of the strange wood's odd grain.

"We should like to see Monsieur Cardener—" began de Grandin, but for once he failed to keep control of the situation.

"Tell him Doctor Obeyid desires to talk with him," broke in our companion, in his deep, commanding voice. "At once, please."

"He's at breakfast now, sir," the servant answered. "If you'll step into the drawing-room and—"

"At once," Hussein Obeyid repeated, not with emphasis, but rather inexorably, as one long used to having his orders obeyed immediately and without question.

"Yes, sir," the butler returned, and led us toward the rear of the house.

Striped awnings kept the late summer sun from the breakfast room's open windows where a double row of scarlet geranium-tops stood nodding in the breeze. At the end of the polished mahogany table in the center of the room a man sat facing us, and it needed no second glance to tell us he was Lawrence Cardener. Line for line and feature for feature, his face was the duplicate of that of the prisoned man whom we had seen the day before. Even the fact that his upper lip

was adorned by a close-cropped mustache, while the prisoner was smooth-shaven, and his hair was iron-gray, while the convict's close-clipped hair was brown, did not affect the marked resemblance to any degree.

"What the dev—" he began as the servant ushered us into the room, but Doctor Obeyid cut his protest short.

"We are here to talk about your brother," he announced.

"Ah?" An ugly, sneering smile gathered at the corners of Cardener's mouth. "You are, eh? Well?" He pushed the blue-willow club plate laden with mutton chops and scrambled eggs away from him and picked up a slice of buttered toast. "Get on with it," he ordered. "You wished to talk about my brother—"

"And you," Doctor Obeyid supplied. "It is not too late for you to make amends."

"Amends?" the other echoed, amusement showing in his eyes as he dropped a lump of sugar into his well-creamed coffee and stirred it with his spoon.

"Amends," repeated Obeyid. "You still may go before the governor, and—"

"Oh, so that's it, eh? My precious wife's been talking to you? Poor dear, she's a little touched, you know"—he tapped himself upon the temple significantly—"used to be fearfully stuck on Lonny, in the old days, and—"

"My friend," Obeyid broke in, "it is of your immortal soul that we must talk, not of your wife. Is it possible that you will let another bear the stigma of your guilt? Your soul—"

Cardener laughed shortly. "My soul, is it?" he answered. "Don't bother about *my* soul. If you're so much interested in souls, you'd better skip down to Trenton and talk to Lonny. He's got one now, but he won't have it long. Tonight they're going to—" his voice trailed off to nothingness and his eyes widened as he slowly and deliberately put his spoon down in its saucer. Not fear, but something like a compound

of despair and resignation showed in his face as he stared in fascination at Hussein Obeyid.

I turned to glance at our companion, and a startled exclamation leaped involuntarily to my lips. The big, Semitic-featured face had undergone a startling transformation. The complexion had altered from swarthy tan to pasty gray, the eyes had started from their sockets, white, globular, expressionless as peeled onions. I had seen such horrible protrusion of the optics in corpses far gone in putrefaction when tissue-gas was bloating features out of human semblance, but never had I seen a thing like this in a living countenance. Doctor Obeyid's lips were moving, but what he said I could not understand. It was a low, monotonous, sing-song chant in some harsh and guttural language, rising and falling alternately with a majesty and power like the surging of a wind-swept sea upon the sands.

How long he chanted I have no idea. It might have been a minute, it might have been an hour, for the clock of eternity seemed stopped as the sonorous voice boomed out the harsh, compelling syllables. But finally it was finished, and I felt de Grandin's hand upon my arm.

"Come away, my friend," he whispered in an awe-struck tone. "The cards are dealt and on the table. The first part of our game of souls is started. *Prie Dieu* that we shall win!"

Alonzo Cardener was sitting at the little table in his cell, not playing cards, although a pack rested beside the Bible on the clean-scrubbed wood, but merely sitting as though lost in thought, his elbow on his knee, head propped upon his hand. He did not look up as we came abreast of him, but just sat there, staring straight ahead.

