

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1946

Cover by Boris Dolgov

NOVELETTES

- SPAWN OF THE GREEN ABYSS C. Hall Thompson 10
There are events that transpire in this world that you will not believe — that you will not want to believe!
- EYES IN THE DARK Seabury Quinn 54
Some will not live to grow old — for a variety of outre reasons
- SHIPMATE Allison V. Harding 74
Your shipmates are picked by chance or fate — to sail with you toward some shrouded doom beyond the farthest horizon!

SHORT STORIES

- MAYAYA'S LITTLE GREEN MEN Harold Lawlor 36
Things happen in rambling, reconverted farmhouses, things that make you wish you weren't twenty miles from the nearest neighbor
- LET'S PLAY "POISON" Ray Bradbury 41
Children — little monsters thrust out of hell because the devil could no longer cope with them
- A COLLECTOR OF STONES August Derleth 48
You don't always worry about ethics if you're a fanatical collector. But you should worry about the dead!
- LIZZIE BORDEN TOOK AN AXE Robert Bloch 67
A locked room, mouldering books, muttered curses, in a rotting hulk of a house — add up to tragedy
- FROGFATHER Manly Wade Wellman 88
The oldest ones say Khomgabassi dug the waterways, planted the trees and fathered the frogs

VERSE

- THE DOOR Harriet A. Bradfield 53
- HEARD ON THE ROOF AT MIDNIGHT Leah Bodine Drake 87
- SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS Irwin J. Weill 35
- THE EYRIE AND THE WEIRD TALES CLUB 93

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178
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Eyes in the Dark

By SEABURY QUINN

A man falls dead—no reason—no injury....

“I AGREE entirely,” Jules de Grandin nodded vigorously. “Too many of our profession wear blinders. This prejudice against Chiropractic is pig-ignorant as that shown against anesthesia when Simpson introduced it, or the abuse heaped on your own illustrious Holmes when he contended puerperal fever is infectious. Me, I think—*mordieu*, watch him! He will not live to grow old, that one!”

Dodging drunkenly from the curb, a man had run into the roadway almost directly in the path of our car, and, as I clamped my brakes on frenziedly, fell sprawling to the pavement.

He lay face downward on the asphalt when we reached him, both arms extended to full length like those of a diver when he hits the water, and no clothing-dummy flung into the street could have been limper. “I’m sure we didn’t hit him!” I exclaimed as we bent over the prostrate figure. “There was no jar—”

“You have right, my friend,” de Grandin cut in. “I saw him fall a full three feet from the wheels but”—he looked up bleakly—“nevertheless, he is dead.”

“Dead?” I echoed incredulously.

“*Comme un maquereau*,” he agreed. “Completely; utterly.”

“But—”

“I think that we had better save our butts for the inquest, friend Trowbridge. It would be well if we called the police—”

“How? We can’t just leave him lying here, nor can we move him, and where would we find a telephone?”

He rose and dusted the knees of his trousers. “I think I see a gleam of light in that doorway. Perhaps they have a phone.”

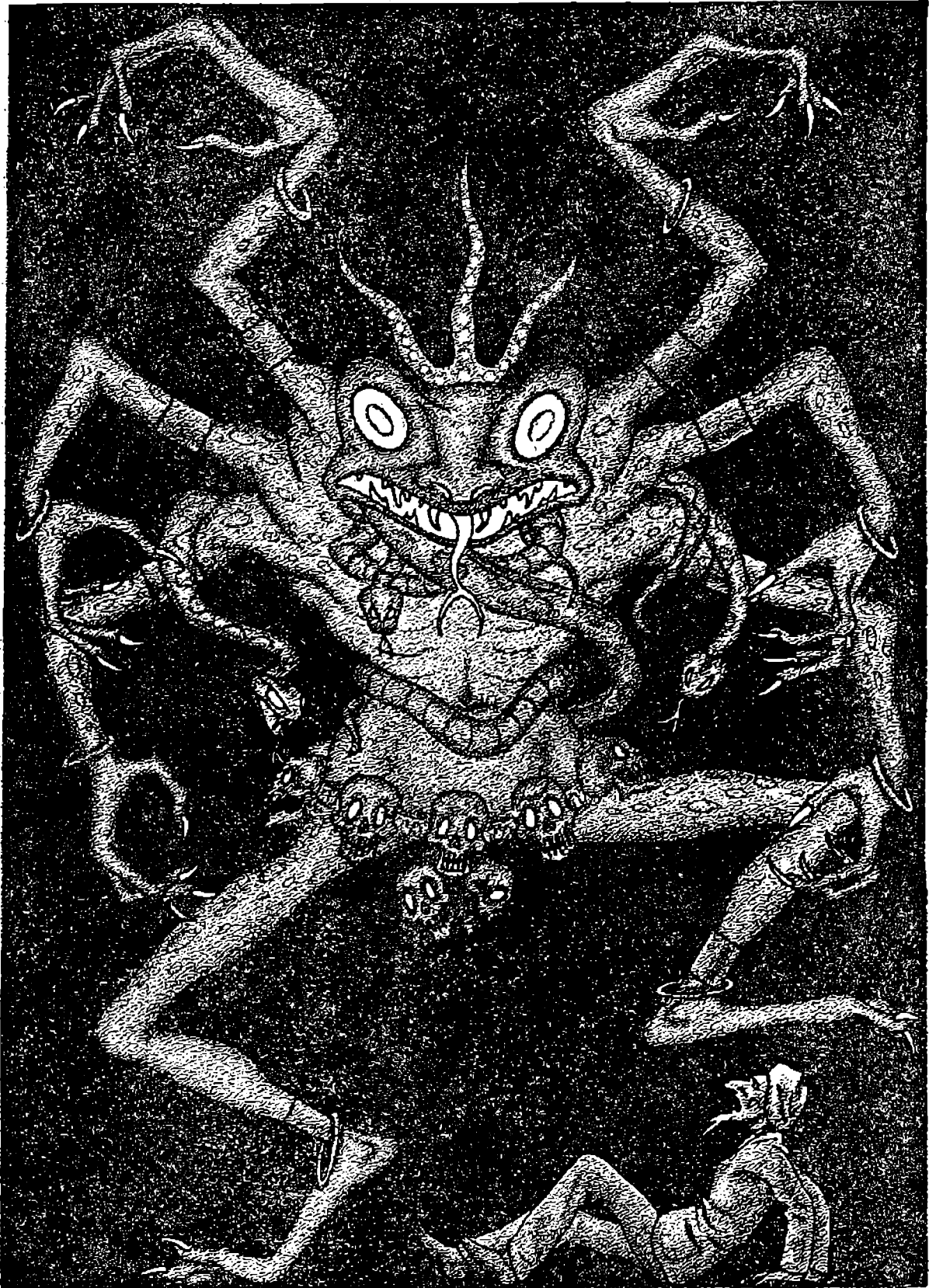
The neighborhood was strange to me. We had been visiting the Westervelt Clinic to observe the effect of a course of chiropractic

