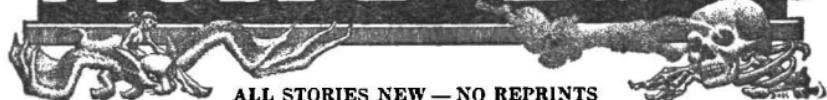


Weird Tales



NOVEMBER, 1949

Cover by Matt Fox

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D. MCILWRAITH, Editor



Conscience Maketh Cowards

By Seabury Quinn

Thus conscience does make cowards
of us all.

—Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1.

LIUTENANT JEREMIAH COSTELLO of the homicide squad refilled his coffee cup, drained it in two gargantuan gulps, and tilted the silex pot over it again. "No, sor, Dr. de Grandin," he reported, "I'm not exactly satisfied with th' findin's. It *looks* like suicide, I'll grant, but there's many a wolf—four- or two-legged—as looks as innocent as any lamb at first glance, too. Here's th' setup: This felly is supposed to have committed suicide by jumpin' out o' th' sixth story winder, an' to make assurance doubly sure, as th' felly says, he tied th' cord o' his bathrobe round his neck before he jumped. But, says Dr. Parnell, th' coroner's physician, th' cord broke an' he was precipitated to th' courtyard. O.K., says I. Could be. But there's more here than meets th' eye; leastwise, Dr. Parnell's eye.

"You've seen throttlin' cases, I dunno?" he raised his almost copper-colored brows inquisitively.

De Grandin nodded. "Many of them, my old one."

"Just so, sor. An' ye'll be rememberin' that in most o' them th' hyoid bone is fractured an' th' larynx cartilages is broken, whereas in hangin' you don't often find this?"

"*Justement*," the little Frenchman nodded.

"Well, sor, every sign was present. If I ever seen a throttlin' case, this was one. I'm thinkin' that they choked him 'fore they swung him from th' winder. An' here's another thing: Th' cord by which

"There is many a wolf—four or two-legged
—as looks as innocent as any lamb!"

he hung before he fell down to the cement o' th' courtyard hadn't frayed out gradual-like. It was clean-cut as if a knife or scissors snipped it off."

"*Vraiment?* And what does Dr. Parnell say to this, *mon lieutenant*?"

"He brushes it aside. Says th' fractures o' th' hyoid bone an' larynx could 'a' been made when th' felly hit th' ground—which I ain't disputin'—an' th' cord could just as well 'a' broken clean as frayed out, which is also possible, but"—he stabbed a thick, strong forefinger at de Grandin—"What gits me goat is that *all* these signs an' tokens manifestin' homicide 'stead o' suicide should be present, yet th' coroner's physician bulls th' jury into bringin' a verdict o' self-murder."

Jules de Grandin tapped a cigarette against his thumbnail, set it alight and blew smoke through his nostrils. "And what do you propose doing, my old and rare one?"

The Irishman raised ponderous shoulders in a gesture of futility. "What can I do, sor? Officially th' case is closed. Th' felly died by his own hand, an' that's th' end o' it. All th' same, I'll be afther doin' some gum-shooin' on me own. If someone's done a murder it's me job to find it out, an' afther that it's up to th' judge an' state's attorney—"

The cachinnation of the office telephone broke in, and I rose to answer it. "It's for you, Lieutenant," I said, and,

"Yes?" Costello challenged. "Oha? At 1515 Belvedere Street? An' th' name—glory be to God!"

In a moment he was back, a look that might have betokened anger or amazement on his broad face. "I'll say there's sumpin' devilish in this business, sors," he told us. "That was th' Bureau callin' to report another suicidal hangin'. Right around th' corner from the one I'd just been afther

tellin' ye about, an'—here's th' payoff!—'tis th' first man's brother who's supposed to 'a' bumped hisself off this time."

THE days of blistering heat were done, and September had come in like a cool and gracious matron. Although there was a hint of fall in the clear air it was still warm enough to enjoy coffee on the veranda that overlooked the side yard where the dahlias bloomed, and after a late dinner we were sitting in low wicker chairs enjoying that delightful languor that accompanies the mingling of eupepsia and slow poison-ing by nicotine, caffeine and alcohol when Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, came to us wearing that peculiarly forbidding expression she assumes when anybody obtrudes on "her doctors'" prandial period. "If ye plaze, sors," she announced with something more than a thin rime of frost upon her voice, "there's two people askin' for ye; a man an' a woman."

"Patients?" I asked, stifling a groan. I'd had five T. and A.'s at Mercy Hospital that day, and performed an emergency paracentesis on an aging woman—necessarily without anesthesia—and the fatigue of strained nerves had left me in a state of near-exhaustion.

Nora raised her shoulders in a shrug—a trick she'd caught from Jules de Grandin—and gave me a look that announced complete nescience. "I wouldn't know, sor. They says as how they'd like to see yerself an' Dr. de Grandin. Shall I go back an' say it's aither hours?"