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin hailed. "Monsieur Lonny!" The prisoner looked up, but there was no change of expression in his dull and apathetic face. "We are come from her, from Madame Beth," the Frenchman added softly.

The change which overspread the prisoner's face was like a miracle. It was young again, and bright with eagerness, like a lad in love when some one brings him tidings of his sweetheart. "You've come from her?" he asked incredulously. "Tell me, is she well? Is she—"

"She is well, *mon pauvre,* and happier, since she has told her story to us. We came upon her yesternight by chance, and she has told us all. Now, she asks that we should come to you and bid you be of cheer."

Cardener laughed shortly, with harsh mirthlessness. "Rather difficult, that, for a man in my position," he rejoined, "but—"

"My brother," Doctor Obeyid's deep voice, lowered to a whisper, but still powerful as the muted rumbling of an organ's bass, broke in upon his bitter speech, "you must not despair. Are you afraid to die?"

"Die?" A spasm as of pain twitched across the convict's face. "No, sir; I don't think so. I've faced death many times before, and never was afraid of it; but leaving Beth, now, when I've just found her again, is what hurts most. It's impossible, of course, but if I could only see her once again—"

"You shall," Hussein Obeyid promised. "Little brother, be confident. That door through which you go tonight is the entrance to reunion with the one you love. It is the portal to a new and larger life, and beyond it waits your loved one."

Gray-faced horror spread across the prisoner's countenance. "You—you mean she is already dead?" he faltered. "Oh, Beth, my girl; my dear, my dearest dear—"

"She is not dead; she is alive and well, and waiting for you," Obeyid's deep, compelling voice cut in. "Just beyond that door she waits, my little one. Keep up your courage; you shall surely find her there."

"Oh?" Light seemed to dawn upon the prisoner. "You mean that she'll destroy herself to be with me. No—*no;* she mustn't do it! Suicide's a sin, a deadly sin. I'm going innocent to death; God will judge my inno-

cence, for He knows all, but if she were to kill herself perhaps we should be separated for ever. Tell her that she mustn't do it; tell her that I beg that she will live until her time has come, and that she'll not forget me while she's waiting; for I'll be waiting, too."

"Look at me," commanded Obeyid suddenly, so suddenly that the frantic man forgot his fears and stopped his protestations short to look with wonder-widened eyes at Hussein Obeyid.

The Oriental raised his staff and held it toward the wire screen the guards had placed before the cell. And as he held it out, *it moved.* Before our eyes that staff of carven wood and ivory became a living, moving thing, twining itself about the doctor's wrist, rearing its head and darting forth its bifurcated tongue. "*Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*—in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate——" murmured Hussein Obeyid, then launched into a low-voiced, vibrant cantillation while the vivified staff writhed and turned its scaly head in cadence to the chant. He did not distort his features as when he cast a spell upon the prisoner's brother; but his face was pale as chiseled marble, and down his high, wide, sloping forehead ran rivulets of sweat as he put the whole force of his soul and mighty body behind the invocation which he chanted.

The look upon the convict's face was mystifying. Twin fires, as of a fever, burned in the depths of his cavernous eyes and his features writhed and twisted as though his soul were racked by the travail of spiritual childbirth. "Beth!" he whispered hoarsely. "Beth!"

I turned apprehensively toward the prison guard who sat immediately behind us. That he had not cried out at the animation of Obeyid's staff and the low-toned invocation of the Oriental ere this surprised me. What I saw surprised me more. The man lounged in his chair, his features dull and disinterested, a look of utter boredom on his face. He saw nothing, heard nothing, noticed nothing!

"... until tonight, then, little brother," Hussein

Obeyid was saying softly. "Remember, and be brave. She will be awaiting you."

"Come," ordered Jules de Grandin, tugging at my sleeve. "The dice are cast. We must wait to read the spots before we can know surely whether we have won."