treatments on a neurasthenic for whom potassium iodide and sodium salicylate had proved about as efficacious as so much distilled water. The old house occupied by the Clinic stood in what was little better than a slum and the old street through which we drove had seen better days, but not for a long time. Most of the houses were old brownstone fronts that had been elegant homes but now were shabby, run down at the heel, like gentlefolk in reduced circumstances. Signs announcing furnished rooms showed in most of the windows; on window-sills were half-filled milk bottles and the oddments common to “light housekeeping” apartments. Although it was but little after ten o’clock no lights showed in the blank-eyed windows. Either everyone had gone to bed or residents of the block economized on electricity.

However, as I followed the line of his pointed finger I saw a faint gleam seeping from the house before which we had stopped. A dull pattern of reds and blues lay on its white marble stoop where light shone dimly through the little panels of its stained-glass door, and though the place showed the air of decay that sat like a blight on the neighborhood it seemed a little better than its mates. None of its window lights had been broken and patched, it bore no card announcing rooms to let; the very curtains which obscured the light within seemed to announce it still maintained some sort of aloofness from the forthright poverty of the locality.

I started toward the dimly lighted door, but a sharp ejaculation from de Grandin halted me. “What is it?”

He had turned the dead man’s face toward him and was staring at a small wound on the forehead with a look of fascination. “One cannot surely say,” he answered softly, “but— What do you make of him, *hein?*”



"Why, when he fell he struck his brow—"

"On what, one asks to know? What is there in the street on which he could have

cut himself?" As I bent to inspect the wound he added: "And if he cut himself when he fell, why should his injury take this form, *heim?*" With a wisp of paper napkin

from the glove compartment of the car he wiped the corpse's brow, revealing not a straight or jagged cut, but three distinct incisions in the skin, clear-cut as if made with a needle or knife-point.

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "It looks like shorthand."

"It does, indeed," he agreed, "but it is not. Unless I miss my guess it is an Arabic inscription, perhaps Hindustani. I cannot be quite sure which."

"Arabic—Hindustani?" I echoed incredulously. "What would that be doing on a man's forehead—"

"*Tiens, mon vieux*, what would a man be doing falling dead in the street, with or without an inscription cut into his brow? *Le bon Dieu* knows, not I. Did not it seem to you he fled from something—"

"No, it didn't," I denied. "It seemed to me that he was drunk and didn't know what he was doing. Certainly, he wasn't watching his step—"

"Agreed," he nodded. "Most certainly he had not his wits about him, but few people *in extremis* do. However, let us wait the findings of the coroner. Our first concern is to find a telephone."

I JERKED the silver-plated handle of the old-fashioned bell-pull vigorously, and from somewhere in the rear of the house came a responsive brassy tinkle, but no more. "*Grand Dieu des porcs*," de Grandin swore, "are we to be kept waiting while they rise and make a toilette like that of Marie Antoinette? *Hola dans la maison!*" he supplemented my ring with a vigorous thump upon the walnut panel of the door. "Awake, arouse yourselves within!" he shouted, and as he struck the door a second time a light click sounded and the portal swung back under the impact of his knuckles.

I hesitated on the threshold, but de Grandin had no scruples about violating the householders' privacy. "*Hola!*" he exclaimed again as he stepped over the sill. "Is there no one here to—*morbleu!*" he broke off, then, in a lower tone, "*Pas possible?* In such a neighborhood? *Regardez*, if you please, Friend Trowbridge."

We stood upon the entrance of a wide, long hall with frescoed ceiling and tall

doors of massive walnut letting off to right and left. In the softly diffused light of a bronze-shaded Oriental lamp it seemed unreal as a stage setting—Persian, Indian and Chinese rugs almost hid the polished planking of the floor, more rugs, glowing with jewel-colors shading from pale jade to deepest ruby, draped along the walls. Where the white and mahogany balustrade of a wide staircase curved upward a peacock screen had been set, and immediately in front of it was a carved divan of inlaid blackwood. By the divan stood a tabouret of Indian cedar inlaid with copper, and on it, still emitting a thin plume of steam, a tiny cup of eggshell porcelain rested. Over everything there hung a heavy, heady, almost drugging perfume—ambergris.

"*Tenez*," de Grandin clicked his tongue against his teeth as he surveyed the apartment, "he is like a diamond set in brass or a pearl in a pig's snout, a room like this in such a neighborhood, *n'est-ce pas?* One wonders—*ab-ha? Ab-ha-ha?*" His voice sank to a whisper as he nodded toward the stairway.

The blackwood divan just beneath the stairs was spread with leopard skin, and lying indolently on it was a woman, one arm extended toward us, wrist bent, hand drooping. Beneath her fingers coiled the brass stem of a *hookah* she had evidently let drop when she slipped off to sleep, and from the brass tobacco-cup that topped the cloisonné water-jar of the hubble-bubble the faintest coil of scented smoke ascended.

I had an odd feeling of unreality, a sort of this-can't-possibly-be-true sensation as I looked at her. She matched her surroundings as perfectly as if she had been made up for a part, and the big, gorgeous, dimly lighted room were the stage on which she played it. Small she was, almost childishly so, and dainty as a sweetly molded porcelain figurine. But her body was a woman's, not a child's. The turn of her bare arms, the firm rondure of her breasts, spoke full maturity. Her skin was golden with the warm glow of sun-ripened fruit, her nose was small and slightly hawk-beaked, her forehead low and wide. Her hair was black and sooty, without luster, parted smoothly in the middle and drawn down like wings above her ears, and the pandanus-red mouth was full-lipped,

sensual and petulant, suggesting quick transitions from gay laughter to storms of anger, like that of a willful child.

