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A Gamble in Souls

By SEABURY QUINN

A fascinating weird tale centering around the dapper little French occultist and scientist, Doctor Jules de Grandin



"It darted forth its lambent tongue to touch the dead man's eyes, lips and nostrils."

WE **CROSSED** the big, cement-floored room with its high-set, steel-barred windows and white-washed 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 authoritative-ness 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 white-washed 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 re-entered 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 fur-tively. 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 Trow-bridge," 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 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 ever-greens bordering the road and flitted like a wind-blown leaf across the spot of lum-inance cast by my headlights.

"*Cordieu*, she will not die of senility if she persists in such a way of walk-ing——" 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 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——"

"Undoubtedly," 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 anaesthesia, 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 good-night, 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 surprize 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 library 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 night-dress, kimono and sandals. I sat there in a sort of stupor, too surprized 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 to-night, 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 debauched 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 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 be-

fore 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——"

"*Que 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, easy-going 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 non-committally. "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 palet-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 wofully 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 circumstantial 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 impertuning 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 palet-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 surprize 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?"

"*Bissabi!*" 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 Car-

dener——” 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, singing 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 innocence, 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 wonderwidened 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 stiff-backed 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. "*Bismillab al-rabman al-rabim*—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 poisoning 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 coach, 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 semi-conscious 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 life-like 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.

"**N**ow, 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 exemple:* 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 thor-

ough-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.”