They led him in to die at twenty minutes after ten. Permission to attend the execution had been difficult to get; but Jules de Grandin with his tireless energy and infinite resource had obtained it. Hussein Obeyid, the little Frenchman and I accepted seats at the far end of the stiffbacked church-like pew reserved for witnesses, and I felt a shiver of sick apprehension ripple down my spine as we took our places. To watch beside the bed of one who dies when medical science has exhausted its resources is heart-breaking, but to sit and watch a life snuffed out, to see a strong and healthy body turned to so much clay within the twinkling of an eye—that is horrifying.

The executioner, a lean, cadaverous man who somehow reminded me of a disillusioned evangelist, stood in a tiny alcove to the left of the electric chair, a heavy piece of oaken furniture raised one low step above the tiled floor of the chamber; the assistant warden and the prison doctor stood between the chair and entrance to the death-room, and although this was no novelty to him, I saw the medic finger nervously at the stethoscope which hung about his neck as though it were a badge of office. A partly folded screen at the farther corner of the room obscured another doorway, but as we took our seats I caught a glimpse of a wheeled stretcher with a cotton sheet lying neatly folded on it. Beyond, I knew, waited the autopsy table and the surgeon's knife when the prison doctor had pronounced the execution a success.

I breathed a strangling, gasping sigh as a single short, imperative tap sounded on the panels of the painted door which led to the death chamber.

Silently, on well-oiled hinges, the door swung back, and Alonzo Cardener stood in readiness to meet the

great adventure. His cotton shirt was open at the throat, the right leg of his trousers had been slit up to the knee; as the pitiless white light struck on his head, I saw a little spot was shaved upon his scalp. To right and left were prison guards who held his elbows lightly. Another guard brought up the rear. The chaplain walked before, his Prayer Book open. *". . . yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me . . ."*

Cardener's eyes were wide and rapt. The fingers of his right hand closed, not convulsively, but tenderly, as though he took and held another's hand in his. His lips moved slightly, and though no sound came from them, we saw them form a name: "Beth!"

They led him to the chair, but he did not seem to see it; they had to help him up the one low step—his last step in the world—or he would have stumbled on it; for his eyes were gazing down an endless vista where he walked at peace with his beloved, hand in hand.

But as they snapped the heavy straps about his waist and wrists and ankles and set the leather helmet on his head, a sudden change came over him. He struggled fiercely at the bonds which held him in the chair, and although his face was almost hidden by the deadly headgear clamped upon his skull, his lips were unobscured, and from them came a wailing cry of horrified astonishment. "Not me!" he screamed. *"Not me—Lonny!* I'm—"

Notebook open, and pencil poised, as though to make a memorandum, the prison doctor stood before the chair. Now, as the convict screamed in frenzied fear, the pencil tilted forward, as though the doctor wrote. A sudden, sharp, strange whining sounded, something throbbed and palpitated agonizingly, like stifled heart-beats. The ghastly, pleading cry was checked abruptly as the prisoner's body started up and forward, as though it sought to burst the leathern bonds which held it. The chin and lips went from pale gray to dusky red, like the face of one who holds

his breath too long. The hands, fluttering futilely a moment since, were taut and rigid on the chair arms.

A moment—or eternity!—of this, then the grating jar of metal against metal as the switch was thrown and the current was shut off. The straining body dropped back limply in the chair.

Again the doctor's pencil tilted forward, again the whining whir, and the flaccid body started forward, all but bursting through the broad, strong straps which harnessed it into the chair. Then absolute flaccidity as the current was withdrawn again.

The doctor put his book and pencil by and stepped up quickly to the chair. Putting back the prisoner's open shirt—he wore no undershirt—he pressed his stethoscope against the reddened chest exposed to view, listened silently, then, crisp and business-like, announced his verdict:

"I pronounce this man dead."

White-uniformed attendants took the limp form from the chair, wrapped it quickly in a sheet and wheeled it off to the autopsy table.

We signed the roll of witnesses and hurried from the prison, and:

"Drive, my friend, drive as though the fiends of fury rode the wind behind us!" ordered Jules de Grandin. "We must arrive at Madame Cardener's without delay. Right away, immediately; at once!"

