

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 34

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Published monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter September 24, 1938, at the post office at New York, N. Y. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00 English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

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"Stephanola!" he murmured, and his lips formed a kiss.

Mansions in the Sky

By SEABURY QUINN

A tale of Jules de Grandin, the mercurial and fascinating little French scientist, occult detective, ghost-breaker and expert in things supernatural

"**V**RAIMENT," Jules de Grandin looked up from his reading, parentheses of concentration between his brows. "It is precisely as he says, that Monsieur Kipling."

"Eh?" I answered, stifling an incipient yawn. It was raining, steadily and coldly, and had been since midafternoon. An icy wind souged through the bare gray trees, and flocks of sparrows huddled shivering

in the shelter of the dripping eaves. The study fire was dying, and I was almost waterlogged with sleepiness. "What's true?" I murmured with scant interest.

"Why, this epigram he makes, my friend:

"The sins ye do by two and two
Must be paid for one by one."

"I dare say," I returned, "but if you don't mind, I think that I'll turn in."

The phone bell rang a short, sharp stuttering warning, first querulously, then insistently, finally with a frantic, drilling clamor. I half decided to ignore it; the night was foul, and I was dog-tired after a long, trying day. But habit overcame my inclination. "Hullo?" I challenged gruffly as I took the instrument from its cradle.

"Doctor Trowbridge, will you come right away, please? It is my niece. She has hurt herself; perhaps she may be dead already——"

"Hold on," I cut in, "who is this?"

"Kimon Sainpolis, Doctor. It is my niece Stephanola. She is badly hurt."

"What's the nature of the injury," I began, but the sharp click of the phone thrust back into its hooks broke my query off half uttered, and I turned toward the surgery for my first-aid kit with a sigh of exasperation.

De Grandin joined me at the front door, his trench coat belted and his felt hat already turned down in anticipation of the outside rain.

"Where to, *mon vieux*?" he asked. "May not I go, also? It is dull work, staying by oneself when others are about their business."

"Of course, glad to have you," I responded as I climbed into my car and shot the starter. "Kimon Sainpolis, the Greek importer, just called. It seems his niece has met some sort of accident—pretty serious, too, I gathered, for he said she might be dead."

We turned into the boulevard and headed toward the heights where Sainpolis, grown rich with vending wine in Prohibition days, and richer still since his activities were legalized, had built his big stone mansion.

THE wind was bitter as a witch's curse as we began to mount the hill, and by the time we reached our destination there was a glaze of ice across my windshield reminiscent of the frosting on old-fashioned barroom mirrors. It was almost midnight, but every window in the house was bright as we drew up at the curb and hastened up the path of marble tiles that led to the wide porch.

Inside there was the sound of voices speaking in the stage-whisper of ill-suppressed excitement as the butler met us at the door and ushered us across the hall. Somewhere upstairs a woman laughed and wept by turns in the shrill timbre of hysteria.

"Doctor Trowbridge, this is kind of you, indeed," Sainpolis exclaimed as he rushed down the wide stairs to greet us. "I am almost frantic—Doctor de Grandin!" he acknowledged my introduction with a deep bow, "I am honored that you, the great occultist, have consented to come out with Doctor Trowbridge! My niece——"

"Where is she?" I broke in sharply. Our patient might be dying while we stood there talking.

"Upstairs, sir. She is—oh, but it is terrible! How shall I ever face my brother, her poor father? He sent her to me from the old country when she was only three years old. Now——" He wrung his slender white hands in an agony of despair. "You will help me keep it secret, Doctor?"

"Where is she?" I repeated. "And what's wrong with her?"

"Ah, yes, of course, Doctor. You must know all—all—if you are to help me. Come."

Up the thickly carpeted steps we followed him, down a hallway wide enough to have served a hotel, till we paused before a partly-opened door.

"In there!" he whispered as he stood aside and waved dramatically. "You will find her in there, gentlemen."

De Grandin was before me by the fraction of a step, and as he crossed the threshold he came to a sharp halt, letting his breath out in a low "Ha?"

Before an ormolu-framed cheval glass, like a *couturière's* dummy overturned, a girl lay on the slate-gray carpet. The sheer rose chiffon of her evening dress was crumpled round her like the petals of a wilting flower, pale yellow hair like wind-blown floss swirled round her face, a silver brocade evening sandal had slipped off one silk-sheathed foot and lay gaping emptily upon its side.

All this I saw at first glance. My second look showed what de Grandin had seen at first.

Below the golden head, where it rested on the velvet carpet, was a sickening dark-red stain, slowly spreading as the gilt clock on the dressing-table ticked the seconds away nervously.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Suicide!"

"Quite yes," de Grandin nodded. "It was not us, but the funeral director and the coroner Monsieur Sainpolis should have called."

"But we musn't have the coroner!" our host wailed from the doorway. "I appeal to you as doctors to prevent a scandal. I have called you to attend my niece. If she is dead, you can certify——"

"Be quiet, if you please," de Grandin ordered sharply. "Not one word from you! Answer me: When did this happen?"

"Not fifteen minutes ago," Sainpolis answered. "We had been to the theatre, Madame Sainpolis, my niece and I. Stephano had been nervous and upset all after-

noon; during the final intermission she complained of feeling faint and begged us to allow her to come home. We let her go, but before she had been gone five minutes we decided to follow her. Our car drove up just as she dismissed her taxi, and we entered the house not two minutes behind her. We heard her slam her door; before we could get halfway up the stairs we heard a shot. See"—he pointed to the tiny pistol lying by her outstretched hand—"it was with that she did it."

De Grandin eyed him levelly. "You can assign no reason for this so unfortunate occurrence?"

Sainpolis raised his shoulders in a shrug of eloquent negation. "You know as much as I do, sir. My niece was only twenty-two and was affianced to an estimable young man. As far as I know they had no quarrel."

"U'm?" de Grandin tweaked his small mustache. "She had shown no signs of melancholy—what of this afternoon?"

Sainpolis looked thoughtful. "I could not call it melancholy," he replied at length, "but she has certainly been nervous at times. Six months or so ago she lost a pair of gloves. They were practically new, and quite expensive, but it seemed to me she brooded over their loss far more than she should. It was certainly not natural."