I was about to nod assent, but de Grandin intervened. "By no means, *ma petite*. If they desire to see Friend Trowbridge solely it is obviously a medical matter; but if they also wish to consult me that is another pair of sleeves. Tell them we will see them, if you please."

The couple who awaited us in the consulting room were not entirely prepossessing. The man was middle-aged, balding, heavy-shouldered, rather puffy at the waistline. He wore a neat, dark, formally-cut suit with narrow piqué edging at the V of his waistcoat. From his black-rimmed pince-nez trailed a rather wide black ribbon, and through their lenses he was studying my

excellent copy of Renoir's "Boating Party" with evident disapproval. (In passing I might state I studiously avoid "professional pictures" such as "The Doctor," "The Study in Anatomy," or even the slightly humorous cartoons of Hogarth and Hans Holbein.)

His companion was more difficult to catalogue. She was just an average female of indeterminate age with undistinguished features and an undistinguished hat and hairdo. Her dress, though well made and of good material, seemed somehow not quite urban. A man might find some difficulty saying what was wrong with her, but a woman would have known at once. She had, as Jules de Grandin would have put it, a total lack of *le chic*.

"Dr. Trowbridge? Dr. de Grandin?" the man asked as we entered.

"I am Dr. Trowbridge," I answered, "and this is Dr. de Grandin." I paused, awaiting an exchange of confidences.

Our caller cleared his throat and looked at us, rather expectantly, it seemed to me. "You know me, of course." He did not ask it as a question, but made the announcement as a statement of fact.

De Grandin shook his head and looked distressed. "*Je suis désolé, monsieur*, but I do not. I have lived in this so splendid country but a little quarter-century, and have not met all its celebrities. You are not George Washington, or Général Pershing —"

"I am Pastor Rodney Roggenbuck of the Complete Scriptures Congregation."

The smile that hovered underneath the waxed tips of de Grandin's small blond mustache gave way to something like a sneer. The shepherd of the flourishing new congregation was known to both of us by reputation. With calculating shrewdness he had filched doctrinal bits from such divergent sects as Whiteism, Christian Science, Russellism, fundamental Calvinism and the Eutychian heresy, spiced them highly with intolerance, and with this pot-pourri for creed and doctrine had begun crusading against the theatre and movies, medicine and Sunday papers, vivisection, vaccination, newspaper comics, liquor, coffee, tea and tobacco, the teaching of ele

mentary geology in public schools and "graven images"—in connection with which later he had attempted to enjoin the May processions of local Catholic churches and statuary in the city's parks. That one professing such beliefs should consult a physician was, to speak conservatively, amazing.

"And which of us do you desire to consult, *monsieur*?" de Grandin asked. "Is it that you are *indisposé*?"

"I've come because Lieutenant Costello suggested it."

"Ah?"

"He tells me you are skilled in magic, witchcraft, and such things."

"A-ah?" de Grandin repeated, and there was something like cold-lightning flashes in his small blue eyes. I braced myself for an atomic explosion.

"Precisely, sir. He's no more satisfied that Fred and Theobald committed suicide than I am."

"And just exactly who, if one may ask, were Fred and Théobald, *monsieur*, and why should they not have destroyed themselves, and what concern of mine is it if they did so? Were they, perhaps, your brothers—"

"They were."

DE GRANDIN sucked in a quick mouthful of air, but his look of angry suspicion did not soften. "Say on, *monsieur*," he ordered. "I am listening."

"Frederick Roggenbuck was my younger brother. He lived at 1213 Quincy Street. Night before last he was supposed to have hanged himself from the window of his apartment. The coroner says it was suicide.

"Early this morning, or very late last night, my elder brother Theobald who lived with us at 1515 Belvedere Street, just around the corner from my brother Fred's, is supposed to have hanged himself from a pipe in the basement. None of us heard him rise from bed, or heard him in the cellar, but when Lucinda, the maid who gets our meals and looks after the house, let herself in this morning she found him hanging by a length of clothesline.

"Both my brothers were good, religious men, sir, and well aware of the enormity of

the crime of self-murder. Neither would have thought of doing such a thing. Besides, they both had everything to live for—they were well fixed financially, and were engaged in work they loved with holy zeal—

"Were they, by any chance, associated with you in your labors, *monsieur*?" de Grandin interrupted.

"They were. Theo was a presbyter and Fred a deacon."

"U'm?"

"What are you implying, sir? Why do you say 'u'm' in that manner?"

"*Pardieu, monsieur*, why should I not say 'u'm' in any manner that I choose?" de Grandin shot back testily. "I shall say 'u'm' or 'h'e' or 'sacré bleu' or anything I wish to say in any manner I desire, and if you do not like it there is neither lock nor bolt upon our door. You are at liberty to leave forth-with."