Beth Cardener met us at the door, the pallor of her face intensified by the sable hue of the black-velvet pajamas which she wore. "It happened at twenty minutes after ten," she told us as we filed silently into the hall.

De Grandin's small eyes rounded with astonishment as he looked at her. *"Précisément, Madame,"* he acknowledged, "but how is it you know?"

A puzzled look spread on her face as she replied: "Of course, I couldn't sleep—who could, in such circumstances?—and I kept looking at the clock and saying to myself, 'What are they doing to my poor boy now? Is he still in the same world with me?' when I

seemed to hear a sort of drumming, whirring noise—something like the deafening vibration you sometimes hear when riding in a motorcar—and then a sudden sharp, agonizing pain shot through me from my head to feet. It was like fire rushing through my veins, burning me to ashes as it ran, and everything went red, then inky-black before my eyes. I felt as if I stifled—no, not that, rather as though every nerve and muscle in my body were suddenly cramping into knots—and at the same time there was a terrible sensation of something from inside me being snatched away in one cruel wrench, as though my heart were dragged out of my breast with a pair of dreadful tongs that burned and seared, even as they tore my quivering body open. If it had lasted, I'd have died, but it left as quickly as it came, and there I was, faint, weak and numb, but suffering no pain, staggering to the window and gasping for breath. As I reached the window I looked up, and a shooting-star fell across the sky. I knew, then; Lonny was no longer in the same world with me. I was lonely, so utterly, devastatingly lonely, that I thought my heart would break. I've never had a child, but if I had one, and it died, I think that I'd feel as I felt the instant that I saw that falling star.

"Then"—she paused, and again that puzzled, wondering look crept into her eyes—"then something, something inside me, like a voice heard in a dream, seemed to say insistently: 'Go to Larry; go to Larry!'

"I didn't want to go; I didn't want to see him or be near him—I loathed the very thought of him, but that strange, compelling voice kept ordering me to go. So I went.

"Larry was sitting in the big chair he always uses in the library. His head had fallen back, and his hands were gripping the arms till the finger-tips bit into the upholstery. His mouth was slightly open and his face was pale as death. I noticed, as I crossed the room, that his feet were well apart, but both flat to the floor. It was"—her voice sank to a husky,

frightened whisper—"it was as if *he* were sitting in the death-chair, and had just been executed!"

"U'm, and did you touch him, *Madame?*" de Grandin asked.

"Yes, I did, and his hands were cold—clammy. He was dead. Oh, thank God, he was dead! He murdered his poor brother, just as surely as he killed his father, but he'll never live to boast of it. He died, just as Lonny did, in 'the chair,' only it wasn't human injustice that took his perjured life away; it was the even-handed judgment of just Heaven, and *I'm glad.* I'm glad, do you hear me! I'm glad enough to rush out in the street and tell it to the world; to shout it from the house-tops!"

De Grandin cast a sidelong glance at Hussein Obeyid, who nodded silently. "Perfectly, *Madame,* one understands," the Frenchman answered. "Will you go with us and show us the body? It would be of interest——"

"Yes, yes; I'll show you—I'll be glad to show you!" she broke in shrilly. "Come; this way, please."

Gray-faced, hang-jawed, pale and flaccid as only the dead can be, Lawrence Cardener sat slumped in the big chair beside the book-strewn table. I glanced at him and nodded briefly. No use to make a further examination. No doctor, soldier or embalmer need be introduced to death. He knows it at a glance.

But Hussein Obeyid was not so easily assured. Crossing the room, he bent above the corpse, staring straight into the glazed and sightless eyes and murmuring a sort of chanting invocation. "*Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*—in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; in the name of the One True God——" He drew a little packet from his waistcoat pocket, broke the seal which closed it and dusted a pinch of whitish powder into the palm of his right hand, then rubbed both hands together quickly, as though laving them with soap. In the shadow where he stood we saw his hands begin to glow, as though they had been smeared with phosphorus, but gradually the glow became a quick and flickering faint-blue

light which grew and grew in power till it darted wisps of bluish flame from palms and finger-tips.