Abruptly he returned to his original theme: "You will help me, gentlemen? You can say it was not suicide—I will say she hurt herself while playing with the toy pistol, and that I summoned you in all haste; you can bear me out in your statements. The disgrace of a suicide in the family will practically ruin me — my brother will declare a feud on me—she will be denied the last rites of the church——"

De Grandin motioned him to silence. "If you are troubled only on those scores, *Monsieur*, we can certainly assist you," he answered. "*Mademoiselle* your niece was

rendered melancholy by the loss of her so pretty gloves; she brooded on their loss; *alors*, she shot herself. *Voilà*. Sane people do not do such things, and the church will not refuse its comfort to a person who has killed herself while mad. We can give you our opinion that she must have been of unsound mind when she destroyed herself. Do not make yourself uneasy on that account, *Monsieur*."

"But the police," Sainpolis almost wailed. "They will spread the news broadcast——"

"Excuse me, sir," the butler paused discreetly at the entrance, eyes carefully averted from what lay on the floor, "there's a gentleman from the police here asking for Miss Stephanola. I've told him she is indisposed——"

I had not thought Sainpolis' face could have been paler than it was already, but at the serving-man's announcement the blood seemed visibly to drain out of his countenance, leaving it as livid as the features of a long-dead corpse. "The—police?" he choked. "Tell them to go away, tell them anything. They must not know; we cannot see them now——"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*, there you do make the great mistake," de Grandin interrupted. "A crime has been committed here, the crime of suicide. The police must be notified. Await me, and touch nothing in this room!" Tiptoeing down the corridor he leaned across the marble balustrade and looked down to the lower hall.

Below us stood a big red-headed man, looking interestedly, but not at all with awe, at the articles of almost priceless vertu with which Sainpolis had adorned his house. As he turned we saw his face, smooth-shaven, florid, curiously calm.

"*Gloire!*" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "We are in luck, it is the good Costello. *Holà, mon vieux!*"

The big detective started at the little Frenchman's hail, and, "Glory be, Doctor

de Grandin, sor, who'd 'a' thought to find you here?" he answered with an eye-crinkling smile. "It's on th' level, then, about th' lady's bein' laid up?"

"*Hélas, mon brave*, it is more serious than that," de Grandin replied. "We were called in haste to tend her, but a greater one than we arrived before us."

"Arra, sor, ye mane she's dead?"

"Completely."

"What wuz it, sor?"

"It seems to have been suicide by gunshot."

The utterly expressionless expression which policemen, undertakers and lawyers can assume at will spread across Costello's face.

"Does it, now, indade?" he answered. "That's that, then. We'd best be lookin' round a bit before th' coroner's men mess everything up wid their chicken-tracks."

"You will leave us, if you please, *Monsieur*," de Grandin ordered Sainpolis as we re-entered the death chamber. "There are certain observations to be made which might distress you."

As the worried little man crept out he bent above the body. The pistol lying on the floor was little larger than a toy, and as nearly as I could determine was of .22 caliber. When de Grandin held it to me after a quick inspection I followed his example and put the muzzle to my nose. Faint, but quite perceptible, the sulfurous reek of burnt gunpowder came to me.

That the weapon had been held against the girl's head there was no doubt, for the wound disfiguring the scalp had been torn into a cross-shaped scar by escaping gases plowing up the tissue, and the skin each side of the aperture was tattooed in converging lines like wheel-spokes by dark powder-stains. An area of slightly burned flesh ringed the hole, and a disk of powder-blackening half an inch or so in diameter marred the skin. From the irregularity of

the wound it was evident that the bullet had crashed through the temporal bone at the junction of the coronal and squamous sutures, and had been directed upward to the brain.

"*Bien*," de Grandin nodded. "All indicia of self-destruction are apparent. Now, if the fingerprints upon the pistol are the poor young person's——"

"Yis, sor," Costello broke in with what seemed to me unnecessary emphasis, "I'm particu'ly anxious to git a sample o' her fingerprints."

"*Mais, c'est très simple*," answered de Grandin as he lit a wax match, let its oily flame discolor the smooth surface of a hand mirror and, one after another, proceeded to rub lampblack on the dead girl's well-manicured finger-tips, then transfer impressions to a sheet of paper from a memorandum pad which lay upon the rosewood writing-desk.

"You are satisfied it was a suicide, *mon sergent*?" he asked as he completed his task.

"It seems so, sor," Costello answered, "but——"

"Yes—but?" de Grandin prompted.

"Oh, nothin', sor. I wuz just wonderin' how she got hep."

"She which?" the Frenchman asked.

"This 'hep', what is he, if you please?" but before the sergeant could reply, "*Ohé, la pauvre!*"

"What's that, sor?"

"Observe." He motioned toward the far side of the room where a *prie-dieu* stood against the wall, a shelf containing two extinguished candles, a covered crucifix and a rosary fastened to the wall above it. "*Cette pauvre*," he repeated. "See, she veiled the cross before she shot herself all dead!" Stepping across the room he bowed formally to the cross and lifted off the tulle scarf which obscured it. "*Parbleu*, this is a most unusual-looking prayer book," he added as he bent and picked a slender vol-

ume bound in gold-stamped vellum from the velvet cushions of the prayer-bench.

"Regard him, if you please," he ordered, holding out the little book for our inspection.

We saw its covers were secured by a gold clasp held by a tiny padlock.

"Hey, sor, ye can't do that widout a search warrant!" Costello warned sharply.

"No? You amaze me, my friend." From his hip, where he wore it lashed to his back brace-straps—"pour les circonstances imprévues"—de Grandin drew his double-edged *apache* knife and calmly forced the book's lock. It gave way with a snap, revealing not a volume of devotions, but a blank book whose pages were thickly covered with a fine, irregular script.

"French!" exclaimed Costello in disgust as he glanced at the small writing. "A lotta good that'll do me."

"It may," de Grandin replied with a grin. "There have been times when I believed I understood that language. Perhaps I can translate it for you." He thrust the volume in his pocket, and:

"Ye can't do that, sor," protested the detective. "It's agin th' law."

"So in an unhappier day was bootlegging but I have the recollection no one ever stopped to think about it," answered the small Frenchman. "Luckily I am under no compulsion to observe the niceties of police etiquette, and undoubtedly this small book will prove of help to us. Permit me to suggest you look out of the window for a moment, my friend. The view tonight is very fine."

