

Weird Tales

JAN.

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

A RIVAL FROM THE GRAVE

creeping horror!

weird terror!

by

SEABURY QUINN

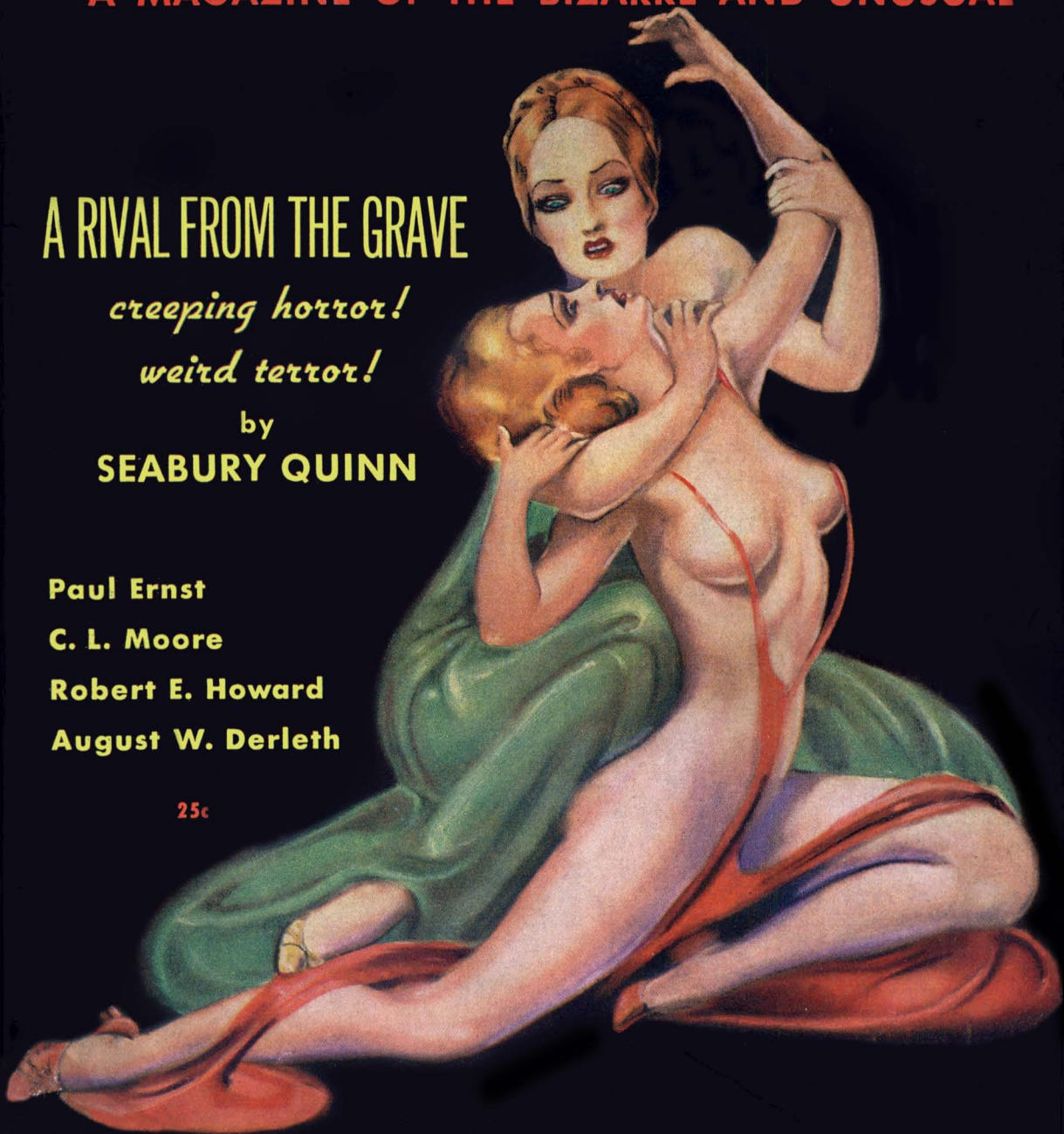
Paul Ernst

C. L. Moore

Robert E. Howard

August W. Derleth

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A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

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"I loathed myself for having let her make a slave of me."

A Rival From the Grave

By SEABURY QUINN

*A tale of creeping horror that rises to a climax of sheer terror—
a story of Jules de Grandin*

"**H**OW many lobster sandwiches is that?" I demanded.

Jules de Grandin knit his brows in an effort at calculation. "Sixteen, no, eighteen, unless I have lost count," he answered.

"And how many glasses of champagne?"

"Only ten."

"By George, you're hopeless," I reproved. "You're an unconscionable glutton and wine-bibber."

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

"It is," I conceded, "but——"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ten thousand pestilential mosquitoes, do not sit there muttering like an elderly

● Jules de Grandin is without doubt the most lovable and fascinating detective in fiction. Occultist, scientist and ghost-breaker, he is not a detective in the ordinary sense, for he uses his keen mind and quick wit against supernatural wrong-doing as well as against crimes attributable to natural agencies. Vain, boastful, mercurial, a dreaded foe and a loyal friend, de Grandin has been the hero of more than fifty stories in **WEIRD TALES**, and his popularity with the readers is increasing with each new tale. We recommend to you this story of his latest exploit: "A Rival from the Grave."

spinster with the vapors!" he commanded. "Tell me who she is, my friend."

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

"U'm?" he murmured, rising and studying the picture with what I thought unnecessary care. "*Non*, my friend, she is not lovely. Beautiful? But yes, assuredly. Lovely? No, not at all."