A short, tight bodice of plum-colored satin like a zouave jacket covered but in no wise concealed the luscious fullness of her bosoms, from waist to ankles she was encased in exaggeratedly full pantaloons of saffron-yellow muslin drawn in tightly at the bottoms and ending in a triple row of fluffy ruffles. About her neck and wrists and ankles circled strands of gold discs almost large as pennies set with uncut rubies and off-color diamonds, and from each plate hung a tiny golden sleigh-bell. In her left nostril was a hoop of gold large and heavy as a wedding ring, and balanced on the tip of one small foot was a green-velvet heelless slipper thickly worked with gold embroidery and seed-pearls. Its mate had fallen to the rug-strewn floor, baring a tiny blue-veined foot the heel and sole and toes of which were stained bright red with henna.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Madame,*" de Grandin began, speaking softly so as not to waken her abruptly. "We regret the intrusion, but—*ah?*" We had been walking toward the sleeping woman, our footsteps soundless on the rug-spread floor, now we stood beside her. Her heavy-lashed, kohl-shadowed lids were not quite closed. A little thread of white showed between them, and her petulantly sensuous mouth was lax and drooping at the corners, as though she was unutterably tired. "*Morbleu,*" he exclaimed, and his voice rasped as if his throat were sandy, "another?"

"How—" I began, but he shut me off impatiently. "*Par la barbe d'un bouc vert,* do not you see it, my friend? There is something devilish here!" Scratched on the smooth, pale-amber skin of her forehead were the same shorthand-like characters we had found on the brow of the dead man in the street.

"What can it mean?" I wondered. "The wounds are fresh—the man, was still bleeding, this was probably made after death, for there's no evidence of hemorrhage, but she can't have been dead long. The coffee cup is still steaming, the *bookab* is smoking—"

"God and the devil know, not we, my friend," the little Frenchmen answered. "This case is not for the coroner alone. It is

a matter for the police and the public prosecutor. Unless I am far more mistaken than I think, this is a matter of murder."

"YOU fellers do send in the damnedest cases," complained Dr. Jason Parnell, the coroner's physician. "I don't mind 'em when they're messed up some, or even when they're ripe from bein' in the Bay too long, but when they're dead without a single, solitary reason—"

"How do you say?" de Grandin demanded. "Is it that you could not make a diagnosis?"

"That's a rough outline of the plot. A first-year student knows that death begins in one of three ways: Coma, starting at the brain; asphyxia, beginning at the lungs, or syncope, commencing at the heart. Those bodies you found have no right to be dead. There's absolutely nothing diagnostic. No trace of coma, syncope or asphyxia. The man had a slight touch of TB, but he'd have been good for another five years, anyway. The woman showed traces of drug-addiction, but nothing which could account for her death. Except for those dam', insignificant scratches on their foreheads neither of 'em had a thing wrong with him; certainly nothing that the wildest stretch of imagination could call fatal. Hearts, lungs, brains all intact, no trace of any known poison, nothing serious the matter with 'em, except that they're both dead as herrings.

"Ye say there wuzn't any trace o' poison, sor?" Lieutenant Costello of the Homicide Bureau asked in disappointment. "Sure, that's too bad entirely. I'd kind o' built me case around them scratches on their foreheads—"

"I didn't say there was no trace of poison," Parnell denied tartly. "I said there was no trace of known poison. Generally speaking, poisons fall into three categories: corrosives, such as phenol or carbolic acid, hydrocyanic acid, or oxalic acid; hypnotics and antipyretics, such as the derivatives of opium, alcohol, chloroform and the like, and alkaloidals, which affect the central nervous system, among which many snake venoms are to be found. Usually we suspect some class of poison from the physical appearance of the body. From a general classification we descend to particulars, gradually

eliminating one suspected toxin, then another, till we've narrowed our investigation down to the particular poison causing death. Like you, when I found nothing radically wrong with these peoples' hearts or lungs or brains I suspected poison had been introduced into their systems through those scratches on their foreheads, but I drew a blank there, too.

"The area around the wounds should have been swollen, red and inflamed if snake venom had been introduced; these scratches seemed to have no effect on surrounding tissue, and specimens taken from them proved almost completely sterile. If one of the vegetable poisons such as curare had been injected symptoms similar to snake-bite would have been noticed, but as I said there were none. Furthermore, tests made on the blood and tissues yielded negative results. None of the familiar reactions was noted. All this, of course, does not preclude the possibility of poisoning. It merely means no poison known to me was used."

"Uh-huh," agreed Costello doubtfully. "What're ye goin' to tell the jury wuz the cause o' death, sor?"

Dr. Parnell drew out his wallet and extracted a ten-dollar bill which he laid on the desk before the policeman. "If you'll tell me what I should tell 'em that's yours, Lieutenant," he offered.

"Tenez, my friends, I think we waste the time," de Grandin broke in. "The key to this accursed mystery must lie under some doormat. Our task is to discover which one."

"True fer ye, sor," agreed Costello. "All we gotta do is find out why two people who didn't die from any known cause is dead, an' who kilt 'em, an' why. After that it's all simple. Where do we start turnin' up them doormats ye was spakin' of, I dunno?"

The little Frenchman took his narrow chin between his thumb and forefinger. "The markings on their brows are identical," he murmured. "If they had been different it might have meant something, or nothing. Their identity undoubtedly means something, also, but what?" Abruptly he turned on us, small, round blue eyes blazing almost angrily. "Why do we stand here?" he demanded. "Why do we not go to consult the good Ram Chitra Das at once, right away, immediately?"