Astonishingly, as the big detective turned his back upon him, he dropped upon his knees beside the crumpled little body, joined his hands and bowed his head in silent prayer a moment.

"*Eh bien*," he rose and brushed his trouser knees, "let us be upon our way, my friends. It seems we have accomplished all we can here. We are agreed it was a

suicide? *Très bon.* Let us notify the coroner to that effect."

"AND now, my old one, tell me what this 'hep' is," he demanded of Costello as we gathered round the study fire. "You have the idea how the poor young *demoiselle* contracted it?"

Costello grinned. "Sure, sor, it ain't a thing, it's sumpin that ye feel. Like"—his eyes roved round the room in search of inspiration—"well, sor, ye're hep when ye're jerry—like as if a felly tried to snatch yer overcoat in a restaurant, an' ye realized what it wuz that he wuz up to as he started to do it."

The frown of fierce fixed concentration faded from de Grandin's face. "One comprehends entirely, *mon vieux*. When one is hep he has become wise, *n' est-ce-pas?*"

"Sure, now, sor, ye wouldn't 'a' been kiddin' me?" Costello asked reproachfully.

"By no means, my incomparable one. But what was it that the so unfortunate young woman had become hep to?"

Once more Costello looked serious. "I ain't sayin' she destroyed herself on this account, but it's worth considerin'," he replied, reaching in his pocket and drawing forth a slip of folded paper. "This come by special delivery to Headquarters about ten o'clock, an' I'd come out to ask th' pore young gur-rl about it when I finds she's up an' shot herself."

The paper was a noncommittal sheet of cheap white bond such as can be had at any ten cent store, and the message which it bore was composed of words and letters cut from a newspaper, capitals and lower-case characters oddly assorted:

"if you waNt to DIshcover who made the burglaries in THIS city YOu should looK at stePhanola SainpOlis fingERprintS"

That was all.

Costello cleared his throat. "We ain't exactly advertisin' it, sor, but these bur-

glaries that's been committed here th' past six months has been done mighty slick, an' we haven't got to first base wid 'em. It a'most seems as if th' felly that's pulled 'em has gone out of his way to leave his fingerprints around. A'most like he signs his jobs, ye might say. Three-four times we've made a pinch, an' it looked as if we had dead wood on 'em, but when we come to matchin' up th' fingerprints th' whole case melted."

"You could not identify the culprits' prints left at the scene of crime?"

"No, sor, that we couldn't. There ain't no record of 'em here or in th' criminal or non-criminal files in New York an' Washin'ton."

"You have a copy of the miscreant's prints with you?"

"Right here, sor." The sergeant drew a second slip of paper from his wallet and laid it on the table.

Glass in hand, he and de Grandin compared the copy with the set of prints made of the dead girl's digits. Even I, who am no expert, could read the damning likeness as I compared them through the lens. The wanted criminal's fingerprints and those of Stephanola Sainpolis were identical.

"Bates hell, sors, don't it?" asked Costello. "Here's a young gur-rl, rich and well brought up an' wid no nade to want fer annything longer than it takes to ask fer it; yet off she goes an' takes to burglary. One o' them fool thrill-hunters, she wuz, I'd say, an' just to make th' game more dang'rous she went an' left her fingerprints all over every job she pulled."

He returned the papers to his pocket, and: "Wonder who it wuz that tipped us off, an' why?" he added thoughtfully. "Belike she had a partner in th' wur-rk, some uneddycated crook who got mad at her when she wouldn't come across wid more swag, an' double-crossed her for revenge."

"I think you're wrong there, Sergeant,"

I told him. Ever since I'd seen the treacherous message I'd been wrestling with memory, and recollection came to me just as he finished speaking. "When I was a youngster serving my internship at old Bascomb Hospital I used to see notes sent the clinic by our foreign out-patients. Part of my work was translating them into English for the records and I remember how our English sibilants confused them. You'll note the sender of this note says 'dishcover' for 'discover.' Our English 'sh' and 'ch' and the combinations of our sibilants 'c,' 'z' and 's' are things few foreigners except the Scandinavians and Dutch ever seem able to grasp unless they've had more than ordinary training in English orthography. They'll use 'sh' for the combination of 'c' and 's,' or 's' and 'c'—as in 'discover'—eight times out of twelve. I believe whoever pasted up this note was foreign born and quite unused to writing English. He may speak it fairly well, but when it comes to writing it he's virtually illiterate."

"*Parbleu*, my friend, you put the finger squarely on it!" de Grandin exclaimed. "Me, I made those very mistakes which you point out when I was studying English. The girl has slipped from Friend Costello's net by suicide, but he may be able to arrest the one who betrayed her, thus meting out poetical and criminal justice at the same time. Tomorrow I will translate her diary," he added to Costello. "It may be we shall find some clue in it."

HE WAS in the library most of the next day, and when he joined me at dinner there was an oddly sad expression on his face.

"Find anything in the diary?" I asked.

"Much; a great deal," he replied with something like a sigh, "but I must ask your indulgence. Wait until the good Costello joins us, so we need have only one narration of the story."

Police routine delayed Costello until after nine o'clock, and several times I thought de Grandin would explode with impatience. Within two minutes after we had gathered in the study he stood before us like a teacher about to address his class, the dead girl's diary in one hand, a sheaf of notes clutched in the other.

"My friends," he began impressively, "we three owe a humble apology to the dead. All of us condemned her as a criminal who chose suicide as an escape from justice last night. It was not so. She was the victim of a villain blacker than the devil's lowest coal-vault. Attend me. Here is the story which her journal tells:

"Two years ago, when she was only twenty, she was attending school near Morristown. A fashionable school it was, one where the pupils were continually chaperoned, except when they were most in need of supervision. It seems the girls had found a way of getting out unseen at night and going to the near-by city, almost at will. *Eh bien*, I think the managers of that school took more trouble to investigate their pupils' families' bank accounts than they did to look up their background, for assuredly they had some queer fish there. One of them was a girl whom the diary designates as Amy, and it was she whom the poor young Mademoiselle Sainpolis shared rooms with. *Tiens*, she shared other things as well, for anon this Amy took her to a roadhouse near the school, and there they met a man called Niccolo—last name unknown.

"He had a way with women, this one. A handsome dog he must be, and a vain and vicious one.