"Oh, no offense, sir, I assure you," Mr. Roggenbuck soothed. "Perhaps we do not understand each other. I wish you'd let me tell you—"

"Your wish is granted, *monsieur*." De Grandin dropped into a chair and lit a cigarette. "Begin at the beginning, if you please, and tell me why it is that you suspect your estimable brothers did not give themselves the happy dispatch. Have you, perhaps, physical as well as moral reasons for your supposition?"

"Lieutenant Costello tells me he informed you of his reasons for suspecting Brother Fred did not do away with himself. In Brother Theo's case his suspicions are even more firmly founded.

"Theobald was portly, somewhat stouter than I, and just a little shorter, say about five foot six or seven. The pipe from which he is supposed to have hanged himself is eight feet from the floor, the rope by which he was suspended was just a little over two feet long from knot to noose. Theo's feet swung four or five inches from the floor, and there was no stool or chair or other object which he could have stood on near them. It would have been physically impossible for him to have looped the rope around his neck while standing on the floor, and equally impossible for him to have

hanged himself without standing on something, yet there was nothing underneath him, and no object on which he could have stood anywhere within such distance as he could have kicked it from under him while he struggled as he hung."

"U'm?" Jules de Grandin put his fingers tip to tip and pondered. "And how was Monsieur Théobald arrayed? In his *chemise de nuit*—"

"No, sir. The night-shirt is a garment feminine in form, and Holy Scripture says explicitly a man shall not put on a woman's garment. He was wearing pajamas and a cotton bathrobe. His straw slippers had fallen from his feet as he hung from the pipe."

De Grandin lit another cigarette and blew smoke from his nose. "Perhaps you have a point there, *monsieur*. I could not say until I've reconnoitered the terrain. Have you other grounds for suspicion, or is there any person you suspect?"

"Yes, sir; I suspect one Amos Frye, my sister-in-law's husband. I believe he drove them to self-murder by vindictive witchcraft—in fine, that he 'put a hex upon them,' as they say in the part of the country from which I come."

"But this is of the utmost interest, *monsieur*. Where may one find Monsieur your belle-sœur's husband?"

"He is dead."

"Hein? *Feu noir du diable*, do you say so? Proceed, *monsieur*. Tell more; tell all. Like Baalam's ass, I am all ears!"

"**M**Y WIFE has an afflicted sister named Eulalia," our caller answered. "For some years she has had the impression of tuberculosis, but stubbornly refuses to drink of the healing waters of faith, preferring to entrust herself to the worldly aid of physicians."

De Grandin pursed his lips as if to whistle, but made no comment. His features gave no indication of his thoughts; his eyes were absolutely void of expression.

"She was a wilful, headstrong girl," continued Mr. Roggenbuck, "and when the war came on as punishment for the sins of the world she insisted on becoming involved in canteen work. Strictly against our wishes,

I may add. The Scriptures say specifically, 'Thou shalt not kill,' and every soldier is potentially a murderer. However, she insisted on consorting with these men of blood, and finally she married one of them.

"We offered her a home while he was overseas, and would have made him welcome when he returned, although he was a gentile—that is, not of our faith—but he insisted on her living with him in an apartment he provided. Then he secured employment as a traveling salesman, and was forced to be away from home much of the time. Eulalia's impression of disease became stronger, and at last we took her to our house, where she could receive treatment in accordance with the tenets of true religion. When he returned from his trip we refused to let her go to him, or let him come to her. My wife Rosita is her sister, and I am like a brother to her, aye, more than a brother, since I have her spiritual welfare at heart—what's that, sir?" he broke off as de Grandin murmured something sotto voce.

"*Pardonnez-moi, monsieur*, it is that I seem to recall a passage in the Bible that says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, since the twain are one flesh—"

"My dear sir! If you understood such things you'd know that Holy Scripture is to be received seriously, but not literally. Besides, the reference is to a man's cleaving to his wife, not a wife's cleaving to her husband; and in addition we are not Eulalia's father and mother, but her sister and brother-in-law. I challenge you to find a passage in the Bible which says a woman shall desert her brother-in-law to follow her husband!"

De Grandin's expression would have done credit to a cynical, blond Mephistopheles, but he answered with astonishing mildness, "You have me fairly there, *monsieur*. I do not think that I can cite you such a verse. And now, as you were saying—"

"Amos made several attempts to see Eulalia, and was on the brink of bringing legal action when he was unfortunately killed in a highway accident. Most fortunately my brothers happened by while he lay dying by the roadside, and Theobald,

who as a presbyter has power to loose or retain sins, gave him absolution. We thought, at least we hoped, that he was saved, but it appears his vengeful, earth-bound spirit has pursued my poor, dear brothers, hounded them to suicide; made them self-murderers."