He grasped his serpent-headed staff between his glowing hands, and instantly the thing became alive, waving slowly to and fro, darting forth its lambent tongue to touch the dead man's eyes and lips and nostrils. He threw the staff upon the floor, and instantly it was a thing of wood and ivory once again.

Now he pressed fire-framed hands upon the corpse's brow, then bent and ran them up and down the length of the slack limbs, finally poising them above the dead man's *omphalos*. The flame which flickered from his hands curved downward like a blue-green waterfall of fire which seemed to be absorbed by the dead body as water would be soaked in thirsty soil.

And now the flaccid, flabby limbs seemed to tighten, to stretch out jerkily, uneasily, as though awaking from a long, uncomfortable sleep. The lolling head began to oscillate upon the neck, the slack jaw closed, the eyes, a moment since glassy with the vacant stare of death, gave signs of unmistakable vitality.

A shrill, sharp cry broke from Beth Cardener. "He's alive," she screamed, horror and heart-sick disappointment in her voice. "O-oh, he's alive!" She turned reproachful, tear-dimmed eyes on Hussein Obeyid. "Why did you revive him?" she asked accusingly. "He might have died, if you hadn't—"

Her voice broke, smothered in a storm of sobs. Thus far the vibrant hatred of the murderer and her exultation over the swift retribution which had overtaken him had kept her nerve from snapping. Now, the realization that the man whose perfidy had betrayed her trust and her lover's life was still alive broke down her resistance, and she fell, half-fainting, on the couch, buried her face in a pillow and gave herself up bodily to retching lamentation.

"*Madame,*" de Grandin's voice was sharp, peremptory; "Madame Beth, come here!"

The woman raised her tear-scarred face and looked

at him in wonder. "Come here, quickly, if you please, and tell me what it is you see," he ordered again.

She rose, mechanically, like one who walks in sleep, and approached the semiconscious man who slouched in the big chair.

"Behold, observe; *voilà!*" the Frenchman ordered, leaning down and bending Cardener's left ear forward. There, plainly marked and unmistakable, imprinted on the skin above the *retrahens aurem* was a small white cicatrix, a quarter-inch or so in length.

"Oh?" It was a strangling, gasping cry, such as a patient undergoing unanesthetized edentation might give; wonder was in it, and something like fright, as well.

The little Frenchman raised his hand for silence. "He is coming to, *Madame*," he warned in a soft whisper.

Life, indeed, had come back to the shell above which Doctor Obeyid had chanted. Little by little the dread contours of death had receded, and as the hands lost their rigor and lay, half open, on the chair arms, we saw the fingers flexing and extending in an easier, more lifelike motion.

"Jodo!" whispered Cardener, rolling his head listlessly from side to side, like one who seeks to rouse himself from an unpleasant dream.

"*Jodo!*" she repeated in an awed and breathless whisper. "*He* never called me that! 'Way back, when we were children, Lonny and I gave each other 'intimate names,' and I never told mine to a soul, not my parents, nor my husband. How—"

"Jodo—Beth dear," the half-unconscious man repeated, his fingers searching gropingly for something. "Are you here? I can't see you, dear, but—"

"*Lonny!*" Incredulous, unbelieving joy was in the woman's tones, and:

"Beth, Beth dearest!" Cardener started forward, eyes opening and closing rapidly, as though he had come suddenly from darkness into light. "Beth, they told me you'd be waiting for me—are you really here?"

"Here! Yes, my dear, my very dearest; I am here!" she cried, and sank down to her knees, gathering his head to her bosom and rocking gently back and forth, as though it were a nursing baby. "Oh, my dear, my dear, however did you come?"

"I'm dead?" he queried timidly. "Is this heaven or—"

"Heaven? Yes, if I and all my love can make it so, my darling!" Beth Cardener broke in, and stopped his wondering queries with her kisses.

"Now, what the devil does it mean?" I asked as we drove slowly home after taking Doctor Obeyid to his house in Melton Street.