"This poor one thought that she was seeing life when she met him; even when she learned he was a criminal she was more thrilled than shocked, and when he dared her to take cocaine she was still more fascinated. *Tenez*, the path down to Avernus is a smooth one. Within two months she

had joined him in a criminal foray, acting as his lookout while he burglarized a house.

"In her journal she recounts how she suffered with remorse next day, and vowed to have no more to do with him. Within a week she kept another rendezvous, and this time they held up a dining-car.

"Then fear came to the aid of conscience. The papers told of the blond girl who helped the highwayman, and she was sure she would be recognized if she remained near Morristown. She wrote her uncle, begged to be allowed to come home, and left the school next day.

"Earnestly she strove to make amends for her misdeeds. Every day she went to church, each night she prayed for hours for forgiveness. It seemed her prayers were answered, for in a short time she met a young man named Strapoli, and their love was almost instantaneous. They were affianced, preparations for their wedding were in progress, then"—he paused and waved his hand as if announcing an arrival—"Niccolo re-entered. She, as she thought, was done with him, but he had not by any means concluded his relationship with her. Oh, no.

"She was beautiful, she was wealthy, she was much to be desired. He meant to have her. *Ha*, but he was subtle, that one!

"He called her on the telephone, and she, poor innocent, went in mortal fear to the appointed place. She offered him whatever he desired if only he would leave her, and he reproached her for her lack of faith, told her he knew they lived in different worlds, and all he wanted was to say good-bye and beg some little keepsake from her. What do you think he asked for a souvenir, *bein'?*"

Pausing, he looked expectantly from me to Costello; then, as we made no answer: "Her gloves, by damn, he asked her gloves of her! You comprehend?"

"I recall Sainpolis said she'd lost a pair of gloves six months or so ago, but I don't

see the connection," I answered. "She knew where they were——"

"*Précisément*. That is exactly why she was driven first to desperation, then to madness, finally to self-destruction. The gloves were glacé kid, and almost new, she says so in her diary. She gave them to him gladly, and came home with a great fear gone from her; but in a few days all her dreams of happiness were dissolved. Why did he ask her gloves? I ask you."

Vaguely recollection knocked upon the door of my memory. "Didn't Portia and Nerissa beg Bassanio's and Gratiano's gloves after the trial in *The Merchant of Venice* in order to plague them later on?" I asked.

"*Tu parles, mon vieux*. But what they did in sport this one did in deadly earnest. From the gloves he had matrices of her fingerprints made, and these he had cemented to the fingertips of rubber gloves——"

"Be gorry, sor, I git it!" Costello almost roared. "That's why th' burglar wuz so careless wid his fingerprints—that's why we couldn't match 'em up, no matter how we tried——"

"*Exactement*. And this Niccolo, this reptile, this snake in human guise, wrote to his victim, telling her each time he projected a burglary and informing her that her fingerprints would be found at the scene of crime.

"Imagine yourselves that! She scanned the papers every day to learn if any clue had been discovered. Nothing; nowhere; never! All the papers told her that the burglar left his fingerprints, but his identity——"

"Well, for goodness' sake, why didn't she denounce him?" I interjected. "She could have told the police that her fingerprints were forged——"

He threw me a God-give-me-patience look. "Quite yes, but if he were apprehended her adventures into crime would

have come to light, also. Remember that, my friend. Only in his safety lay her own. Also, she was much in love with Monsieur Strapoli, and stood in mortal fear of scandal. She dared not speak, yet if she remained quiet she was still in danger. *Misère de Dieu*, how she must have suffered!

"For six months this went on, six months she lived and moved beneath the shadow of this Damocletian sword; for half a year she roasted in a hell of fear, grilled on the iron of her conscience. Then came the last blow to her shattered morale.

"Not content with having made a criminal of her, not satisfied with having introduced her to the habit of cocaine, this species of a camel must make a final demand. She must, he told her, dismiss the young Strapoli and accept him as her fiancé. He would have her beauty and her wealth at once and live in idleness upon the fortune which she brought him.

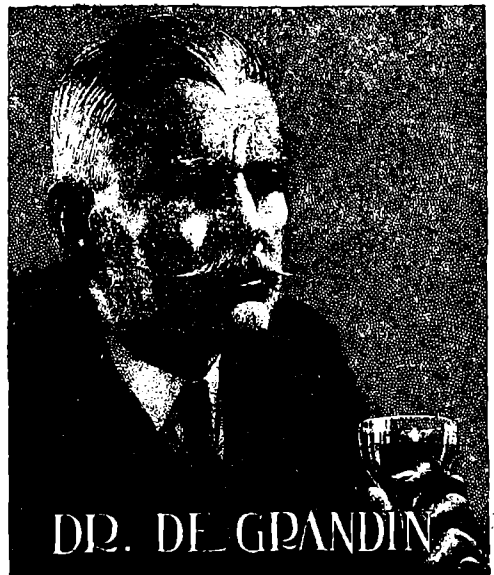
"She might have given him the money, but herself she denied him, and he took revenge. Only yesterday he notified her that unless she married him forthwith he would denounce her to the police.

"Last night she and her aunt and uncle went to the theatre, to a play called *Evil Communications*. It is a melodrama dealing with a blackmail plot. In it the heroine who has forsaken her criminal associates and married happily is about to be denounced by one with whom she has been involved in crime. She sees her happiness about to be destroyed, her children branded with her hidden infamy. She kills herself. The suggestion took hold on Mademoiselle Sainpolis. She left the theatre, left her aunt and uncle, hurried home and—*tiens*, the rest we know. We came, the good Costello came; but she had gone."

"Bedad," commented Costello, "I'd like to have 'bout fifteen minutes private conversation wid this Niccolo. Me an' a two-foot length o' rubber hose."

SHE was very lovely in her casket. The scars of autopsy had been obliterated by the skill of the embalmers, a gown of white lace—fashioned for her wedding day—enfolded her slim form, a white lace mantilla draped her shining hair; in the slender, oleander-white hands crossed piously upon her virgin bosom a rosary was twined. Our testimony had convinced the priest, and her funeral was held in church with the lovely, long-drawn ceremony of high mass as celebrated by the Greek communion, a choir of forty voices singing *a cappella* and incense rising in an almost choking cloud of sweetness. Six young girls robed in white and veiled like brides were pallbearers; floral offerings filled two open touring-cars which headed the procession from St. Helena's to the tiny Greek Orthodox cemetery.