The artist had done justice to Elaine Taviton. From the canvas she looked forth exactly as I'd seen her scores of times. Her heavy hair, red as molten copper, with vital, flame-like lights in it, was drawn back from her forehead and parted in the center, and a thick, three-stranded plait was looped across her brow in a kind of Grecian coronal. Her complexion had that strange transparency one sometimes but not often finds in red-haired women. A tremulous green light played in her narrow eyes, and her slim, bright-red lips were slightly parted in a faintly mocking smile to show small, opalescent teeth. It was, as Jules de Grandin had declared, a fascinating face, beautiful but unlovely, for in those small

features, cut with lapidarian regularity, there was half concealed, but just as certainly revealed, the frighteningly fierce fire of an almost inhuman sensuality. The sea-green gown she wore was low-cut to the point of daring, and revealed an expanse of lucent shoulders, throat and bosom with the frankness characterizing the portraiture of the Restoration. Scarcely whiter or more gleaming than the skin they graced, a heavy string of perfectly matched pearls lay round her throat, while emerald ear-studs worth at least a grand duke's ransom caught up and accentuated the virid luster of her jade-toned eyes.

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

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

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

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

A CHORUS of shrill squeals of feminine delight, mingled with the heavier undertone of masculine voices, drew our attention to the hall. As we hurried from the study we saw Agnes Taviton upon the stairs, gray eyes agleam, her lips drawn back in laughter, about to fling her bouquet down. The bridesmaids and the wedding guests were clustered in the

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But she certainly staggered just before she missed her catch," I countered.

"Everybody can't absorb such quantities of champagne as you can stow away and still maintain his equilibrium. It's a case of too much spirits, I'm afraid."

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

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

"*Tiens*, it is the crowning sorrow of a doctor's life that privacy is not included in his dictionary," answered Jules de Grandin with a sigh. "Show him in, *petite*"—Nora, who tipped the scales at something like two hundred pounds, never failed to glow with inward satisfaction when he used that term to her—"show him in all quickly, for the sooner we have talked with him the sooner we shall see his back."

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

"Step into the consulting-room," I said

as we concluded shaking hands; "we can look you over better there," but:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

here's Agnes!" and when we both grew older it was just the same. I remember once I had to fight half a dozen fellows because they called me sissy for preferring to help Agnes stage a party for her dolls to going swimming with them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"She laid her hand upon my head, and it was like an accolade. 'I am your liege lady and you're my true sir knight,' she answered, 'and you will bear me faithful service. When we're grown I'll marry you and you must love me always. And I'll scratch your eyes out if you don't!' she added warningly.

"God, I wish she'd done it then!"

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

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

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

"But, my dear boy," I expostulated,

"you're married to Agnes; Elaine's dead; there's nothing to prevent the realization of your happiness."

"That's what you think!" he answered bitterly.

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

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

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

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

"I shared a room with Alec MacMurtrie, a likable young subaltern from a Highland outfit who could drink more, smoke more and talk less than any man I'd ever seen. He was in bed when I reported in that night, but woke up long enough to smoke a cigarette while I undressed. Just before we said good-night he turned to me with an almost pleading look and told me, 'I'd wear a sprig o' hawthorn in my tunic when I went about if I were you, laddie.'

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

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

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

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

"I couldn't figure what she wanted, but I was so fascinated by her that if she'd asked me to attempt to swim the

Channel without water-wings I'd have undertaken it.

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

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

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

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

"She stirred lazily and flung an arm

across her eyes as she moaned gently. I stood above her, still as death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I cabled home for funds and we had a grand time shopping, first in London,

then at the Galeries LaFayette in Paris when my discharge came through.

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

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

"But when I lay in Elaine's arms so feverishly clasped it seemed our bodies melted and were fused in one, and felt

the sting of her hot kisses on my mouth, or the bitter tang of her blood in my throat, I knew that I was weak as wax in her hot grasp, and that she owned me bodily and spiritually. I was her slave and thing and chattel to do with as she liked, powerless to offer any opposition to her slightest whim.

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

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

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

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

"Things were changed when I came home to Harrisonville. My parents had both died with influenza while I was away. Agnes' father had committed suicide. He'd been in business as an importer, dealing exclusively with German houses, and the blockade of the Allies and our later entrance into the war completely ruined him. They told me when

his bills were paid there was less than a hundred dollars left for Agnes.

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

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

"If there were any bitterness in her she didn't show it. I think that my lips trembled more than hers when she took my hand and whispered, 'I'm praying for your happiness, Frazie.'

"God knows I needed prayers."

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

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

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

"Plenty," rejoined Taviton. "Elaine

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

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

ly reflex, a sort of orchestration to a dance of Sapphic passion.

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

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

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

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

"'Strong enough to stand bad news?'

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

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

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

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

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

"'Of course,' I interrupted. 'Make all necessary arrangements with New York authorities, please, and send for her as soon as possible.' I had difficulty to keep from adding, 'And be sure you dig her

grave so deep that she'll not hear the judgment trumps!

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

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

"I could not take my eyes off her face. That countenance of perfect beauty I had looked upon so often, those slim, red-fingered hands and little satin-shod feet from which I'd drunk the blood at her command—it seemed impossible that they were now for ever quiet with the quietness of death.

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

"It was a trick of light and shadow, doubtless, but it seemed to me the dead lips in the casket curved in a derisive smile, and through the quiet of the darkened room of death there came, faint as the echo of an echo's echo, that whisper I had heard Armistice Night beside the

sea at Biarritz: 'Mine! Mine; *all mine for ever!*'

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

"I THINK I knew how Kartophilos felt when he was reconciled with Heaven the night that Agnes promised she would be my wife. All that I'd forfeited I was to have. The promises of childhood were to be fulfilled. I put the memory of my marriage to Elaine behind me like an ugly dream, and a snatch of an old war song was upon my lips as I let myself into my bedroom:

There's a kiss with a tender meaning,
Other kisses you recall,
But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart,
Are the sweetest kisses of all . . .

"That night I'd had the sweetest kiss I'd known since I went off to war; life was starting afresh for me, I was——

"My train of happy thought broke sharply. My bedroom was instinct with a spicy, heady perfume, cloying-sweet, provocative as an aphrodisiac. I recognized it; it was a scent that cut through all the odors of the antiseptics a moment before I had first seen Elaine in the convalescent section of the nursing-home at Biarritz.