"What makes you think so, *monsieur*?"

"Almost a year ago, shortly after Amos's fatal accident, my brother Fred began to have strange feelings. Have you ever had the feeling you were watched intently by some evilly-disposed person, sir? That is the feeling Fred complained of—as if someone who wished him ill were looking at him from the back continually, waiting opportunity to pounce. Sometimes the feeling grew so strong that he would turn around to see if he were actually being stared at; but there was never anybody visible.

"Three months later Theodore began to suffer the same eerie sensations. They had no privacy. When they disrobed for bed or for the bath that feeling of surveillance was on them; when they walked along the street or drove their cars they felt another walked behind them or was sitting at their sides; when they wrote a letter or perused a book there was always the impression that another looked across their shoulders, watching every move they made, never taking their eyes off them, never ceasing to hate them with poisonous, suppurating hatred. It must have been a terrible sensation, and one calculated to drive them to madness and self-murder."

De Grandin's eyes had lifted as our caller spoke. Now they were fixed in an unwinking cat-stare on a point a little beyond Mr. Roggenbuck's shoulder. For the first time the other seemed aware of the Frenchman's intent gaze, and a tremor ran through his hard-shaven, rather fleshy face. His jaws seemed suddenly to sag flaccidly like the dewlaps of a hound, and his mouth began to twist convulsively. "What—who—is it?" he demanded in a voice that seemed to come from a clogged throat.

The little Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say, *monsieur*? Perhaps it was no more than a shadow."

"What sort of shadow—what did it look like?"

"*On ne sait pas?* Perhaps it was like that of a man, perhaps that of a curtain shaken in the wind, perhaps a trick of the lamplight. *N'en parlons plus.* At any rate, it is gone now."

"You're sure?"

"Oh, quite sure, *monsieur*."

"Then"—Mr. Roggenbuck drew a silk handkerchief and wiped his brow—"what would you advise, Dr. de Grandin? Are you willing—can you help?"

"I am willing, and I think that I can help the cause of justice, Monsieur Roggenbuck. My fee will be a thousand dollars, in advance."

"A thousand dollars!"

"Perfectly. In fifteen minutes it will be increased to fifteen hundred. In half an hour I am not for hire at any price."

He pocketed the check, and, "Now, *monsieur*," he suggested, "suppose we go to your house and inspect the scene of your late brother's *déces*."

THE house in Belvedere Street was a substantial frame dwelling, neither opulent nor unpretentious, with a wide portico behind the tall, white pillars of which shadows seemed to be imprisoned. No lights showed anywhere in it, and Mr. Roggenbuck had to feel for the keyhole before he was able to admit us. Inside the place was quite as uninspiring as it was outwardly. It seemed to have been ordered, straightened into complete impersonality. The furniture was of good quality and obviously expensive, and just as obviously chosen without taste. Mahogany of no particular period stood cheek by jowl with golden oak and maple patently of neo-Grand Rapids design. The floors were waxed and highly polished, and on them were some simulated Kashan rugs arranged without regard to pattern or color. Such pictures as adorned the walls were of the Landseer-Rosa Bonheur school. I almost expected to see "The Stag at Bay" or "Pharaoh's Horses," or an enlarged sepia print of the Colosseum.

"The basement first, if you will be so kind," de Grandin asked, and led by our host we descended a flight of narrow stairs. The room ran under the entire house and was in nowise remarkable. In one corner was

the gas furnace, flanked by the hot water tank, with stationary washtubs and a mechanical washer beside them. Odds and ends of cast-off furniture, rolled-up summer matting rugs and similar lumber lay around the walls.

"Here was where my brother was found," Mr. Roggenbuck told us, pointing to an iron pipe that snaked between the joists supporting the first floor. "He hung, as I told you, with his feet almost on the ground, and there was nothing under or near him which he could have stood on while adjusting the noose—"

"Did you observe him before he was cut down?" de Grandin interrupted.

"Why, yes—"

"He wore no slippers, I believe?"

"They had dropped from his feet, I assume—"

"One does not make assumptions in such cases, *monsieur*. Have you any reason to believe that they had fallen, rather than been slipped off?"

"No-o; I can't say I have."

"*Bien. Bon.* We begin to make the progress. Now, what, exactly, was his position?"

Roggenbuck was silent for a moment, then dropped to one knee. "I'd say he hung just about here, with his feet clear of the floor."

"U'm. And he was five feet and a half in height, the rope by which he hung was approximately two feet long, his feet lacked four or so inches of contact with the floor?"

"That is correct, sir."

"H'm. Then something less than a foot high—something perhaps no more than six or seven inches would have been sufficient for him to mount as a scaffold—"

"But there was nothing there, I tell you—"

"Not even this, perhaps?" Wheeling as if on a pivot, the little Frenchman walked to the wall opposite the place where we stood, stooped and retrieved an object lying in the shadow.