Jules de Grandin raised his elbows, brows and shoulders in a shrug which seemed to say there are some things even a Frenchman can not understand. "You know as much as I, my friend," he returned. "You saw it with your own two eyes. What more is there which I can tell you?"

"A lot of things," I countered. "You said yourself that once before you'd seen—"

"Assuredly I had," he acquiesced. "Me, I see many things, but do I know their meaning? Not always. *Par example:* I say to you, 'Friend Trowbridge, I would that you should drive me here or there,' and though you put your foot on certain things and wiggle certain others with your hands, I do not know what you are doing, or why you do it. I only know that the car moves, and that we arrive, at length, where I have wished to go. You comprehend?"

"No, I don't," I answered testily. "I'd like to know how it comes that Lawrence Cardener, who, as we know, was a thorough-going villain, if ever there was one, exchanged, or seemed to exchange personalities with the brother whom he sent to death in the electric chair at the very moment of that brother's execution—and how that scar appeared upon his head. His wife vouched for the fact that it wasn't there before."

The little Frenchman twisted the needle-points of

his sharply waxed, wheat-blond mustache until I thought that he would surely prick his finger on them. "I can not say," he answered thoughtfully, "because I do not know. The Arabs have a saying that the soul grows on the body like a flower on the stalk. They may be right. Who knows? What is the soul? Who knows, again? Is it that vague, indefinite thing which we call personality? Perhaps.

"Suppose it is; let us assume the flower-analogy again. Let us assume that, as the skilful gardener takes the blossom from the living rose and grafts it on the living dogwood tree, and thereby makes a rose-tree, one skilled in metaphysics can take the soul from out a body at the instant of dissolution and transplant it to another body from which the soul has just decamped, and thereby create a new and different individual, composed of two distinct parts, a soul, or personality, if you please, and a body, neither of which was originally complementary to the other. It sounds strange, insane, but so would talk of total anesthesia or radio have sounded two hundred years ago. As for the scar, that is comparatively simple. You have seen persons under hypnotism lose every drop of blood from one arm or hand, or become completely anemic in one side of the face; you know from medical history, though you may not have seen it, that certain hysterical religious persons develop what are called stigmata—simulations of the bleeding wounds of the Savior or the martyred saints. That is mental in inception, but physical in manifestation, *n'est-ce-pas?* Why, then, could not an outward and physical sign of personality be transferred as easily as the inward and spiritual reality? *Pardieu,* I damn think that it could!"

"But will this 'spiritual graft' endure?" I wondered. "Will this transformation of Larry Cardener into Lonny Cardener last?"

"*Le bon Dieu* knows," he answered. "Me, I most greatly hope so. If it does not, I shall have to make my promise good and give her that mercuric cyanide. Time will tell."

Time did. A year had passed, and the final summer hop was being given at the Sedgemoor Country Club. The white walls of the clubhouse shone like an illuminated monument in the dusky blue of the late September night, lights blazed from every window and colored globes decorated the overhanging roofs of the broad verandas which stretched along the front and rear of the building. In the grounds Chinese lanterns gleamed with rose, blue, violet and jade, rivaling the brilliance of the summer stars. Jazz blared from the commodious ballroom and echoed from the big yellow-and-red striped marquee set up by the first green. Jules de Grandin and I sat on the front piazza and rocked comfortably in wide wicker chairs, the ice-cubes in our tall glasses clinking pleasantly.

"*Mordieu,* my friend," the Frenchman exclaimed enthusiastically, "this what do you call him? zhu-leep?—he is divine; magnificent. He is superb; I would I had a tubful of him in which to drown my few remaining sorrows!" He sucked appreciatively at the twin straws thrust between the feathery mint-stalks, then, abruptly: "*Mort de ma vie,* my friend, look—behold them!" He pointed up excitedly.