"MISTER STRAPOLI, if ye please, sors," announced Nora McGinnis shortly after dinner the evening following the funeral. "He says as how he ain't a patient," she added rather grimly, for the rule against admitting patients after office



hours was of her own devising, and one which she imposed on both my clientele and me with rigorous inflexibility.

The young man who came in a moment later was typical of the city's café life. His dinner suit was of exaggerated cut, trousers fitted snugly at the waist and hips but bellying into flowing bottoms at the foot; a purple grosgrain cummerbund was bound so tightly round his waist as to suggest a corset, his double-breasted jacket sloped sharply from the shoulders to the waist, then flared above the hips. Black hair, rather long, was brushed straight back without a part and trained down on his cheeks in long sideburns. The bandoline with which it was dressed gave it a finish flat and shiny as a skullcap of black patent leather. He was the perfect "sheik" type, reminiscent of the days when Valentino and Novarro were the *beaux idéals* of motion picture lovers. He was lithe and graceful as a panther in his movements, but somehow the impression which he gave was of a panther which has been hunted till the fear of hounds and guns is in its sleek pelt like a barb.

"Doctor de Grandin?" he asked tentatively in a light but musical voice.

"I am he," de Grandin answered, eyeing him with none too much approval. "What is it that you wish?"

"I am Anthony Strapoli. Stephanola Sainpolis was—we were to have been married."

The little Frenchman shot me a quick glance as if to warn me, "Silence, my friend, tell him nothing. Let me handle this." To the young man:

"You have our deepest sympathy, *Monsieur*. I, who have had the experience, know how the heart bleeds at the thought that we shall not see those we love again——"

"But I have seen her, sir. I saw her last night. That's why I've come to you. They tell me you know all about such things."

De Grandin's narrow brows rose slightly. "You imply you saw her in the spirit?"

"No, sir. In the flesh. I swear it!"

For an instant the small Frenchman eyed him narrowly; then: "Say on, *Monsieur*, I listen."

The young man dropped into a chair and fixed his large dark eyes upon de Grandin's small blue ones. "It wasn't any ghost or spirit I saw, sir," he announced earnestly. "It was Stephanola, in the very body I have known and loved.

"I lead the band at Casa Ayer, and last night was a special occasion, our first broadcast on a national hook-up, so I couldn't be away, though it almost broke my heart to go through with it. I played at both the dinner and the supper shows, and it was two o'clock before we were through, almost three when I reached home. I was so tired that I could hardly stand, but when I went to bed I couldn't sleep; so, sometime between three and four I got up and went to the bathroom for a dose of veronal. I took a stiff shot and was going back to bed when I happened to look into the living-room. Something white was shining there."

"Shining, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin repeated in a flat voice.

"Yes, sir. At first I thought it was the moonlight on the polished floor, but when I looked again I saw it was the lower part of a white dress, a woman's long white gown. I stepped into the room, and there was Stephanola. Don't look at me like that, sir. I tell you she was there!"

"But certainly," de Grandin soothed. "Conditions were ideal for the vision. The broken heart, the tired, frayed nerves, the sedative——"

"It wasn't any vision, as you call it. It was my girl, there in the living, breathing flesh. She stood there in her bridal gown, the one they used to bury her, with the white lace veil across her golden hair, just as I'd hoped to see her at the altar.

"At first I was afraid. Everyone's afraid of ghosts, even if they're of the ones they've loved; so I began to cross myself, and said, 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son——'

"But before I finished she put her hand out to me. 'Don't say it, Tony,' she begged. 'If you do I'll have to go away, and I don't want to leave you so soon.'

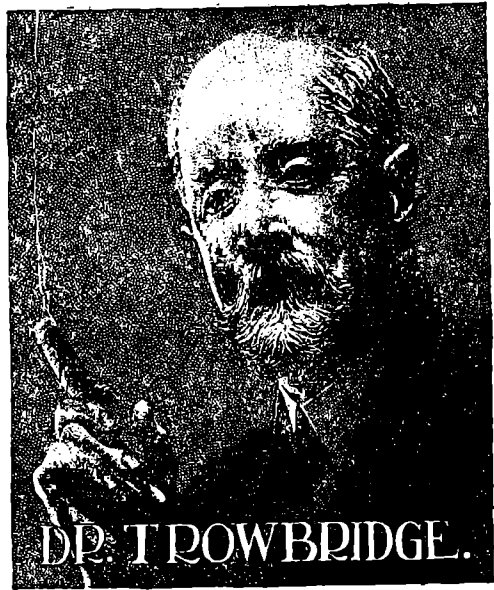
"So there I stopped with my hand in the air, right where I'd touched myself upon the forehead when I began to form the cross, and the invocation half pronounced.

"She stepped toward me, and I saw the motion of her train against the floor, and when the moonlight shone on her she cast a shadow. Ghosts don't make shadows, so I began to lose my dread of her, and when she put her hand on mine it was cool and soft, just as it always was, not cold and ghostly.

" 'Tony dear,' she whispered, and I could feel her breath against my cheek, 'you've got to help me. I need your help most dreadfully, my dear. I'm a sinner, Tony, for I took the life that wasn't mine to take, but there is a way open for me to forgiveness if you'll help me. Won't you help me, please, Tony?'

"She looked so beautiful and sorrowful and appealing that before I realized what I did I'd put my arms around her and was drawing her to me. I could feel her in my arms, feel the pressure of her body against mine. It was no ghost I held, but a sweet living girl, the same one I'd embraced a thousand times before.

"She didn't shrink from me nor hold back when I bent to kiss her, but—I don't quite know how to say it—something something I could feel but couldn't see, seemed to come into the room just then. I can't describe it, really. It wasn't palpable, and yet it was. I couldn't see nor hear nor feel it, but I knew it was there. A thing invisible and soundless had displaced some of the room's air—you know how it



is when you're standing in a phone booth and someone else crowds in, but doesn't touch you? And I had a sense of being watched."

"Watched? Inimically?" de Grandin prompted as the boy stopped with a puzzled frown.

"No, sir. It was as if someone very sad, but not at all hostile, stared at me with a long, calm look." His shapely slim hands made a gesture of futility. "It's just impossible to describe, sir. There was no chill, no fear, no sensation I can name at all, but I suddenly felt she and I were not alone, and kissing her right then would be—well, sort of indecent.