"I looked wildly round the room, but there was no one there. Stamping to the nearest window I sent it sailing up, and though it was a zero night outside I left it fully open till the last faint taint of hellish sweetness had been blown away.

"Shivering—not entirely from cold—I got in bed. As the velvet darkness settled down when I snapped off the light, I felt a soft touch on my cheek, a touch like that of soft, cold little fingers seeking my lips. I brushed my face as though a noisome insect crawled across it, and it seemed I heard a little sob—or perhaps

a snatch of mocking laugh—beside me in the darkness.

"I put my hand out wildly. It encountered nothing solid, but in the pillow next my head was a depression, as though another head were resting there, and the bedclothes by my side were slightly raised as if they shrouded slimly rounded limbs and small and pointed breasts.

"I dropped back, weak with panic terror, and against my throat I felt the tiny rasping scrape of little fingernails. How often that same feeling had awakened me from sleep when Elaine's craving for a draft of 'the red milk' was not to be denied! And then I heard—subjectively, as one hears half-forgotten music which he struggles to remember—'Give me your blood, beloved, it will warm me. I am cold.' Then, sharp and clear as the echo of a sleigh's bells on a frosty night, repeated those six words which had been my bill of sale to slavery: 'Mine! Mine; all mine for ever!'

"I woke next morning with a feeling of malaise. Sure I'd suffered from a nightmare, I was still reluctant to rise and look into the mirror, and reluctance grew to dread when I put my hand up to my throat and felt a little smarting pain beneath my fingers. At last I took my courage in both hands and went into the bathroom. Sheer terror made me sick as I gazed at my reflection in the shaving-glass. A little semilunar scar was fresh upon my throat, the kind of scar a curved and pointed fingernail would make.

"Had Elaine come from the grave to set her seal on me; to mark me as her chattel now and ever?"

Tavito was shaking so he could not relight the cigar which had gone dead during his recital. Once again de Grandin helped him, steadying his hand as he held his briquette out; then: "And did this—shall we say phenomenon?—occur again, *Monsieur*?" he asked as matter-of-

factly as he might have asked concerning a dyspepsia patient's diet.

"Yes, several times, but not always the same," the other answered. "I had a period of two weeks' rest, and had begun to think the visitation I had suffered was just a case of nerves, when something happened to convince me it was not a case of nightmare or imagination that had plagued me. Agnes and I were going to the first recital of the Philharmonic, and—I was luxuriating in renewing our old courtship days—I'd stopped off at the florist's on my way from the office and bought her a corsage of orchids. Of course, I might have had them sent, but I preferred to take them to her.

"I laid the box upon my bureau while I went in to shave. My bedroom door was closed and the bathroom door was open; no one—nothing animal or human—could have come into my room without my hearing it or seeing it, for my shaving-mirror was so placed that its reflection gave a perfect view of the entrance to the bedroom. Perhaps I was five minutes shaving, certainly not more than ten. The first thing that I noticed when I came back to my room was a heavy, spicy scent upon the air, sweet, penetrating, and a little nauseating, too, as though the very faintest odor of corruption mingled with its fragrance.

"I paused upon the threshold, sniffing, half certain that I smelled it, half sure my nerves were fooling me again. Then I saw. On the rug before the bureau lay the box the flowers came in. It was a heavy carton of green pasteboard, fastened with strong linen cord, enclosing an inner white box tied with ribbon. Both the outer and the inside boxes had been ripped apart as if they had been blotting-paper, and the tissue which had been about the flowers was torn to tatters, so it looked as though a handful of confetti had been spilled upon the floor.

The cord and ribbon which had tied the boxes were broken, not cut—you know how twine and ribbon fray out at the ends when pulled apart? The bouquet itself was mashed and torn and battered to a pulp, as though it first were torn to shreds, then stamped and trodden on.

"Again: We were going to the theater and I came home a little early to get into my dinner kit. I dressed with no mishaps and was taking down my overcoat and muffler in the hall when a vase of roses on the mantel toppled over, and absolutely drenched my shirt and collar. There was utterly no reason for that vase to fall. It stood firmly on the mantel-shelf; nothing short of an earthquake could have shaken it over, yet it fell—no, that's not so; it didn't fall! I was six or eight feet from the fireplace, and even admitting some unfelt shock had jarred the rose-vase down, it should have fallen on the hearth. If it reached me at all, it should have rolled across the floor. But it didn't. It left its place, traveled the six or eight intervening feet through the air, and poured its contents over me from a height sufficient to soak my collar and the bosom of my shirt. I'm just telling you what happened, gentlemen, nothing that I guessed or surmised or assumed; so I won't say I heard, but *it seemed to me I heard* a faint, malicious laugh, a hatefully familiar mocking laugh, as the water from that rose-jar soaked and spoiled my linen.

"THESE things occurred in no set pattern. There was no regularity of interval, but it seemed as if the evil genius which pursued me read my mind. Each time when I'd manage to convince myself that I'd been the subject of delusion, or that the persecution had at last come to an end, there'd be some fresh reminder that my tormentress was playing cat-and-mouse with me.

"You were at my wedding. Did you see what happened when Agnes threw her bouquet down; how Betty Decker almost had it in her hands, and how——"

"*Parbleu*, yes, but you have right, *Monsieur!*" de Grandin interrupted. "By damn, did I not say as much to good Friend Trowbridge? Did I not tell him that this tall young *Mademoiselle* who all but grasped the flowers which *Madame* your charming wife had thrown did not miss them through a lack of skill? But certainly, of course, indubitably!"

"D'ye know what happened on our wedding night?" our guest demanded harshly.

De Grandin raised his shoulders, hands and eyebrows in a pained, expostulating shrug. "*Monsieur*," he muttered half reproachfully, like one who would correct a forward child, "one hesitates to——"

"You needn't," cut in Taviton, a note of bitter mockery in his voice. "Whatever it may be you hesitate to guess, you're wrong!"

"We went directly to Lenape Lodge up in the Poconos, for it was there twenty-eight years ago we'd plighted our troth the day that Agnes saved me from the snake.