It was a 'bowling ball of some eight inches diameter, black and highly polished, but overlaid with a thin film of dust. As he held it daintily, with thumb and forefinger in the grip-holes, we saw the dust upon

its surface had been wiped away in two parallel patches roughly oblong in shape, and that a wavering diagonal of cleared space ran down one side. "Unless I am far more mistaken than I think," he told us, "*Monsieur le Suicide* stood on this globe while he adjusted the loop to his neck, then kicked it from him so it rolled to the spot where I spied it. That we can readily determine. Your brother balanced barefoot on this ball, *monsieur*. The slippery soles of his straw shoes would not have afforded a purchase on its smooth surface. *Alors*, he left the prints of his feet on the polished wood. See them?" He indicated the two spots where the dust was disturbed. "The ridges on the friction skin of hands and feet are as highly individual as the prints of the fingers. Your brother has not yet been buried. It is necessary only that we bring the prints on this ball out, make an impression of the pattern of the soles of his feet, and *voilà*, we can be sure that he stood upon the sphere before he did *la danse macabre*. Yes, certainly." He wrapped his salvage in a newspaper taken from the pile that stood in readiness for the trash-collector, then:

"If you will be so kind as to conduct us to Madame your sister-in-law, we shall be obliged," he said.

"I'm sorry, but I can't permit her to be disturbed," Mr. Roggenbuck refused.

"*Très bien; just as you say,*" de Grandin agreed. "I think that we have gleaned sufficient data for one call already. If you will be so good as to give me an order on the mortician permitting me to make prints of your brother's feet we need not trouble you further at this time, *monsieur*."

"**W**HERE'VE you been?" I demanded as he came in sometime after eleven the next evening and began attacking the snack of turkey sandwiches, champagne, lemon pie and coffee Nora had left for him with a ferocity that would have made a famished wolf seem daintily abstemious by comparison.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, where have I not been, my old one?" he answered between mouthfuls. "Me, I have been up hill and down dale, and completely round the barn of Monsieur Robin Hood. I have visited the

excellent mortician, the newspaper office, the office of the county clerk, the house of Monsieur Roggenbuck—*grand Dieu*, what a name!—and a dozen other places, also.

"And has my search been vain? *Par la barbe d'une pieuvre*, I shall say otherwise!" He finished the last morsel of sandwich, washed it down with the last sip of champagne, poured a cup of steaming coffee, and prepared to demolish a great wedge of lemon meringue. "My friend," he leveled his fork at me like a weapon, "my old and rare one, I learned a number of most interesting things today. Some of them may have a bearing on *l'affaire* Roggenbuck, although at present I cannot make out their pattern. Consider, if you please:

"The Brothers Roggenbuck appear to have worked as a team for years, the estimable Rodney furnishing the invention, his less talented kinsmen attending to the details. Before the 1929 debacle their specialty was peddling securities, stock of goldless gold mines, oilless oil wells, real estate entirely under water, and the like. Their favorite clients were bereaved ladies left some small insurance, or, failing those, old couples who had laid away a little for their final years. Frédéric, the younger brother, went to jail, Théobald was fined, but not incarcerated; Rodney went free for lack of evidence.

"Let us, like surveyors, drive a peg down there, and proceed with our examination of the terrain. The present Madame Roggenbuck is not the first, nor second, nor third spouse of this *manqué* evangelist. He has, it seems, been married three times previously. It seems she was the elder of two orphan daughters of a *viellard* named Stret-fuse."

"Old Henry Stret-fuse?" I asked. "I remember him. He had a farm out on the Andover Road—"

"Précisément. A very old, worked-out farm which was considered worthless when he left it to his daughters. But with the coming of the war, when the city commenced expanding like a blown-up bladder, it became most valuable for building sites. The boom in building had just begun when Monsieur Roggenbuck married Mademoiselle Stret-fuse."

"She was, as I have said, the elder of two sisters, and much flattered to receive attention from the reverend gentleman. Eulalia, her younger sister, was already suffering from incipient tuberculosis." He paused, swallowed the last crumb of pie, and added, "According to the terms of the will, the sisters were named joint tenants in the land. Does that mean anything to you?"

I shook my head.

"Nor did it signify to me until I had consulted Monsieur Mitchell the *avoué*. Then I began to scent a little so small mouse. Joint tenancy, the lawyer told me, means that tenants hold the land in equal, undivided shares, but at the death of one the whole estate passes to the other instead of going partly to the heirs of him who dies. *Et puis?* No one will buy the share of one joint tenant unless the other also signs the deed, since he who buys is subrogated only to the rights of his grantor, and liable to have his heirs' inheritance defeated if he dies before the other joint tenant. Do you also begin to smell the rodent?"

"H'm; can't say that I do."