"She stepped back from my arms and put her hands upon my shoulders. 'Listen, Tony dear,' she told me, 'listen carefully; this is terribly important. See.' From her dress she drew a big red rose and put it in my hand. 'This is from me, dear, the only gift that I can give you now. Do you recognize it?'

"I looked, and thought I did. Among the flowers I'd sent for her funeral was a spray of Gloire de Dijon roses, twenty-two of them, one for each year of her life.

'Keep it, Tony,' she added, 'it will help you realize this is not a dream you're having. Kneel, dearest.'

"The veronal had started working by this time, and I was getting dizzy. I don't know whether I knelt purposely or whether I stumbled and fell, but next moment I was on my knees before her and she held her hands against my lips. Somehow that—that presence—which came into the room with her didn't seem forbidding any more, and I kissed her fingers, starting with the little finger of her right hand, counting off ten kisses, and ending with her left little finger. Then, very gently, she drew her hands from mine and laid them on my eyes."

THE look of simulated interest with which de Grandin had regarded Strapoli gave way to an amiable frown of concentration. "And when she did this you saw something?" he demanded almost sharply.

The young man's shoulders came up in a puzzled shrug. "Yes, sir, I did, but it didn't seem to make much sense."

"Suppose you tell us what you saw, and let us be the judges of its sense or senselessness, *Monsieur*."

"At first I saw nothing but indistinguishable blackness, just as you always do when you first close your eyes; then, as the pressure of her fingers on my lids seemed to grow, the black appeared to fade to a dark blue, and soon this was all shot with stars, like the sky on a clear night before the moon has risen. Then slowly, like the fade-in in a motion picture, the image of a house appeared against the sky, not quite shutting out the star-specked heavens, but seemingly imposed on them. It was a big house, something like this, but with more grounds around it, and with evergreens growing by the porch. I saw it plainly, but in miniature, as if it were very far away, or as if I looked at it through the wrong end of an

opera glass. There were no lights in any of the windows, but a sort of soft illumination, like moonlight, made it plain as day to me."

"And what occurred then, if you please?"

"Nothing, sir. I knelt there, looking at that house through my closed eyelids for what seemed several minutes; then I felt the pressure on my lids lighten, and when I opened my eyes I was alone, kneeling in the center of the room with a big red rose in my hand.

"I started to get up, but the veronal had taken hold, and I fell forward in a heap and lay there in a drugged sleep till almost noon today. When I recovered consciousness I'd have thought it all a dream, if it were not for this." From the breast pocket of his dinner coat he drew a tissue paper parcel, handling it as reverently as if it were a sacred relic.

The soft white wrappings came away, revealing a great red Gloire de Dijon rose, slightly wilted and with several petals coming loose, but still retaining its deep color and breathing forth a rich scent from its golden heart.

"This was still clutched in my hand when I waked," he told us. "Something, I don't know what, told me that it was from the spray I'd sent to Stephanola, and as quickly as I could I dressed and hurried to the cemetery. All the floral tributes were in place around her grave or on it, and almost at the mound's head, where her breast would be, they'd put my spray of roses. I counted every blossom on it. There were twenty-one left."

Slowly de Grandin poured three drinks, tendering one to our guest, one to me.

"No, thanks," the young man refused. "Sometimes I drink a little wine. I never touch hard liquor."

"*Mon Dieu*, and you have such an amiable face, too!" de Grandin exclaimed in a shocked voice. Then: "*Eh bien*, whatever

else you were last night, you were not drunk when you beheld this vision, *mon vieux*."

A reproachful look came into the young man's dark eyes. "You don't believe me, sir!" he almost wept.

"*Par la barbe d'un bouc vert*, I do, my friend," the little Frenchman answered earnestly, "but there are some features of your vision which daunt me. Precisely, what is it that you would have me do?"

Strapoli smiled sadly. "I think I've come to you for moral support more than anything else," he replied. "Mr. Sainpolis told me you were an expert in the occult, and I'd like to have your opinion——" He paused, swallowed once or twice; then, hurriedly: "Did I do wrong to let the vision stay, or should I have sent it—her—away with an invocation of the Trinity? I went to Father Anastapoul this morning and told him everything, and he tells me I was wrong. He says the living have no right to contacts with the dead except through prayer, and that demons often take the forms of those we loved in life to lure us to damnation."

"The reverend father has some factual basis for his statement," de Grandin answered with a thoughtful nod. "It is unfortunately all too true that what we thought the spiritual manifestation of one we loved turns out to be a foul succubus, but I should say the evidence in this particular case seems to point elsewhere. Tell me, *Monsieur*, what does your own heart say?"

"Why, that I did no wrong, sir. I believe it was Stephanola, not her ghost or spirit, but herself, and that she came to me for help because she loves me, just as I love her. There's nothing I would not have done for her when she was living; why should I deny her aid, now that she's dead?"

Tears were streaming down his face, and other tears were glinting on de Grandin's lashes as he answered, "Why, indeed,

my friend? Do not attempt to evoke her—as you value your salvation do not seek communication with her through a spiritualistic medium—but if she comes again unbidden, receive her as a lover should. You would not have hurt her living; can you find it in your heart to hurt the helpless dead?"

"WHAT d'ye make of it?" I asked as the door closed on our visitor. "Did he actually see her, or was it just a tired brain in a tired body, plus a dose of veronal, that gave him an hallucination?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "*Le bon Dieu* knows, not I. There is much truth in that old saying that the wish is father to the thought. Who of us has not heard the voice of one whom he has loved and lost—perhaps beheld him? Such experiences come oftenest when we are in that no man's land between full consciousness and sleep. It is entirely possible he wished so hard for her that his tired senses heard the pleadings of his heart and vouchsafed him a vision. On the other hand, we have the rose for evidence."

"Yes, but the rose might have been there all the time," I argued. "Gloire de Dijons were her favorite flowers; he might possibly have bought one, put it in a vase, and then forgotten it. And as for one blossom being missing from the spray out in the cemetery, the wonder is that there were any left. I noticed how the young men hurried with the flowers following the funeral. If Mr. Martin had caught them he'd have given them a lecture. I've often heard him say the floral tributes deserve almost as great care as the body, because they're tokens of love."

"An estimable man, that Monsieur Martin," he returned. "He is a funeral director in a thousand. Come, let us go and drink to him."