"We had dinner in the little cottage they assigned us, and lingered at the meal. That first breaking of bread together after marriage seemed like something sacramental to us. After coffee we walked in the garden. The moon was full and everything about us was as bright as day. I could see the quick blood mount to Agnes' face as she bent her head and seemed intent on studying her sandal.

"I feel something like the beggar maid beneath Cophetua's window," she told me with a little laugh. 'I've nothing but my love to bring you, Frazier.'

"But all of that?" I asked.

"All of that," she echoed in a husky

whisper. 'Oh, my dear, please tell me that you love me that way, too; that nothing—*nothing*—can or will ever come between us. We've waited so long for each other, now I—I'm frightened, Frazier.'

"She clung to me with a sort of desperation while I soothed her. Finally she brightened and released herself from me.

"'Five minutes I'll give you for a final cigarette. Don't be longer!' she called gayly as she ran into the cottage.

"That five minutes seemed eternity to me, but at last it was concluded, and I went into the house. The bedroom was in shadow, save where a shaft of moonlight struck across the floor, illuminating the foot of the big old-fashioned bedstead. Under the white counterpane I could see the small twin hillocks which were Agnes' feet; then, as I stood and looked at them, my breath came faster and my pulses raced with quick acceleration. There was the outline of another pair of upturned feet beneath that coverlet. 'Agnes!' I called softly, 'Agnes, dear!' There was no answer.

"Slowly, like a man wading through half-frozen water, I crossed the room, and put my hand upon the bed. The linen sank beneath my touch. There was nothing solid there, but when I took my hand away the bedclothes rose again, showing the contour of a supine body.

"'She—it—can't do this to us!' I told myself in fury, and disrobed as quickly as I could, then got in bed.

"My hand sought Agnes', and I felt a touch upon it, soft as rose leaves, cold as lifeless flesh. Slim fingers closed about my own, fingers which seemed to grasp and cling like the tentacles of a small octopus, and which, like a devil-fish's tentacles, were cold and bloodless.

"I drew back with a start . . . surely this could not be Agnes, Agnes, soft and warm and loving, pulsing with life and tenderness. . . .

"Then I almost shrieked aloud in horror—'almost,' I say, because my mouth was stopped, even as I drew my lips apart to scream. A weight, light, yet almost unsupportable, lay upon my chest, my hips, my thighs. Moist lips were on my lips; small, sharp fingers ran like thin flames across my breast and cheeks; nails, small nails of dainty feet, yet sharp and poignant as the talons of a bird of prey, scratched lightly against the flesh of my legs, and a heavy strand of scented hair fell down each side my face, smothering me in its gossamer cascade. Then the quick, sharp ecstasy I knew so well, the instant pain, which died almost before it started with the anodyne of bliss, as the cut of razor-keen small teeth sank in my lips and the salty, hot blood flowed into my mouth. Slowly I could feel the nerve-force draining from me. Wave on wave, a flooding tide of lethargy engulfed me; I was sinking slowly, helplessly into unconsciousness.

"When I awoke the sun was streaming in the bedroom windows. Spots of blood were on my pillow, my lips were sore and smarting with a pain like iodine on a raw wound. Agnes lay beside me, pale and haggard. On her throat were narrow purple bruises, like the lines of bruise that small strong fingers might have left. I roused upon my elbow, looking in her face with growing horror. Was she dead?

"She stirred uneasily and moaned; then her gray eyes opened with a look of haunted terror, and her lips were almost putty-colored as she told me: 'It—she—was here with us last night. Oh, my love, what shall we do? How can we lose this dreadful earthbound spirit which pursues us?'

"**W**B LBFT Lenape Lodge that day. After what had happened we could no more bear to stay there than we could have borne to stay in hell. As

quickly as I could I made arrangements for a Caribbean voyage, and for a short time we had peace; then, without the slightest warning, Elaine struck again.

"A ball was being given at Castle Harbor and Agnes was to wear her pearls. They had been my mother's and Elaine had always been most partial to them. When she died I put them in a safe deposit vault, but later had them re-strung and fitted with a new clasp for Agnes.

"I was dressed and waiting on the balcony outside our suite. Agnes was putting the finishing touches on her toilet when I heard her scream. I rushed into the bedroom to find her staring white-faced at her own reflection in the mirror, one hand against her throat. "The pearls!" she gasped. "She was here; she took them—snatched them from my neck!"

"It was true. The pearls were gone, and within a little while a bruise appeared on Agnes' throat, showing with what force they had been snatched away. Naturally, as a matter of form, we hunted high and low, but there was no sign of them. We knew better than to notify the police; their best efforts, we knew but too well, would be entirely useless.

"I had a terrible suspicion which plagued me day and night, and though I didn't voice my thought to Agnes, I could hardly wait till we got home to prove the dreadful truth.

"As soon as we were back in Harrisonville I saw the superintendent of the cemetery and arranged a disinterment, telling him I had decided to place Elaine's body in another section of the plot. There were several obstacles to this, but Mr. Martin managed everything, and within a week they notified me that they were ready to proceed. I stood beside the grave while workmen plied their spades, and when the big steel vault was opened and the casket lifted out, Mr. Martin asked

if I desired to look at her. As if I had another wish!

"He snapped the catches of the silver-bronze sarcophagus, and gently raised the lid. There lay Elaine, exactly as I'd seen her on the night before the funeral, her face a little on one side, one hand across her breast, the other resting at her side. A little smile, as though she knew a secret which was more than half a jest, was on her lips, and in the hand that rested on her breast, twined round the slender fingers like a rosary, was the string of pearls which had been snatched from Agnes' throat that night at Castle Harbor, a thousand miles and more away!

"I don't expect you to believe my unsupported word, but if you'll trouble to call Mr. Martin, he'll confirm my statement. He saw me take the pearls from her, and remarked how she seemed to cling to them, also that he had no recollection they were buried with her, and would have sworn they were not in the casket when he closed it."