"WELL, well, this is an unexpected pleasure!" our Hindu friend greeted as we trooped into his apartment in East Eighty-sixth Street. He and his charming wife were lunching on the tiny tiled terrace that let off of the dining room of their maisonette, a spot of grateful coolness in the sweltering city. A red-and-white striped awning kept the mid-September sun at bay, the tiled floor was a cool gray-green underfoot, at the terrace edge a row of scarlet geraniums nodded in the light breeze fanning in from the East River. The buhl table from which they ate was itself a museum piece, and the covered dishes of Georgian Sheffield plate were, I noted enviously, the kind about which antique dealers dream. Steam spiraled lazily from the swan's-neck spout of a teapot under which a spirit lamp burned, iced grapefruit, chops, scrambled eggs and buttered toast had just been set before them, and at the far side of the table, beaded like the forehead of a farmhand on a summer day, a tall, inviting bottle of Rhine wine waited.

"Had luncheon?" asked our host. "Yes? That's a pity. We'd love to have you join us, but perhaps you'd take a cup o' tea?"

He smiled at the woman who sat facing us. "You remember Drs. Trowbridge and de Grandin, and Lieutenant Costello, my dear?"

Nairini inclined her head in a bow that included us jointly, and there was something queenly in the movement. I knew that she had been an Indian prince's daughter who had eloped from her bridegroom's palace with Ram Chitra Das, himself the grandson of a rajah and as engaging a scapegrace as ever backslid from the ancient Hindu faith and took service with His Britannic Majesty.

They were an oddly contrasting, yet completely complementary couple, these renegade children of Mother India. In his gray flannels with the bright stripes of his school tie in bold contrast, Ram Chitra Das looked anything but a Hindu. He might have been a Spaniard or Italian, perhaps a Basque or Portuguese, but there was nothing Oriental in his clear-olive complexion, his sleekly brushed black hair and humorous, alert dark eyes.

Nairini, on the contrary, could never have been mistaken for a Westerner. Her skin

was an incredibly beautiful tan, as if it had been powdered with the finest gold, her eyes of deep, moss-agate green were set a trifle slantingly, and her hair, demurely parted in the middle and gathered in a great coil at the back was a dull black cloud. Her mouth was an extraordinary color, like the darker sort of strawberries. Her dress of block-printed linen, chocolate-brown on cocoa-tan, was sleeveless and reached to her ankles, about her waist was a girdle of amber beads as large as hazel nuts. There were bracelets of frail silver filigree on her wrists, jade-and-silver pendants hung in her ears; a soft, musical cling-clong sounded as she moved slightly, and we saw the slender bare ankles above her sandaled feet were ringed with heavy circlets of sand-molded silver.

With a grace that made the simple act seem like the art of a skilled dancer she poured tea for us, and Ram Chitra Das demanded, "I suppose you chaps are in trouble again? We never see you when the sailin' is clear."

"Not so much in trouble as puzzled, my friend," de Grandin denied. "Last night Friend Trowbridge and I found two people dead without excuse."

Ram Chitra Das bent a mild frown upon the little Frenchman. "Let's see if I follow you. D'ye mean you'd no excuse for findin' 'em, or the late lamented had no adequate excuse for dyin'?"

"Both, *par les bois d'une hûtre!*" Briefly de Grandin sketched our adventure of the night before, ending with Parnell's failure to ascribe a cause of death.

"H'm." Ram Chitra Das helped himself to more scrambled egg and spread strawberry jam on his toast. "You say the scars on their foreheads looked like writin'? Sounds as if some o' my former fellow countrymen might have been up to tricks. Can you recall what the scars looked like?"

"By blue, I can, my friend. I have here an exact copy." The Frenchman drew a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to Ram Chitra Das.

"*Sivanavama!*" For a moment our host's hand shook as he looked at the sketch, but in a moment it had steadied.

Nairini's delicately arched brows rose a trifle higher. "What is it?" she asked in her clear, smooth contralto that

somehow reminded me of the cooing of doves.

"I fear, old dear, that this is it." Her husband's voice was so casual that we knew he held hysteria in check by an effort as he passed the slip of paper to her.

"*Oom Parvati!*" The superb gentility that comes from hundreds of generations of royal blood stood Nairini in good stead, but in the sudden widening of her pupils and the quick expansion of her narrow nostrils we read fear.

"*Ab-ha!*" de Grandin barked. "You know him? You recognize him, *hein?*"

Ram Chitra Das nodded grimly. "We know him very well indeed."

"And what, if one may ask, does he mean, this writing?"

"Oh, the writing? Literally translated it means 'The Afghan.'"

"*Vraiment?* And who would this so odious Afghan be?"

Ram Chitra Das' dark eyes were serious as he turned them on de Grandin. "You know something about me," he returned. "You know my father was a prince's son who made a misalliance with a *nautchni* and went into a not too onerous exile as a consequence; you know about my education. I was brought up as a high caste Brahmin lad and in addition had some trainin' under fakirs who, as the saying goes, could 'teach tricks to a fox.' They certainly taught me some things that have come in very handy. My English education was interrupted by the World War, but when I came back from France I took my degree at Oxford and topped it off with a year at the Sorbonne."

The grin with which he broke his recital had something of a small-boy-at-the-circus quality. "So there I was, schooled Orientally and Occidentally, restless with the restlessness of all demobbed soldiers, and with not a blessed thing to do. My caste had been completely smashed by my trip across the ocean and such indiscretions as eating beef, and after fourteen years of European life in peace and war Brahma, Vishnu and Siva meant no more to me than Pegasus or Apollo, nor had I filled this vacuum of disbelief by embracing Christianity, though several parsons and the Lord knows how many nice old ladies had labored manfully to bring me into the fold. I didn't need to

work, my income was sufficient for my needs and almost equal to my wants, but I was bored. Bored stiff. I got so tired of being just Ram Chitra Das, idler, that I took service with the Intelligence Section of the Indian Police.

"I don't think that I'm boastin' when I say they got a bargain in me. I spoke every dialect that's used between Colombo and Kabul, and since I owed allegiance to no formal brand of religion and had no caste to be broken I could masquerade as a Hindu, Mohammedan, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh or Parsee without embarrassment. I gave 'em twenty-seven shillin's' worth for every pound they paid me. Besides, I had a lot of fun."