"Bedad, sor, he's at it again, th' impident spalpeen!" Sergeant Costello

stalked into our breakfast room, his usually florid face gone almost apoplectic with fury.

"*Morbleu*, do you say so? And who in Satan's foul name is he, and what has he been at?" de Grandin answered with a grin.

"Why, this here now felly, th' one that ye were afther readin' about in Miss Sainpolis' diary. Bad cess to 'im, wid th' pore young gur-rl hardly cold in her grave he's goin' round burglarizin' houses an' lavin' fingerprints all over th' place. Ouch, it's th' brazen one he is! Belike he thinks we didn't check her fingerprints when we found that she wuz dead, an' o' course, he don't know nothin' about th' diary, so he thinks he's safe as long as——"

"One moment, if you please!" de Grandin shut him off. "Me, I feel the birth-pains of an idea stirring in my brain. I have what you call the hunch!" He raised a hand to enjoin silence; then: "Where did he commit this latest outrage?"

"'Twas Misther Westmorsham's house, out on th' Bordentown Road, sor. Th' family wuz to Atlantic City, an' th' servants had been given time off. This mornin' they come back to find th' house picked clean as a wishbone, wid furs an' silverware and jools and Lord knows what all carted off.

"An' how d'ye s'pose he got in? Why, through th' front door, if ye plaze. Jimmied it and walked right in, as bold as brass. We know he done it sometime between midnight an' this mornin', for th' harness bull on th' beat tried th' door at twelve an' one, an' agin at half-past three. At half-past six this mornin' a prowler car passin' by seen it wide open, an' when they went in to investigate they found th' whole place gutted clean as anny carcass in a butcher-shop."

"*Parbleu*, it strikes a chord, my friends!" de Grandin cried. "Me, I have the idea. *Oui-da, ma petite pauvre*, I get the message which you sent!"

"Howly Moses, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, d'ye let him stharta his drinkin' so early in th' mornin'?" Costello asked me in well-simulated reproach.

"Never mind the ill-timed witticisms, thou great stupid one," de Grandin shot back. "Come with me, at once, immediately, right away. Take me to this house of Monsieur Westmorsham, let me look at it, and I will show you how to lay this miscreant by the heels. Come, hurry, we waste time!"

THE supper show was more than half done when the captain showed us to our table at the Casa Ayer. The slow, deliberately erotic notes of *Mood Indigo* trickled like a spate of hot spiced wine from the battery of saxophones set in the front rank of the orchestra while several young and shapely women cavorted on the dance floor in a flood of purple light.

De Grandin waved the menu card aside. "I have not the hunger," he announced. "Bring me a dozen lobster sandwiches and a pint of champagne *brut*, no more."

I ordered a Welsh rarebit and a mug of ale, and looked around the darkened room. Here and there a man's shirtfront or a woman's shoulders gleamed in dim highlight, but for the most part the whole place was steeped in shadow. On the stand before the orchestra I descried our visitor of the night before leading the musicians with the deftness of long practise, his task mechanical as drawing breath.

At the table next to us a party of two women with their escorts talked in strident tones, decrying music, food and entertainment. As a match flared I caught sight of them. The women were the sort one might expect to see at night clubs, powdered, painted, curled and bleached until all semblance of their natural selves had vanished. Curiously, although they wore the irreducible minimum of clothes, they seemed overdressed. One of the men faced

from me; the other I saw full face in the orange flare of the match, and instinctively I hated him. Somehow, for all his obviously freshly-shaven face and spotless linen, he seemed unclean. Dark-skinned he was, swarthy as a mulatto, with curling black hair, full, red lips and dancing black eyes. But though he smiled it seemed to me he did so more in contempt than merriment, and the gleam in his eyes was decidedly more malicious than jocund. Handsome he was, certainly, but in the way that Mephistopheles is pictured; cruel, arrogant and vicious.

"My Gawd," I heard him sneer, "d'je ever see a cornier show?"

The match winked out, and as the darkness hid him from me I heard the clinking chime of metal on the tiled floor. He had offered the ultimate in insults to the club's talent, flung a fistful of coppers to them.

The lights flashed on and de Grandin beckoned to a waiter, handing him a note. In a moment young Strapoli joined us.

"You have something to tell me, sir?" he asked as we shook hands.

"Not now, a little later, perhaps," returned de Grandin. "First, I would have you tell me something. You recognize this picture, *hein?*" From his pocket he produced a small photograph and showed it to Strapoli.

The young man studied it a moment, and I saw his face go pale. "Yes, sir!" he replied emphatically. "That's the house I saw last night when Stephanola put her hands against my eyes. I'd recognize it anywhere. It's a real place, then?"

"*Assurément*, very real," de Grandin answered somewhat grimly, "and your recognition of it makes clear something which has puzzled me. I think I know now what it is that *Mademoiselle la Morte Amoureuse* attempts to tell us, and why. Attend me, if you please, my friend: It is more than merely probable that she will come to you again, and when she comes it is a cer-

tainty that she will show another of these mansions in the sky to you."

"Yes, sir?" expectantly.

"*Précisément*. When this occurs you are to notify me instantly. You comprehend?"

"But suppose she comes at night, as she most likely will——"

"Whether morning, noon or night, my friend, you are to let me know immediately. It is of the greatest importance."

Mystified, but willing to co-operate, Strapoli turned to rejoin his band, but as he passed the table next to ours he tripped, stumbled, and fell full length upon the floor.

"You"—he rose, eyes blazing as he faced the dark-skinned man who had flung coppers to the dancers—"you tripped me!"

"Yeah, I tripped yuh. So what?" the other countered, rising from his chair and lurching forward menacingly.

Strapoli's hand drew back, but before he had a chance to strike, the other was upon him, bringing up his knee and striking him violently in the stomach. It was as foul a blow as I had ever seen, and Strapoli crumpled to the floor, the breath completely knocked from him.

"Get fresh wid me, punk, will ya?" snarled the swarthy one. "For two cents I'd send yuh where I sent——" he broke off, laughing, and turned to his companions.

"C'mon, let's blow his lousy joint," he ordered.

Astoundingly, none of the waiters or attendants made a move to stop him as he swaggered from the place, and as we lifted Tony to his feet I whispered, "Don't you want to prosecute him? He attacked you without provocation, and both Doctor de Grandin and I will testify we saw him start the fight——"

"Oh, no, sir, thank you," he mumbled as he rearranged his clothes. "We wouldn't dare do that."