TAVITON drew a long, trembling breath, and the look of settled melancholy had deepened on his stern and rather handsome face as he concluded: "And that is why I'm here tonight, Doctor de Grandin. Probably the old axiom that every man must bear the consequences of his own folly applies to me with double force, but there's Agnes to consider. Though I don't deserve it, she's in love with me, and her happiness is bound inextricably with mine. I've heard that you know more about these psychic phenomena than anyone, so I've come to see you as a last resort. Do you think that you can help us?"

De Grandin's small blue eyes were bright with interest as our caller finished his recital. "One can try," he answered, smiling. "You have been explicit in your narrative, my friend, but there are some

points which I should like to be enlightened on. By example, you have seen these manifestations in the form of force a number of times, you have smelled the perfume which *Madame* your *ci-devante* wife affected. You have seen her outline under cloth, and you, as well as Madame Taviton, have felt the contact of her ghostly flesh, but have you ever seen her in ocular manifestation?"

"N-o," answered Frazier thoughtfully, "I don't believe we have." Suddenly he brightened. "You think perhaps it's not Elaine at all?" he asked. "Possibly it's one of those strange cases of self-imposed hypnosis, like those they say the Hindoo fakirs stimulate among their audiences to make it seem they do those seemingly impossible——"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur,* I think nothing at all, as yet," the little Frenchman interrupted. "I am searching, seeking, trying to collect my data, that I may arrange it in an orderly array. Suppose I were a chemist. A patron brings me a white powder for analysis. He cannot tell me much about it, he does not know if it is poisonous or not, only that it is a plain white powder and he wishes to be told its composition. There are a hundred formulæ for me to choose from, so the first step is to segregate as many as I can; to find out what our so mysterious powder is definitely not before I can determine what it is. You could appreciate my difficulty in the circumstances? Very well, we are here in much the same predicament. Indeed, we are in worse case, for while chemistry is scientifically exact, occultism is the newest of the sciences, less than half emerged from silly magic and sillier superstition. It has not even a precise nomenclature by which one occultist can make his observations fully understood by others. The terminology is so vague that it is almost meaningless. What we call 'ghosts' may be a

dozen different sorts of things. 'Spirits?' Possibly. But what sort of spirits? Spirits that are earthbound, having shed their fleshly envelopes, yet being unable to proceed to their proper *loci*? If so, why do they linger here? what can we do to help them on their way? Or are they possibly the spirits of the blessed, come from Paradise? If so, what is their helpful mission? how can we assist them? Spirits of the damned, perhaps? What has given them their *passepport jaune* from hell? By blue, *Monsieur*, there are many things we must consider before we can commence to think about your case!"

"I see," the other nodded. "And the first thing to consider is——"

"Mrs. Taviton, sor!" announced Nora McGinnis from the study doorway.

SHE came walking toward us rapidly, the tips of silver slippers flashing with swift intermittence from beneath the hem of her white-satin dinner frock. Time had dealt leniently with Agnes Taviton. The skin of her clear-cut oval face was fresh and youthful as a girl's, despite her almost forty years; her short, waved hair, brushed straight back from her broad forehead, was bright as mountain honey, and there were no telltale wrinkles at the corners of her frank gray eyes. Yet there was a line of worry in her forehead and a look of fear in her fine eyes as she acknowledged my quick introduction and turned to Frazier.

"Dear," she exclaimed, "the emeralds, they're—she——"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Madame,*" de Grandin interrupted. "*Monsieur* your husband has recounted how your pearls were taken; now, are we to understand that other jewels——"

"Yes," she answered breathlessly, "to-night! My husband gave the emerald earrings to me—they had been his great-great-grandmother's—and as the stones

were so extremely valuable I didn't dare have them reset in screws. So I had my ears pierced, and the wounds have been a little slow in healing. Tonight was the first time I felt I dared take out the guard-rings and try the emeralds on. I'd brought them from the safe and put them on my dresser; then as I raised my hands to disengage the guard-ring from my left ear I felt a draft of chilly air upon my shoulders, something seemed to brush past me—it was like the passage of a bird in flight, or perhaps that of an invisible missile—and next instant the velvet case in which the emeralds rested disappeared."

"*Eh, disappeared, Madame?*" de Grandin echoed.

"Yes, that's the only way that I can put it; I didn't actually see them go. The chill and movement at my back startled me, and I turned round. There was nothing there, of course, but when I turned back to my bureau they were gone."

"Did you look for them?" I asked with fatuous practicality.

"Of course, everywhere. But I knew it was no use. They went the same way that the pearls did—I recognized that sudden chill, that feeling as if something—*something evil*—hovered at my shoulder, then the tinkle and the disappearance. And," she added with a shuddering sigh, "those emeralds went to the same place the pearls went, too!"

"Thank Heaven you'd not put them in your ears!" broke in her husband. "You remember how she bruised your throat that night she snatched the pearls——"

"Oh, let her have them!" Agnes cried. "I don't want the vain things, Frazier. If hoarding jewelry like a jackdaw gives her restless spirit peace, let her have them. She can have——"

"Excuse me, if you please, *Madame*," de Grandin interrupted in a soft and toneless voice. "Monsieur Taviton has placed your case with me, and I say she shall not

have anything. Neither your jewelry, your husband, your peace of mind—*corbleu*, she shall not have so much as one small grave to call her own!"

"But that's inhuman!"

The Frenchman turned a fixed, unwinking stare on her a moment; then, "*Madame*," he answered levelly, "that which pursues you with the threat of ruined happiness also lacks humanity."

"Perhaps you're right," said Agnes. "She stole Frazier from me; now she takes the jewels, not because she has a use for them, but because she seems determined to take everything I have. Please, Doctor de Grandin, please make sure she doesn't take my husband, whatever else she takes."

I had a momentary feeling of uncertainty. Were these three sane and grown-up people whom I listened to, these men and woman who talked of a dead woman's stealing jewelry, discussing what she might have and what she might not take, or were they children playing gruesome make-believe or inmates of some psychopathic ward in some mysterious way brought to my study?

"Don't you think we'd better have a glass of sherry and some biscuit?" I suggested, determined to negotiate the conversation back to sanity.