THEN suddenly he drew his brows down and the whole aspect of his face changed. "They gave me an assignment to keep an eye on Karowlee Sahib, the pershwa of Bahadurpore. He was a tricky old cuss, this Raja Karowlee, somewhere about fifty, more wives than any other possessions—though they said he used about ten pecks o' diamonds for playthings. When he's not thinkin' of women it's treason; makin' deals with Russia or the Afghans, anyone who'll play his game and give him a leg up with his schemes. That's how he got his nickname, The Afghan. He'd spent almost a year up north o' Kabul tryin' to sell one of those Afghan amirs the idea of comin' down and botherin' the Raja while he pulled off his local revolution, and when he came back he had a pack o' Afghan wolfhounds, a lot less money than he took away, and his beard dyed red with henna, Afghan fashion. He'd had no luck with the hillmen, though. Seems the amir's son had served with the British and seen the R.A.F. in action. He wasn't havin' any trouble with *those* babies.

"Well, as I was sayin', I was up Bahadurpore way, posin' as a free-lance soldier and servin' as a lieutenant in Karowlee's guard when word comes that the Princess Mihri Nairini—that means Nairini the Beloved—was comin' up from Bhutanistan, where her father was in the king business in a small way, to marry this old reprobate Karowlee. Women didn't mean much to me in those days. I'd been petted by the English ladies and the French girls were nice to me, too,

but I'd never seen one who could lure me into exchangin' ridin' boots and polo mallet for slippers and a pipe. Besides, I'd absorbed European ideas. This Princess Nairini was a 'native,' probably ate with her fingers and couldn't read or write. I'd seen her kind a thousand times, and the more I saw of 'em the more I thought my pater had the right idea when he married a *nautchni*. Then—" he paused with a slow, reminiscent smile, and Nairini cut in softly:

"Then I captured him."

"*Qu'est-ce donc?*" de Grandin demanded. "How do you say, *Madame?*"

She smiled at him and two deep dimples showed in her cheeks, a merrily incongruous combination with her exotic eyes. "There'd been every kind of merrymaking in the palace for three days, and I was almost tired to death. I'd slipped away from my attendants and gone down to the garden to sit by the lotus pool when I saw someone coming toward me in the moonlight. He wore the red tunic and gold-and-red turban of an officer in Karowlee's Guard, and was very beautiful. He carried a light cane with which he switched the heads off of the flowers bordering the path. Flowers always seemed like living, sentient things to me, not merely vegetables, and I couldn't bear to see him behead them. 'Stop that!' I ordered sharply, and he halted as if he had walked into a brick wall."

"Why not?" demanded Ram Chitra Das. "There I was, attendin' to my guardin', when a houri out o' the False Prophet's Paradise tells me to stop it. High caste Hindu women, like *Muslimmi*, observe *pardah*, you know—veil themselves before strange men. This girl wore no veil, but plainly she was neither a *nautchni* nor a palace servant. 'Who are you?' I asked and she told me, 'Your future queen who orders you to cease destroyin' her flowers.'

"That started it. The next night I was there, and the next night after that. So was she, and we had other things to talk about than flowers. I was windin' up my tour of duty, about ready to sneak back to headquarters, and when I left Nairini went with me."

"One understands," de Grandin grinned delightedly with a Frenchman's innate appreciation of romance. "And then?"

Ram Chitra Das grinned back. "Since then it's been a game o' tag. Karowlee's a revengeful old devil, and I rather think we made him lose face by elopin'. Two or three times his agents almost got us. Once I found a cobra in my bath in Calcutta where no cobra had a right to be; scorpions have appeared mysteriously in my boots, I nearly stopped a bullet one night when Nairini and I were ridin' outside Bombay. When they transferred me to duty in London, smellin' out sedition among Indian sailors in the neighborhood of East India Dock Road, I thought we'd shaken off pursuit, but one night—we were livin' in St. James' Park where you'd no more look for a Hindu than for a rich man in heaven—what should turn up in our bed but a krait, a little cousin to the cobra, less than a tenth his size and more than twenty times as deadly. Then we knew the heat was on again, as you say in America."

DE GRANDIN nodded. "And you associate this brand upon the dead ones' foreheads with Karowlee Sahib?"

"Definitely. He's known as The Afghan from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas. Furthermore, elopements from his household ain't as rare as might be expected. His women are so numerous that he can't give 'em much attention. They get bored, and in India as in Ireland or Idaho there are always Boy Scouts ready to do their good deed by entertainin' bored wives. Sometimes these johnnies get serious and marry the gals—at least they run off with 'em.

"Usually Karowlee Sahib calls the turn on 'em before they get far. A year ago his agents killed a young Parsee who'd offered his protection to one of his runaway women, and disfigured the girl so that she committed suicide. That was in the outskirts of Benares, but instances of his revenge have been reported in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. We know from personal experience he can reach across the ocean. I think it altogether likely the man who dropped dead before your car and the woman you found dead in the house were victims of his vengeance."

De Grandin stroked his little wheat-blond mustache gently, then gave its ends a sudden savage tug. "Would you come with

us to inspect these defunct ones?" he asked. "It may be you might recognize them."

"Be glad to, old chap. I doubt I'll know 'em, but we might find out something, and I've more than a mere academic interest in this case. My dear," he turned to Nairini, "I think you'd better come along. With Karowlee's playmates on the loose I'd feel much safer if I had you in sight—"

"Why not pack a bag and stop at my house?" I suggested. "You'll be nearer to your base of operations there, and in no greater danger—"

"Thank you, Dr. Trowbridge," he accepted. "If Karowlee's agents are in Harrisonville we'll force their hand by movin' in on 'em. Might as well have a showdown now as later."

"And did you find out anything helpful?" de Grandin asked Ram Chitra Das that evening after dinner as Nairini, looking if possible more beautiful than ever in a white dinner dress embroidered at the hem with golden lotuses, poured coffee for us in the drawing room.

"Quite," answered the Indian. "I skipped down to the morgue as you suggested and had a look at the *corpora delicti*. I didn't recognize the woman, but the man was William Archer Thurmond, much better known to the Criminal Investigation Department as 'The Snapper,' from his playful little habit of snapping up any unconsidered trifle left lying about. I got in touch with a friend at New Delhi by radio telephone, and he tells me The Snapper was last heard of in Bahadupore. That seems to match up. Evidently he was fascinated by the lady's charms, and quite as evidently she was one of Karowlee's women. They probably eloped, and if I know The Snapper she took something more than herself from the palace when she kept the rendezvous. Probably a quart or two of pearls or diamonds. So Karowlee wrote two more names down in his black books, and it seems his agents scored a double first this time."