"*Très bien*. Regard me: If Monsieur Roggenbuck married Mademoiselle Eulalia the chances are that she, the victim of an often fatal malady, would predecease her elder sister; but if he married Mademoiselle Sara, as he did, the chances are that she, though older, will survive and become sole owner of a valuable property. For that reason, and no other, I am convinced, he chose the elder of the sisters for his bride.

"However, complications rose when Mademoiselle the younger sister married Monsieur Frye. Under his loving care and cherishment she might outlive her elder sister, then *poof!* where would the reverend gentleman be?"

"Not to be caught napping, *pardieu!* Not he! When Monsieur Frye goes to the war he takes his sister-in-law to his house, sees that she has no medical attention, and hopes for the best."

"*Hélas*, the soldier-husband comes home from the battlefields, so stronger measures must be taken. He takes the young wife from her home and holds her virtually a prisoner, *incommunicado*.

"Now, listen carefully. Monsieur the hus-

band is about to ask the court to give him back his wife when he meets death upon the highway. The accident occurs on a steep hill, and, quite fortuitously, two of the firm of Roggenbuck Frères are there at or about the time it happens."

"Are you implying—"

"I am implying nothing. I am merely marshalling the facts for our review. Two days before this fatal accident Monsieur Frédéric buys a motor car, a swift vehicle fitted with a driving searchlight, such as police cars carry. Moreover, he goes to a garageman and has an even more powerful light installed. He is a city-dweller and not given to much driving on the country roads. Why should he desire so powerful a searchlight?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"Well spoken, my good, trusting friend. You would be the last to entertain unworthy suspicions. Me, I am otherwise."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Not anything at present. This is just another peg we drive down in our surveying tour. But listen further, if you please:

"This afternoon I made it my business to watch Monsieur Roggenbuck's house. By a 'phone call I ascertained that he was at his office. I saw Madame his wife go out; I telephoned his house and got no answer. 'Bien,' I tell me. 'The house are empty; the domestic is not there.' So, like the robber in the night, I break into that house. *Parbleu*, I tell you a most excellent burglar was lost when Jules de Grandin decided to be comparatively honest.

"I went through that house carefully. And in an upper room, a little so small sunless room set high beneath the roof, I find poor Madame Frye. She are locked in like any *felonne*. She lies upon a narrow, unkempt bed, her *robe de nuit* is far from clean, she coughs almost incessantly.

"I speak to her, me. She answers feebly, between coughings. She tells me that her brother-in-law keeps at her constantly to deed her share of the farm to her sister. He tells her that her husband is dead, but she will not believe him. She stubbornly withholds her signature, for he, her husband, had told her to sign nothing. Until he comes she will not sign. *Parbleu*, unless we inter-

vene all soon she will assuredly succumb, and Madame Roggenbuck will be sole heiress. When that occurs, *cordieu*, I do not think that she will be a good risk for insurance. No. I ask to know if it is not a pretty pan of fish I have discovered?"

"It's infamous!" I exclaimed. "We must do something—"

"*Precisément, mon vieux*, we must, indeed. Come, let us go."

"Go? Where?"

"About a little piece of business that I have in mind."

PETEROS read the small bronze tablet on the red-brick house before which we stopped half an hour later. As far as I could see it was the only thing distinguishing it from the other houses in the eminently respectable block. When de Grandin pressed the bell a neatly uniformed maid answered and led us to a parlor.

I glanced about me curiously. The place was rather elegant. A Chinese rug of the Kien-lung period lay on the floor, against the farther wall hung a Ghiorde's prayer-cloth, the furniture was clearly of French manufacture, gilt wood upholstered in an apple-green brocade. The only picture in the room was a life-sized portrait of a blond woman with wide, brooding eyes and a sad mouth. A latch clicked, and a small, neat gentleman entered.

He was perhaps fifty, his hair was slightly gray at the temples, his rather long face was clean-shaven, the dark eyes behind the tortoise-shell spectacles were serious and thoughtful. His dinner clothes were impeccable, but of a slightly foreign cut. He might have been a lawyer or a banker, or perhaps the curator of an art gallery, but I recognized him as Gregor Peteros who, though professionally a medium and clairvoyant, was so highly thought of that psychologists of reputable standing did not hesitate to consult him, and whose monographs on extrasensory perception had been printed in a dozen scientific magazines. "Good evening, gentlemen," he greeted. "I'll be with you in a moment. If you don't mind I'll take a topcoat; I'm rather sensitive to chill."

"As near as I could determine from studying the newspapers and police re-

ports, this is the spot," de Grandin told us as we drew up at a curve that twisted down a steep hill above Harrison Creek. The roadway had been widened recently, and where a hundred-foot drop led to the rock-studded, bawling waters of the stream a breast-high wall of stone and reinforced concrete had been erected. The spot had been a famous—or infamous—one for fatal accidents until this safeguard had been put up, I recalled.