DE GRANDIN sipped his sherry thoughtfully, taking tiny bites of biscuit in between the drinks, more for the sake of appearance than from any wish for food. At length: "Where are the pearls which were abstracted from *Madame* your wife's throat?" he asked Taviton.

"I put them in the safe deposit vault," the other answered. "They're still there, unless——"

"Quite so, *Monsieur*, one understands. It is highly probable they are still there, for these prankish tricks *Madame la Revenante* is fond of playing seem con-

cerned more with your personal annoyance than your valuables. I would that you have imitations of those pearls made just as quickly as you can. Be sure they are the best of duplicates, and match the gems they copy both in weight and looks. You apprehend?"

"Yes, of course, but why——"

"*Tiens*, the less one says, the less one has cause for regret," the Frenchman answered with a smile.

ALTHOUGH I had retired from obstetrics several years before, there were times when long association with a family made me break my resolution. Such a case occurred next evening, and it was not till after midnight that I saw the red and wrinkled voyageur on life's way securely started on his earthly pilgrimage and his mother safely out of danger. The house was dark and quiet as I put my car away, but as I paused in the front hall I saw a stream of light flare from beneath the pantry door.

"Queer," I muttered, walking toward the little spot of luminance; "it's not like Nora to go off to bed with those lights burning."

A blaze of brightness blinded me as I pushed back the door. Seated on the kitchen table, a cut loaf of bread and a partially dismembered cold roast pheasant by his side, was Jules de Grandin, a tremendous sandwich in one hand, a glass of Spanish cider bubbling in the other. Obviously, he was very happy.

"Come in, *mon vieux*," he called as soon as he could clear his mouth of food. "I am assembling my data."

"So I see," I answered. "I've had a trying evening. Think I'll assemble some, too. Move over and make room for me beside that pheasant, and pour me a glass of cider while you're at it."

"*Mon Dieu*," he murmured tragically, "is it not enough that I come home ex-

hausted, but I must wait upon this person like a slave?" Then, sobering, he told me:

"I am wiser than I was this morning, and my added wisdom gives me happiness, my friend. Attend me, if you please. First to Monsieur Martin's I did go all haste, and asked him the condition of the body of that pretty but extremely naughty lady who pursues Monsieur and Madame Taviton. He tells me it showed signs of slight desiccation when they opened up the casket to retrieve the pearls, that it was like any other body which had been embalmed, then sealed hermetically in a metallic case. Is that not encouraging?"

"Encouraging?" I echoed. "I don't see how. If a corpse buried eighteen months doesn't look like a corpse, how would you expect it to look—like a living person?"

His eyes, wide and serious, met mine above the rim of his champagne glass. "But certainly; what else?" he answered, quite as if I'd asked him whether three and two made five.

"You recall how I compared myself to an analyst last night? *Bon*, this is the first step in my analysis. I cannot say with certainty just what we have to fight, but I think that I can say with surety what it is *not* we find ourselves opposed to. You asked me jestingly if I had thought to find a body seemingly alive and sleeping in that casket. Frankly, I shall say I did. Do you know what that would have portended?"

"That Martin was either drunk, crazy or a monumental liar," I answered without hesitation.

"*Non*, not at all, unfortunately. It would have meant that we were dealing with a vampire, a corpse undead, which keeps itself sustained by sucking live men's blood. There lay a dreadful danger, for as you doubtless know, those whom the vampire battens on soon die, or seem to die, but actually they enter in

that half-world of the dead-alive, and are vampires in their turn. From such a fate, at least, Monsieur and Madame Taviton are safe. *Eb bien*, I have but started on my work. It is now incumbent on me to determine what it is we fight. I was considering the evidence when you came in:

"From what we know of Madame Taviton the first, she was a person of strong passions. Indeed, her whole existence centered on her appetites. It was not for nothing that the Fathers of the Church classed lust among the seven deadly sins. And she had so surrendered to her passions that she might be called one single flaming, all-consuming lust wrapped in a little envelope of charming flesh. *Tiens*, the flesh is dead, snuffed out of life in all its charm of evil beauty, but the lust lives on, quenchless as the fires of hell. Also hate survives, and hate is a very real and potent force. As yet this evil thing of lust and hate and vanity has not found strength to take material form, but that will come, and soon, I think, and when it comes I fear she will be bent on working mischief. Hatred is a thing that gains in strength while it feeds upon itself."

"But according to Taviton she came first as a perfume, then made him feel her fierce sadistic kisses," I objected. "That's pretty near materialization, isn't it?"

"Near, but not quite," he answered. "Everything which this one wants she takes. When she came as a perfume she had not strength to make her presence physically felt, but by *willing* him to smell the scent she turned his thoughts on her. Thoughts are things, my friend, make no mistake concerning that. Once Monsieur Taviton was thinking of her, she was able from the psychoplasm he thus generated to construct the invisible but able-to-be-felt body with which she fondled and caressed him, ever concen-

trating his thoughts more strongly on her memory, thus gaining greater strength."

"I don't follow you," I countered. "You say she made him think of her, and merely from that——"

"Entirely from that, *mon vieux*. This psychoplasm, which we cannot certainly define any better than we can electricity, is something generated by the very act of thinking. It is to the mind what ectoplasm is to the body. Apparently it is more substantial than mere vibrations from the body, and seems, rather, to be an all-penetrating and imponderable emanation which is rapidly dissipated in the atmosphere, but in certain circumstances may be collected, concentered and energized by the will of a skilled spiritualist medium—or an active discarnate intelligence. Generally in such cases it becomes faintly luminous in a dark room; again, when very strongly concentrated, it may be made the vehicle to transmit force—to hurl a jar of roses or snatch a strand of pearls, by example."

"Or to inflict a bite?"

"Most especially to inflict a bite," he nodded. "That adds fuel to the ready-blazing fire, more power to the dynamo which already hums with power-generation. The Scriptures speak more categorically than is generally realized when they affirm the blood is the life. With the imbibation of the emanations of his rich, warm blood she gained the strength to make it possible for her to thrust herself between him and his bride upon their wedding night, to choke poor Madame Agnes senseless, and to play the sadist wanton with him after death as she had done so many times in life. But her very wanton wickedness shall put her in our power, I damn think."