"I agree," Jules de Grandin nodded. "For our part friend Costello and I ransacked the neighborhood of the strange deaths, ringing every doorbell in the street, and found out that a Hindu gentleman named Basanta Roy took a room not far from the house where the dead woman was found."

"Humpf," grunted Ram Chitra Das, "Basanta Roy, eh? There are about three hundred and twenty million people in India, according to latest reports, and not less than five million of 'em are named Basanta Roy. Might as well be John Smith in London or Sam Cohen in New York, as far as identification goes."

"Nevertheless," de Grandin persisted, "this Monsieur Roy took lodgings in Thornapple Street. He was by all accounts a very old gentleman who wore a long white beard and kept much to himself, going out only after dark. He spoke English very well, but with an accent. Last night he came back to his room a little before midnight, paid two weeks' rent in lieu of notice, and decamped with bag and baggage."

"Aye?" Ram Chitra Das replied. "That may mean one of several things. Either he's satisfied with his job and gone back to India, or he's shifted operations from New Jersey to New York, hopin' to catch us off guard—eh? Oh, yes, dear, quite!"

Nairini had slipped the cap from her lipstick and leaned across the coffee table as if to rearrange the cups, in reality to scrawl on the mahogany with the cosmetic pencil:

"CAREFUL—ONE LISTENS AT THE WINDOW"

"As I was sayin'," Ram Chitra Das recommenced, but de Grandin interrupted. "Why do we not have some music, my friends? We have all night to talk about the case, let us defer our discussion till later. Will not you play for us, *Madame*? Your music? But of course, I shall be delighted to fetch it."

He hurried from the room and Nairini crossed to the piano, seated herself before the instrument and began to play softly, a slow, haunting tune pitched in a minor key, the heart-broken lament of an Afridi lover. The notes sank till they were no more than a soft murmur under her fingers. She bent forward toward the keyboard as if listening, waiting for something violent and dramatic.

"Trowbridge, Costello, Ram Chitra Das—*à moi!*" the little Frenchman's hail came from the garden. "I have him, me!"

We rushed through the French windows, vaulted down into the garden from the veranda and saw what seemed a vague, amor-

phous shadow draw suddenly in two parts, and heard de Grandin's jubilant announcement, "*C'est fini, mes amis*. He was a slippery eel, this one, but Jules de Grandin knows the fisherman's tricks. Yes, certainly."

FROM the midst of my Paul Scarlets he dragged something which upon inspection proved to be a small, gray-bearded man in a bad state of disrepair. Scratches from rose-thorns criss-crossed his face, his neat white-linen suit was soiled with black earth from the rose-bed, the beautiful pale-green turban which had covered his shaved head had been jerked off to form a fetter for his hands.

"Go forward, thou!" the Frenchman ordered as he gave his captive a shove. "By blue, the one who tries to drive a knife in Jules de Grandin's ribs must get up before sunrise!"

"Well, as I live and breathe, if it's not Ajeit Swaini!" exclaimed Ram Chitra Das as he inspected our prisoner. "Salaam, most reverend *Guru*. We must apologize for your reception, but as this gentleman has said, it is not thought good taste to try to stab a person in America." He gave a quick look at the knife de Grandin had dropped on the surgery table, and, "He didn't scratch you with this thing, did he?" he asked anxiously.

"Scratch me—me, Jules de Grandin?" snapped back the small Frenchman. "*Mor-dieu*, if you and I were not such friends I should be made to be insulted! Have I not said that he who would stab me—"

"Yes, yes; of course. Quite so. I'm glad he didn't nick you, though. I've seen these toad-prickers in action up Darjeeling way. Look." Taking up the short, curve-bladed dagger he grasped its handle in a quick grip, and from the tip of the steel shot a needle-fine jet of almost colorless liquid which hardened into a jellylike substance almost as soon as it struck the porcelain top of the examination table. "Ingenious little tool, eh, what?" he asked. "That's krait venom, my friend, if anyone should happen to ask you. One touch of it and you're a dead pigeon."

"Name of a small blue man, now I am angry!" exclaimed Jules de Grandin. "He has no sportsmanship, that one."

"I'll say he hasn't, agreed Ram Chitra Das. "The famous American formula of never giving a sucker an even break was developed by gentlemen of his profession several generations before Gutama Buddha came to spread the Light in Asia."

Abruptly he dropped his bantering manner. "The question is, what's to be done with him?"

"Why not let me run him in, sor?" volunteered Costello. "We can hold him on a charge of assault wid a dangerous weapon, an' suspicion o' murder—"

"No go," Ram Chitra Das shook his head. "It's true he tried to stab Dr. de Grandin, but it's also true Dr. de Grandin attacked him. As for the murder charge, no judge in the country would listen to it. The coroner's physician can't assign a cause of death. How'd we ever manage to connect him with those killin's in Thornapple Street?"

"Then ye're sure they wuz killin's, not natural deaths?" Costello responded.

"Sure?" The Indian grinned at him, then turned to the prisoner. "You polished off The Snapper and his girl friend in great shape, didn't you, Swami?"

The old man smiled at him almost benignly. "The power of the eye, Nana Sahib—"

"No names!" cut in the other sharply. "I'm just Ram Chitra Das, if you please."

"So be it," acquiesced the old man. "I cast the power of the eye on them and they died."

"H'm."

"*Que diable?*" demanded de Grandin. "Is it that he claims to have the Evil Eye?"

"Something like that," answered the Indian. Then, to me: "Have you some safe place we can stow him temporarily, Dr. Trowbridge?"

I thought a moment, then, "The garage?" I hazarded. "The car's out front, and we could shut him up there for a while."

"How about the windows?"

"There's only one, and I had bars put on that during the tire shortage when burglaries became so numerous."

"Good enough. Would you mind staying with Nairini—just in case—while we put this bird in his cage? Be with you in a moment."

"BUT that can't be, sor," I heard Costello remonstrate as they returned from securing the prisoner in the garage. "It's agin the order o' nature!"