"Can you put yourself *en rapport* with the past, Monsieur Peteros?" de Grandin asked. "I realize it may be difficult, for much traffic has passed since—"

"Do not tell me the details!" Mr. Peteros broke in. "When did the accident occur?"

"September eighteenth, two years ago."

"I see." The medium made a note on a slip of paper, did a quick calculation, and tapped his teeth with his pencil. "That would have been under the sign of Virgo in the decanus of Mercury." He settled himself back on the cushions, closed his eyes, and seemed about to take a nap. For several minutes there was complete silence, and we could hear the ticking of our watches beating out a fugue; from the distance came the dismal wailing of a freight train's locomotive, somewhere nearer a dog barked, and the mounting sound was slender as a strand of spider-web.

Abruptly Mr. Peteros sat up. His eyes were closed, but his face worked excitedly. "I see him!" he exclaimed. "He has swung around the curve at the hilltop and commenced the descent. He seems distract; he is not watching the road. He should not rely on his brakes, he ought to put his engine into low gear."

He swallowed with excitement, then turned his closed eyes down the road. "There is another car coming," he announced. "It's a small, open car, with two men in it. One drives, the other leans out. He is watching . . . watching. He has his hand upon a driving searchlight set upon a rod beside the windshield. It is covered with some kind of cloth, a bag or sack of heavy felt through which no light can pass. The two cars are not more than fifty feet apart now. The man descending the hill swerves to the right, toward the guardrail.

The other car swings to the left. They are approaching head-on. Ah! The man beside the driver of the second car has turned his hooded spotlight squarely on the driver of the first vehicle. Now he snatches the hood off. A-a-ah! There is a beam of dazzling light shining full into the other driver's eyes. It blinds him. He—his car is out of control! He will crash against the barrier. He has crashed through it! His car is turning over and over as it tumbles down the bank. *Kyrie eleison!* The glass of his windshield has shattered. He is pierced by a great splinter of it. He is bleeding, dying. . . ."

He paused a moment, breathing hard, like an exhausted runner, then, more calmly: "The other car has stopped and its passengers have gotten out. They are slipping, sliding down the steep bank. They have reached the wreck, but they make no move to take its occupant out. One of them reaches in and feels his pulse, shakes his head, and steps back. They wait . . . wait. Now they feel the wreck victim's pulse again, and still they make no move to lift him out. Now they seem satisfied. They reach into the wreck and lift the victim out. He is dead. I see them nod to each other, then turn to scramble up the bank again. . . ."

"Yes, yes, monsieur? What next?" de Grandin rasped as Mr. Peteros ceased speaking. "Pour le chapeau d'un cochon vert, what else is it you see, I ask to know?"

"Eh?" Mr. Peteros looked at him with the blank stare of a wakened sleeper. "What's that?"

"Mordien, what else was it you saw?"

"I don't remember. I can never recall what I've seen in the trance."

The little Frenchman looked as if he were about to spring on him, then raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug of resignation. "Tenez, it is of no real importance. I damn think you have told us quite enough."

"*JE SUIS AFFAME*, I am hungry, like a wolf, me," he told me as we reached the house. "Let us see what Madame Nora has concealed in the ice box."

We rummaged in the frigidaire and brought out some cold roast lamb, some lettuce and a jar of mayonnaise. Also several bottles of beer.

"Now," he asked, seating himself on the kitchen table with a sandwich in one hand and beer mug in the other, "what is it that we have? It seems that in the matter of eliminating Monsieur Frye the middle Roggenbuck brother was, as usual, the master mind. He planned the so clever assassination, his henchmen-brothers executed it.

"I am persuaded that they died self-hanged, and that they richly deserved hanging. Of Monsieur Théobald's suicide there is no doubt. The prints upon the bowling ball exactly match the lines of his feet. That he stood on it, then kicked it away when he had draped the noose around his neck, there is no question. Concerning Monsieur Frédéric I cannot say with certainty, but I incline to think that Dr. Parnell is for once right, and the good Costello once unfortunately wrong.

"Why did they do it? Who can say? Perhaps it was their guilty conscience, though I do not think so, for *fripsons* such as they have little conscience. Perhaps it was the vengeful spirit of their victim seeking justice—forcing them to do that which the law could not. It could be so. At any rate, they are eliminated. Our problem now is Monsieur Rodney."

"There's nothing we can do about him," I rejoined. "There's no way we can bring the crime home to him. No court and jury in New Jersey would listen to such testimony as Peteros gave us tonight, and even if they did we can't prove Rodney planned the murder."

"I AGREE with you, *mon vieux*, but we may do what the law cannot. His conscience—granting that he has one—is not clean. His brothers' statements that they had a feeling of being watched troubled him. He is persuaded that his murdered brother-in-law has the power to bewitch him—to 'hex' him, as he puts it. When, to test his sensibility to suggestion, I pretended to see someone standing behind him last night, did not you see how frightened he was? I think that there we shall find the chink in his armor, and I shall work industriously to enlarge it. Yes, certainly. Of course."