"How's that?"

"She follows such a pattern that her acts can be predicted with a fair degree of certainty. She hates poor Madame

Agnes so that she will go to any length to plague her. She stole her pearls, she stole her emeralds. Now the pearls have been recovered. If Madame Agnes were to put them on again, do not you think that she could come and try to repossess them?"

"It's possible."

"Possible, *pardieu*? It is more than possible; it is likely!"

"Well——"

"Yes, my friend, I think that it is well. Ghostly manifestations, materializations of spirit-forms, are peculiarly creatures of the darkness and the twilight. Bright sunlight seems to kill them as it kills spore-bearing germs. So do certain forms of sound-vibration, the sonorous notes of church bells and of certain kinds of gongs, for instance. High-frequency electric currents, the emanations of radium salt or the terrific penetrative force of Röntgen rays should have the same effect, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"I suppose so, but I can't say that I understand."

"No matter, that is not essential. But if you will wait I'll show you what I mean before you are much older. Meantime, the hour is late, the bottle empty and I have much to do tomorrow. Come let us go to bed."

"ALL is prepared," he informed me the next night at dinner. "I had some little difficulty in assembling my armament, but at last I have it all complete. We are ready to proceed at your convenience."

"Proceed? Where?"

"To Monsieur Taviton's. He telephoned me that the imitation pearls are ready, and—*corbleu*, I think that we shall see what we shall see tonight!"

The Tavitons were waiting for us in their drawing-room. Always poised and calm, Agnes nevertheless displayed some-

thing of that look of mingled hope and apprehension shown by relatives when someone dear to them has undergone a major operation. Looking at her pleading eyes, I almost expected to hear the old familiar "How is he doing, Doctor?" as I took her hand in greeting. Frazier was plainly on the rough edge of collapse, his movements jerky, eyes furtive, voice sharpened to the point of shrillness.

"You're sure that it will work?" he asked de Grandin.

"As sure as one can be of anything—which is, *hélas*, not very sure at all," the Frenchman answered. "However, we can make the effort, eh, my friend?"

"What——" I began, but he motioned me to silence.

"*Madame*," he bowed to Agnes in his courtly foreign fashion, "you are ready?"

"Quite, Doctor," she replied, rising to cross the hall and spin the handles of the wall-safe. The tumblers clicked, the little door fell open, and from the strongbox she removed a long jewel-case of night-black plush. For a moment she regarded it half fearfully, then snapped it open, drew out the strand of gleaming pearls it held and clasped it round her throat.

"Why, those are surely not an *imi*——" I began when a brutal kick upon my shin warned me de Grandin wished me to keep silent.

Scarcely whiter than their wearer's slender throat, the sea-gems glinted luminously as Agnes joined us in the drawing-room, cast an apprehensive glance around, then sank down in a chair beside the empty fireplace.

"Brandy or cream?" she asked matter-of-factly, busying herself with the coffee service on the table at her knee.

"Brandy, *s'il vous plait*," de Grandin answered, rising to receive his cup and snapping off the light-switch as he did so.

We were playing at the social amenities, but the very air was pregnant with

expectancy. The rumble of a motor truck bound for the Hudson Tunnels seemed louder than an earthquake's roar; the howling of a dog in the next yard was eery as the wailing of a banshee. I could hear the little French-gilt clock upon the mantelpiece beat off the seconds with its sharp, staccato tick, and in the hall beyond the more deliberate rhythm of the floor clock. In my waistcoat pocket I could hear my own watch clicking rapidly, and by concentrating on the varied tempos I could almost make them play a fugue. Autumn was upon us; through the open window came a gust of chilling air, fog-laden, billowing out the silk-net curtains and sending a quick shiver down my neck and spine. De Grandin took a lump of sugar in his spoon, poured brandy over it and set the flame of his briquette against it. It burned with a ghastly, bluish light. The dog in the next yard howled with a quavering of terror, his ululation rising in a long crescendo.

The strain was breaking me. "Confound that brute——" I muttered, rising from my chair, then cut my malediction off half uttered, while a sudden prickling came into my scalp and cheeks, and a lump of superheated sulfur seemed thrust in my throat. At the farther corner of the room, like a pale reflection of the alcoholic flare which burned above de Grandin's coffee cup, another light was taking form. It was like a monster pear, or, more precisely, like a giant water-drop, and it grew bright and dim with slow and pulsing alternations.

I tried to speak, but found my tongue gone mute; I tried to warn de Grandin with a sign, but could not stir a muscle.

And then, before I had a chance to repossess my faculties, it struck. Like a shot hurled from a catapult something sprang across the room, something vaguely human in its shape, but a dreadful parody on humankind. I heard Frazier give a

startled cry of terror and surprize as the charging horror dropped upon his shoulders like a panther on a stag, flinging him against the floor with such force that his breath escaped him in a panting gasp.

AGNES' scream was like an echo of her husband's startled cry, but the spirit of the little girl who dared the snake to save her youthful sweetheart still burned gallantly. In an instant she was over Frazier, arms outstretched protectingly, eyes wide with horror, but steady with determination.

A laugh, light, titillating, musical, but utterly unhuman, sounded in the dark, and the visitant reached out and ripped the pearls from Agnes' throat as easily as if they had been strung on cobweb. Then came the ripping sound of rending silk, the flutter of torn draperies, and Agnes crouched above her man as nude as when the obstetrician first beheld her, every shred of clothes rent off by the avenging fury.

Birth-nude, across the prostrate body of the man they faced each other, one intent on horrid vengeance, one on desperate defense.

Agnes' lissome body was perfection's other self. From slender, high-arched feet to narrow, pointed breasts and waving golden hair she was without a flaw, as sweetly made and slender as a marble naiad carved by Praxiteles.