"*Non, mon Lieutenant*, it are entirely possible, I do assure you," Jules de Grandin answered. "Ask good Friend Trowbridge if you doubt us."

"Could it be, sor?" dutifully complied Costello. "They're afther tellin' me a man can hypnotize hisself to death."

"What?" I demanded incredulously. "Hypnotize—"

"Perfectly, my old one," broke in de Grandin. "It are entirely possible. Ram Chitra Das affirms it, and while I think it unlikely, I think it could be so."

I turned from one of them to the other in confusion. "What in heaven's name is all this about?"

"Just this, sir," answered Ram Chitra Das, "this Swami Ajeit Singh is one of Raja Karowlee's chief wonder-workers. He's a skilled fakir, an adept at every brand o' magic known in India, and, of course, an expert hypnotist. He probably never heard of Baird or Mesmer, and never studied even elementary psychology, but when it comes to practical ability as a hypnotist I doubt if any of your best professionals could hold a candle to him.

"I take it you've seen experiments in hypnotism performed in the psychological laboratory or on the stage?"

I nodded, wondering what was coming next.

"Very well, sir. You've seen the operator make the subject become rigid, so that if his head is placed on one chair and his feet on another weights can be piled on his stomach to a degree he could not possibly support in consciousness?"

"Yes, I've seen that."

"Have you seen an operator make the blood go from one arm and run into the other till the skin threatens to burst?"

"Yes."

"And blood come through the skin as if a wound had been inflicted?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"And have not you seen the operator tell the subject to decrease his pulse-beat?" interjected Jules de Grandin. "Have not you seen pulsation at the hypnotist's command

sink from eighty beats a minute to sixty, fifty, or even forty?"

"Ye-es," I agreed doubtfully. "I seem to recall such a demonstration in Baltimore some years ago, but—"

"No buts, if you will be so kind. I ask you as a man of science, Friend Trowbridge, if it is possible to tell the human heart—which as we know is an involuntary muscle and takes no orders from the conscious mind—to beat more slowly, is it not possible to tell it to cease beating altogether?"

"Well, I—"

"Do not evade the logic of the question, if you please, my friend. You have admitted seeing pulsation slowed down, even though the action of the heart is altogether involuntary. If it can be slowed down by hypnotic suggestion, why can not it be stopped entirely?"

I saw the logical conclusion of his premises, but was not ready to capitulate. "How could the operator, by which I suppose you mean Ajeit Swami, gain control of his subjects?" I demanded. "We all agree that acquiescence is the prime factor in successful hypnotism. The subject must be willing—"

"*Non, dix mille fois, non!*" he disagreed. "Consent is not at all necessary. All that is required is a lack of opposition. That is why we use the lights, the mirrors, the up-raised forefinger—anything to fix the subject's attention and divert him from a state of rebellion, from thinking 'I will not be hypnotized.'"

"Consider, if you please: This Ajeit Singh Swami is a skilled hypnotist, as are all of his kind. He has a reputation as a wonder-worker throughout Northern India. Is it not so? Of course. Very well, then. The more his reputation grows the greater is his power. People fear him. They believe that he can do much more than he can in reality. They feel—by blue, they know—that it is useless to resist what they call his magic and we call his hypnotic power.

"*Très bon.* Where are we now? We are in the house in Thornapple Street occupied by Monsieur Snapper and his little pretty lady friend of unknown name. We see them sitting in that big, so lovely hall, in pleasant conversation. Perhaps they smoke the *hookah* together, it had more than one mouth-piece. Perhaps they drink the after

dinner coffee. Perhaps they just make the love. She seemed to me the sort of person to whom it would not be difficult to whisper sweet nothings. *Ha*, they have fled across the ocean to America; they have buried themselves in a semi-slum. They fancy themselves immune from pursuit. They feel secure. Yes. And then, all suddenly, comes the Swami Ajeit Singh, the emissary of Karowlee Sahib, and tells them he is there to work his master's vengeance on them. Are they startled? *Parbleu*, they are what you call petrified. They know him, they fear him; they are powerless to resist him as the poor silly rabbit that sees the serpent slithering toward him. *Morbleu*, their chicken—*non*, their goose—is cooked! Yes, certainly; of course.

"THE woman falls into a trance at once when Swami Ajeit bids her sleep. He bids her heart beat more slowly, miss a beat, cease beating altogether. Yes. So it is. Monsieur Snapper, being English and a little stronger in the will, does not succumb so quickly. He resists a so little moment, hears the Swami bid the woman die, sees her expire, and he feels the uselessness of struggling; yet he does struggle—a little. When the Swami puts the brand of Thé Afghan on his forehead it rouses him, he still has the vitality to rise and try to flee.

"But he runs poorly, weakly. We saw him run across the sidewalk, and thought that he was drunk because he staggered so. *Hélas*, it was not so. He ran to sure and certain death, that one. With each step that he ran his mind repeated, 'Die—die—die!' When he had reached the curb he was no better than a running corpse. We saw him fall into the street. We did not know it, but we saw him die. The command to his heart to stop had followed him from the house to the street, it was impossible for him to outrun it as it would be for a horse to outrun his tail. Yes, it are indubitably so. It are not strange the good Parnell could find no cause of death. Those so unfortunate ones did not die; they merely ceased to live."

"I'm not convinced," I told him, "but even if we grant your argument, what are you going to do about it? You don't think

any jury would convict him on such testimony, do you?"

"I'm afraid he's got us in a forked stick," Ram Chitra Das admitted. "He couldn't work his hypnotism on Nairini or me, of course. We're too well versed in such things; but there are other little tricks he might try on us. I'd feel a lot more comfortable if he were out of the way. By Minakshi—"

The little Frenchman's short laugh broke through his sentence. "*Cordieu*, my friend, you have supplied the answer, I damn think!"

"What d'ye mean—"

"Your mention of Minakshi, the Fish-Eyed Goddess. Once when I was at Pondicherry I made the pilgrimage to Madura to witness the annual nuptials of Siva and Minakshi of the amethyst and emerald eyes —'The Fish-Eyed One' as she is known throughout India. I saw her image carried in a splendid bridal car, observed the great jeweled eyes in her serene face and said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, there is danger in those eyes of hers. A man might gaze too long at them and lose himself completely; become hypnotized. Does not the legend say even great Siva is enmeshed when he looks into them? There may be factual foundation for that legend, Jules de Grandin.' And so I looked away. I am a brave man, me, but I take no unnecessary chances. No."