It was shortly before noon next day when he entered Mr. Roggenbuck's of-

fice. The place swarmed with activity. A battery of typewriters, operated by singularly photogenic young women, filled in spaces in processed form letters and addressed envelopes; a boy and girl were busy at a multigraphing machine, several curvaceous females stuffed the filled-in forms into envelopes.

"Yes, sirs?" challenged the young woman at the switchboard, who also evidently acted as receptionist. Advised of our errand she whispered something into an inter-office communicator, and in a moment looked up with a smile. "Straight ahead, please," she directed. "The Bishop's office is at the end of the corridor."

"Parbleu," de Grandin chuckled as we walked down the hall, "when he first came to see us he was a simple pastor. Today he is a bishop. We must hurry to take care of him, my friend, or he will assuredly become pope.

"Monseigneur," he announced as we entered Roggenbuck's dimly-lighted, softly carpeted sanctum, "I have the proof that both your brothers died by their own hands, and—*mon Dieu*, who is that!" he stepped back, both hands raised as if to ward away some horror.

"Who—where?" the other turned half round in his swivel chair.

"The one who stands behind you with his face all smeared in blood and points at you accusingly—"

"No!" Roggenbuck exclaimed. "It can't be—he can't say—"

"Friend Trowbridge, do not you see him?" de Grandin turned to me. "Do not you see him standing there?"

I knit my brows and tried to sound as convincing as possible. "Yes, there's someone there. He seems to have met with an accident. Shall we call an ambulance—"

"No! No!" Roggenbuck broke in hoarsely. "You're lying, both of you!" He pressed a button on his desk, and in a moment there came the click of high heels on the floor outside.

"Did you ring, Bishop?" asked a young woman as she entered. "I—oh! who is it—what's happened?" She stared across her employer's shoulder, apparently wide-eyed with horror, then put her hands up to her face

and dropped back a step, shuddering. "Oh, o-oh!" she moaned. "The blood—the blood!"

Sweat was streaming down Roggenbuck's face, his full-lipped mouth began to work convulsively, and at its corners little flecks of foam showed. His eyes were bright and dilated as if under the influence of a drug. "Do you see it, too, Elsie?" he choked.

She made no answer, but nodded, her face still cupped in her hands, her shoulders shaking with repressed sobs.

"Oh, my God!" the frightened man rose from his desk and stumbled toward the rear door. "He's come for me, too. He came for Fred and Theo, now it's my turn—leave me alone, Amos Frye, I didn't—I didn't—" The door banged to behind him, and de Grandin patted the girl's shoulder.

"Bravo, Mademoiselle," he applauded. "The great Bernhardt at her greatest could not have done better. Here is what I promised you." From his wallet he drew several bills and pressed them into her hand.

The girl giggled. "I wouldn't 'a' done it if he hadn't been such a heel," she confessed. "But he was always makin' passes at us girls, an' threatenin' to fire us if we squawked. The pious old hypocrite!"

The Frenchman grinned delightedly. "You have given me a new word for my vocabulary, *ma chère*. It are entirely as you say. He was an eel of the first water, him."

From the driveway beside the office we heard the rasp of gears and the roaring of a motor being started. In a moment, from the corner came the shrill, hysterical scream of

a police whistle, the crash of metal smashing into metal and the ring of breaking glass.

We rushed into the street and raced toward the corner, with the shriek of the policeman's whistle and a chorus of hoarse cries still sounding.

Telescoped until it was foreshortened by at least a third its length, Roggenbuck's convertible stood at the intersection of the street and boulevard, while towering above it, like a bulldog straddling a luckless cat, was a ten-ton truck.

"Hullo, Dr. de Grandin," greeted the policeman. "Good mornin' Dr. Trowbridge. Gimme a hand with him, will you? He was comin' hell-bent-for-election down the street, payin' no more attention to the red light than if it wasn't there, when *zingo!* he barged into this here now truck, like he'd knock it outa his way. Yeah, the cemeteries is full o' birds that drive like that. He didn't have no more chance than a rabbit."

"One sees," returned de Grandin as, assisting the policeman, we lifted what was left of Roggenbuck from his car. Death must have been instantaneous. Certainly, it had been messy. His whole face was bashed in as if it had been struck by a battering-ram. His skull, from frontal bone to occiput, had been smashed like an egg and almost denuded of scalp. "*Mort*," pronounced de Grandin. "*Mort comme un mouton*—he is dead like a herring, this one." He nodded to the policeman. "This is for the coroner, *mon brave*. Do not disturb the internes at the hospital. They hate to have their poker playing interrupted by such fruitless calls."