Her opponent was incarnate horror. Hideous as a harpy, it still was reminiscent of Elaine as an obscene caricature recalls the memory of a faithful portrait. Where red-gold hair as fine as sericeous web had crowned Elaine's small head, this phantom wore an aureole of flickering tongues of fire—or hair which blew and fluttered round the face it framed in the blast of some infernal superheated breeze. The eyes, which glowed with virid phosphorescence, started forward in their

sockets, lids peeled away until it seemed that they had broken with the pressure of the eyeballs. The mouth was squared in a grimace of fury, and the white, curved teeth gleamed pale against the blowzed and staring lips like dead men's bones drowned in a pool of blood. Fingers, strictly speaking, there were none upon the hands, but a thick and jointless thumb and two bifurcations of the flesh made beast-paws at the end of either wrist, curved claws like vultures' talons growing at their tips. Upon each heel there grew a horny, spur-like knob, and the knotty-jointed toes were mailed with claws like digits of some unclean carrion fowl. The body was well formed and comely, but the breasts were long and pendulous, like pyriform excrescences hanging half-deflated from the thorax.

I put my hand across my eyes to shut the horrid vision out, for in an instant I was sure the dreadful, claw-armed thing would tear the quivering flesh from Agnes' bones as it had rent the clothing from her body.

A rumbling, like the moving of a heavy piece of furniture, sounded at my back, and as I turned around I saw de Grandin trundling a dental X-ray stand across the floor. As an artillerist prepares his piece for action, the Frenchman swung the lens of his contrivance into line, and next instant came a snapping crackle as the high potential current set the cathode rays to darting through the Crookes' tube.

"*Ha, Madame la Revenante*, you see that Jules de Grandin is prepared!" he announced, the elation of the killer who takes pleasure in his task shining in his small blue eyes and sounding in his voice.

As the Röntgen ray fell on the clawing horror it let out a shriek that pierced my eardrums like a white-hot wire.

As though the devilish form were painted on the atmosphere and de Gran-

din held a powerful eraser, it was wiped away — obliterated utterly — while he turned the flanged lens of his apparatus back and forth, up and down, like a gardener directing water from a hose.

The last faint vestige of the dreadful apparition vanished, and he snapped down the trigger which controlled the current.

"Look to Madame Agnes, my friend, *elle est nue comme la main!*" he commanded, rushing from the room to seize the telephone, dial a number in hot haste and call, "*Allo*, is Monsieur Martin there? *Très bien, Monsieur*, proceed at once, we wait on you!"

I advanced a step toward Agnes, mute with sheer embarrassment, but I might have been a chair or sofa, for all the notice she gave me. Unconscious of her nudity as though the very beauty of her body were sufficient raiment, she bent above her husband and clasped his head against her bosom. "My dear," she murmured crooningly, like a mother who would soothe her fretful babe, "my poor, sweet, persecuted dear, it's all right now. She's gone, beloved, gone for ever; nothing more shall come between us now!"

"Come away, thou species of a cabbage plant!" de Grandin's whisper sounded in my ear. "That conversation, it is sacred. Would you eavesdrop, *cochon?* Have you no delicacy, no decency at all, *cordieu?*"

WITH due reverence Jules de Grandin raised the bottle with its green-wax seal flaunting the proud N of the Emperor and poured a scant two ounces of the ancient cognac into the bell-shaped brandy sniffers. "But it was simple, once I had the cue," he told me smilingly. "First of all, my problem was to find what sort of thing opposed us. Monsieur Martin's assurance that the body was a naturally-dead one greatly simplified my task. Very well, then, I must proceed not

against a vampire or a vitalized corpse, but against a thing which had a psychoplasmic body. *Ha*, that was not so difficult, for I knew all surely that the powerful vibrations of the Röntgen ray would batter it to nothingness if I could but contrive to lure it within range of my machine.

"Good, then. Madame Elaine is cruel, vicious, lustful. Also she is panting for revenge on Madame Agnes, and perhaps she tires of making savage love to Monsieur Frazier, and will do him violence, too. So I contrive my plan. With an imitation of the pearls we lured her to the house. She comes, all filled with fury to wreak a horrid vengeance on Monsieur and Madame Taviton. She strikes, *mon Dieu*, how savagely she strikes! But so do I, by blue! I have rented from the dental dépôt a small X-ray apparatus, one which can be aimed as though it were a gun. When her fierce specter rises in our midst I meet it with my X-ray fire. I wither her, I break her up, *parbleu*, I utterly destroy her, me!

"Meanwhile, I have arrangements made with Monsieur Martin. He has disinterred her body, has it ready at the crematory, waiting my instructions. The minute I have triumphed with my X-ray gun, I call him on the telephone. Immediately into the retort of the crematory goes all that is mortal of Madame Elaine. Into nothingness goes that spirit-form she has constructed with such labor. Body and spirit, she is through, completed; finished! Yes, it is so."

"But d'ye mean to tell me you can de-

stroy a ghost with Röntgen rays?" I asked incredulously.

"Tell me, my friend," he answered earnestly, "were you in the Taviton drawing-room this evening?"

"Why, of course, but——"

"And did you see what happened when I turned the X-ray on that spectral horror?"

"I did, but——"

"Then why ask foolish questions? Are not your own two eyes sufficient witnesses?"

Silenced, I ruminated for a moment; then: "Elaine was beautiful," I mused aloud, "yet that thing we saw tonight was——"

"The death mask of her soul!" he supplied. "The body she was born into was beautiful, but her soul and mind were hideous. When she was no longer able to dwell in her natural body, she made herself a second body out of psychoplasm. And it matched the mind which fashioned it as a plastic cast will duplicate the model to which it is applied. The creature which the world saw while she was in the flesh was a false-face, the whitewashed outside of the reeking charnel which was she. Tonight we saw her as she truly was. *Tiens*, the sight was not a pretty one, I think."

"But——"

"*Ab bab!*" he interrupted with a yawn. "Why speculate? I have told you all I know, and much that I surmise. Me, I am tired as twenty horses. Let us take a drink and go to sleep, my friend. What greater happiness can life give tired men?"