Ram Chitra Das raised puzzled brows, but Costello was more forthright. "Is it completely daft ye've gone, sor?" he demanded.

"Daft—crazy?" answered Jules de Grandin with one of his quick elfin grins. "But yes, completely crazy, *mon Lieutenant*—crazy like the fox. Await me here, if you will be so kind." He hurried from the room and Costello turned to us with a Lord-save-my-sanity expression.

"What're ye goin' to do wid a leprechaun like that?" he asked helplessly. "Sometimes I think he's nutty as a fruitcake, then zowie! up he comes wid a idee that knocks ye for a loop."

THE patter of de Grandin's feet came from the hall and he bounced into the room with upraised hands. "Observe them, if you please, *mes enfants!*" he commanded.

"Are they not superb?" Between the thumb and finger of each hand he held a disc of colored glass, its periphery marked by a zone of greenish-brown, its center by a dot of black. I recognized them as the glass eyes from a white bear rug that I had purchased in a thoughtless moment years before and relegated to the attic long since.

"What—" I began, but he cut me off with such a smug grin that I could have kicked him.

"*Regardez-moi*," he ordered. From his jacket pocket he produced a lead tube which I recognized as the container of some luminous paint with which I'd had the house number marked some time before in order that late-calling patients could see it more easily. Squeezing a bit of the paint paste on the tip of a match he proceeded to overlay the cornea of the glass eyes with it, working with that neat, swift precision which distinguished everything he did.

"Turn out the lights, if you please," he directed, and as I complied we were plunged in Stygian darkness, for the lamps had been extinguished in the dining room and no moonlight filtered through the windows. "Observe me, closely, if you please," his command came through the dark, and as we watched twin spots of luminance began to glow, at first faintly, then with sharper definition, finally with a greenish-toned infernal blaze that seemed to give off wisps of smoke as if its fire fed on itself and needed no other fuel.

"Howly Moses!" exclaimed Costello. "Who'd 'a' thought it?"

The lights blazed on again and I let my breath out with a jerk, nor was it till then that I realized I'd been holding it. "You see?" he asked. "Are they not truly fascinating?"

"Call it that if ye wish, sor," answered Costello. "I got another name for it."

"Precisely, *mon Lieutenant*. So will he."

"He, sor? Who?"

"That wicked old man now incarcerated in Friend Trowbridge's garage. The one who tried to stab me with a poisoned dagger. Tonight we perform a most interesting experiment. We shall see how wickedness is turned against itself, how the power of suggestion may be made to rebound on him who exercises it for evil. Yes.

"Will you be kind enough to bring him from the garage?" he asked Costello and Ram Chitra Das.

"And now, my old and very wicked one," he told the fakir when they had brought him into the drawing room, "you killed Monsieur the Snapper and his little pretty lady companion by the power of the eye. Is it not so?"

"It is so," replied the old man with a smile of such supreme self-satisfaction that it was little less than a smirk. "Moreover, I am safe from any harm your laws can do me. No judge sahib in your country would believe I have the power—"

"*Précisément, mon vieux et mangé des vers*, but we believe—and so do you. Anon we put you in a sure, safe place, and presently there comes another who will share the darkness with you. Think on her and be afraid. Remember into whose eyes even great Siva may not look without loss of his will. Bid the blood run slow and slower in your veins, the heart beat weak and weaker in your breast until it beats no more."

He turned abruptly on his heel and left the room, but in a moment he returned and whispered to Costello and Ram Chitra Das, "Take him all quickly into the garage, my friends, and bind him so his face is toward the window. I have fixed the eyes against the wall beneath the sill."

"S'pose he won't look at 'em, sor?" Costello asked when he and the Indian returned from securing the prisoner. "He might shut his eyes or turn his head away—"

"We need not make ourselves uneasy on that score," de Grandin replied. "Human nature being what it is, a man can no more help turning his eyes toward a point of light in a dark room than he can keep from snapping his lids shut when someone pokes a finger at his face. Also, you recall how you were fascinated by the glow of those eyes in the dark. You knew what they were, yet you felt fear; he has no warning. He was told only, 'Presently another comes.' When he has been in the dark a few moments the eyes will begin glowing, it will be as if one came from outside—whether from outside the garage or from another world he will not know."

"But do you seriously think a man can command himself to stop living?" I asked.

"**P**ERFECTLY," de Grandin cut in. "This Ajeit Swami may be a wise man, he may think he understands a great variety of things, but also he is very superstitious. He believes in magic. His is no coldly scientific mind. I planted the seed in his brain before they took him out. Fear—fear of the unknown, which is the greatest fear of all—will do the rest. We know the *ju-ju* of the African witch-doctor is powerless against the European because he does not believe in it, but even the educated native has active or latent superstitious dread of witchcraft, and in consequence, when he is told a spell has been put on him, he weakens, wastes away and dies, purely through the power of suggestion and the working of ingrained belief and fear. Yes, it is so."

Somewhat later he glanced at his watch and put down his glass. "An hour. It is time, I think, my friends. Come, let us go all quietly to the garage and observe what we shall observe."

Shortly after noon next day we ran into Dr. Parnell. "Hey, you fellows been up to some more monkey-business?" he demanded.

"Business of the monkey?" Jules de Grandin's face was blank as a brick wall. "How do you mean, *cher collègue*?"

Parnell eyed us suspiciously. "Well, I wouldn't put it past you two. The police found a dead man in the street not far from Trowbridge's this morning about three o'clock, and—"

"Yes, and—" de Grandin prompted as Parnell came to a pause.

"And I'd say he died of heart failure, except for one thing."

"And what is that one so small thing, if you please?"

"There's nothing wrong with his heart. It's sound as a dollar."

"*Tenez*," de Grandin tweaked the ends of his mustache, "perhaps he autohypnotized himself to death, *cher collègue*. Will not you join us in a drink? You look as if you could use one, as *le bon Dieu* knows I can and shall."