From where we sat a little balcony projecting from the upper floor was plainly in our line of vision. As the little Frenchman pointed, I saw a man arrayed in summer dancing-clothes, step out upon the platform and light a cigarette. As he snapped his lighter shut, he raised his left hand and brushed his short, close-cropped mustache with the knuckle of his bent forefinger. He blew a long cone of gray smoke between his lips, and turned to some one in the room behind him. As the light struck on his face, I recognized him. It was Lawrence Cardener, beyond a doubt, but Lawrence Cardener strangely altered. His hair, once iron-gray, was now almost uniformly brown, save where a single streak of white ran, plume-like backward from his forehead.

A woman joined him on the balcony. She was tall, slender, dark; her little, piquant face framed in clusters of curling ringlets. Her lips were red and smiling,

her lovely arms and shoulders were exposed by the extreme décolleté of her white-crêpe evening gown. I knew her; Beth Cardener, but a different woman from the one whose suicide we had balked twelve months before. This Beth was younger, more girlish in face and carriage, and plainly, she was happy. He turned and offered her his case, then, as she chose a cigarette, extended his lighter. She drew the smoke into her lungs, expelled a fine stream from her mouth, then tossed the cigarette away. As it fell to earth in a gleaming, fiery arc, the man tossed his out after it and put his hands upon her shoulders. Her own white hands, fluttering like homing doves, flew upward, clasped about his neck, and drew his face to hers. Their lips approached and merged in a long, rapturous kiss.

*"Tête bleu, my friend,"* de Grandin cried, "I damn think I can keep my mercuric cyanide; she has no use for it, that one!" He rose, a thought unsteadily, and beckoned me. "Come, let us leave them to each other and their happiness," he ordered. "Me, I very greatly desire several more of those so noble mint zhu-leeps. Yes."

# Afterword

by Robert Weinberg

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

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

While the story received prominent mention in the author's publication, it created no stir at all in the reader's column of *Weird Tales*. In fact, not one reader mentioned anything at all about the incest cen-

tral to the story. Comments were typical for a de Grandin adventure: "The plot was closely knit and ran very smoothly ..."—"the yarn is told vividly and in a manner that creates an almost tangible atmosphere of terror ..."—"Seabury Quinn's latest fully comes up to his past excellent efforts." The story tied with a Conan adventure for the most popular tale in the issue in which it appeared.

In the last few years, Quinn has come into a good deal of criticism for the Jules de Grandin series. The main thrust of these attacks was that the stories were written for money and not artistic achievement alone. Thus, these same critics argue, the de Grandin stories were inferior to the products of those few highly-regarded authors who wrote more for artistic merit than for cold cash. While on the surface, a fine sounding argument, the truth is anything but so simple. Seabury Quinn was a professional author. He wrote to sell, and because of this, he had to write well. For a good part of his life, a major portion of his income was derived from writing, and he was easily the most popular writer ever to work for *Weird Tales*. He was paid at the highest rate that the magazine could afford, and was constantly being asked by the editor for more. The possibility of Quinn having a story rejected by *Weird Tales* was unthinkable. And, while Quinn might not have proclaimed any artistic aims or achievements, his stories were extremely important in the development of modern weird fiction.

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

Also, Quinn was one of the first, and in *Weird Tales* and other pulp magaines of that day, the only writer who had any trace of sex in his stories. Not only did the characters involved often evidence

physical emotions, but some of Quinn's stories even made mention of topics not normally associated with pulp literature: "Warburg Tantavul" is concerned with incest; "The Poltergeist", featured exorcism long before it became popular, and contained more than a hint of lesbian behavior; and "The House of Golden Masks" is a fast action story of white slavery and degradation.

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

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

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

A more full-bodied character was Doctor Hussein Obeyid, "one of the world's ten greatest philosophers" and a "very special friend of Jules de Grandin." Though Dr. Obeyid only appeared in the one story, "A Gamble in Souls," he is presented so vividly by Quinn that his presence dominates the entire tale. Whenever the mysterious Doctor appears, that scene seems to crackle with electricity—For a change, even de Grandin takes a back seat to a master of the most powerful of magic. It was unfortunate that Quinn did not use Dr. Obeyid in any other de Grandin adventures since it was this unusual character that makes "A Gamble in Souls" one of the very finest of all the de Grandins.

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

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

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