"No, and why not?" asked de Grandin.

"That's Niccolo Frezzi—Nick the Brute—sir; he's the toughest mug in town. They'd lie for me and beat me up if I had him arrested. No one ever dares to cross him

"He's suspected of all kinds of crimes, but the police can't pin anything on him, and if anybody dares appear against him, even in a traffic case, he's sure to get a dreadful beating in a day or two. Everybody knows that Nick the Brute does it, but there's never any legal proof of it, so——"

He brushed a fleck of dust from his sleeve and walked unsteadily to his place on the bandstand.

IT WAS hardly daylight when the call came. Strapoli's voice was half hysterical.

"She's been here, sir," I heard him tell de Grandin as I picked up the extension telephone which stood beside my bed. "What? Yes, sir; she showed me another house——"

"*Très bon*, my friend, arise and dress. I shall join you instantly."

In five minutes we were rushing through the dawn-gray streets toward Strapoli's apartment, pausing only to pick up Costello.

"Sure, an' this hunch o' yours had better be a good one," the sergeant growled as he climbed in beside us. "Gittin' a man up at th' crack o' dawn——"

"Be quiet," broke in de Grandin. "Unless I am much more mistaken than I think we shall crack other things beside the dawn before we finish this day's work. You have a two-foot length of hose in readiness?"

"Hose?—Fer th' love o' Mike, sor——"

"*Exactement*. Did not you say you would enjoy a conversation with this so vile Niccolo—you and a length of rubber hose?"

"O' course, sor, but——"

"No buts, my friend. I have the idea who this Niccolo is. If all goes as I think that it will go, I shall deliver him into your hands before so very long."

STRAPOLI waited for us on his doorstep.

"Sorry I couldn't call you sooner," he apologized, "but I fell asleep again when Stephanola left, and just woke up a little while ago."

"Never mind," de Grandin answered. "You are sure that you can recognize the house she showed you?"

"Certain, sir."

"*Très bien*." Slowly, looking carefully from right to left, we cruised the residential sections of the city, beginning at the eastern suburbs, weaving slowly across town, finally threading through the wider avenues of the west end.

Abruptly, "There it is; I recognize it!" Tony called as we idled past a big house in Tunlaw Street. "I'd know it anywhere."

Costello consulted a typed list. "Yep, this is one of 'em," he announced. "Th' Fanshaws live here, but they're all in Florida. We have instructions to kape a special watch on it."

"U'm? Let us see how well instructions have been carried out," de Grandin replied as we walked across the lawn.

Step by careful step we circled the place, testing door and window fastenings. Everything was in order.

"All right, sor, an' where do we go from here?" the sergeant asked.

De Grandin took his chin between his thumb and forefinger. At length: "Who has the keys?" he asked.

Costello referred to his list again. "They're at th' family lawyer's, but——"

"No buts, if you will be so kind. Secure them all soon, and bring at least two officers to mount guard in the house. The robber has not yet appeared, but I am confident he will."

ALL day we waited for a summons to the Fanshaw house, but none came. By dinner time de Grandin was as nervous as a cat; when nine o'clock had sounded he was almost frantic.

"She cannot do this," he declared. "But no, she cannot make the fool of Jules de Grandin."

"What the deuce are you maundering about?" I asked.

"No matter, let us go and see for ourselves. I will phone Monsieur Strapoli to accompany us; he is not due at Casa Ayer till eleven."

The big old house was quiet as a tomb as Strapoli, de Grandin, Costello and I let ourselves in at the kitchen door.

"Seen anything?" the sergeant asked the patrolman waiting in the kitchen.

"Everything quiet as the stock exchange on Sunday, sir."

"Umph? What's next, sor?" the sergeant asked de Grandin.

"First we reconnoiter the terrain, then we sit and wait his coming. Be assured, he will come, my friends. The dead do not make jokes."

From room to room we walked, led by the beam of his flashlight. The place was still with that dead silence peculiar to deserted houses, and I had an eery feeling we were not alone, that unseen eyes were on us, watching with sardonic amusement.

"*Halte la!*" de Grandin ordered as we paused upon the threshold of the drawing-room. "*A silence, he is coming, I think!*"

Softly, so softly that it might have been mistaken for the scraping of a wind-blown branch against the window-pane, a sound came to us from the high French window overlooking the side garden. It came again, louder this time; then a sharp click sounded as the sash swung inward.

Against the back-drop of the cloudy starless night the window showed oblong and dark; dark and empty, like a hole. Then, barely darker than the outer dark-

ness, we saw it: a man's form cased in skin-smooth tights, head covered by a tight hood—no chance for fallen hairs to give police a clue — hands encased in what seemed rubber gloves.

For a moment he paused on the sill like a cat about to leap down from a fence; then soundlessly he dropped into the room and seemed to fade into the shadows.

We were four to one, and two of us were armed, but for an instant terror gripped me by the throat. There was something so inhuman in the tight-clothed burglar, such a suggestion of uncanny cruelty and power. . . .

De Grandin broke the spell. "*Eh bien, Monsieur le Voleur, you are very welcome!*" he announced. "We have waited long, but not with patience——"

Flashlights cleft the blackness, and like miniature lightnings came the flamings of two pistols, then a third. Boots pounded on the hardwood floors as the two patrolmen rushed to join us. I saw a shadow loom against the window for an instant, then saw it topple inward as a whirring missile struck it.

"Tur-rn on th' lights, ye omadhauns!" Costello bellowed, and after a brief fumble a switch clicked, almost blinding us with the sudden brilliance from the chandelier. Before the window lay a figure cased in clinging black silk jersey like an acrobat's costume, save that a hood-like helmet covered neck and chin and head, leaving only a small oblong of face visible, and this was barred by the wisp of a black silk mask. Beside the supine body lay de Grandin's little automatic; a larger weapon was half clutched in one of the man's flaccid, rubber-gloved hands.

Costello leaned and snatched the mask off of the fellow's face. I recognized him instantly: the man who threw the coppers at the Casa Ayer, then tripped and beat Tony Strapoli.

"Well, well," the sergeant chuckled.

"Nick th' Brute in person, an' not a movin' pitcher. We got dead wood on 'im at last——"

"He is also the Niccolo mentioned in the poor Sainpolis girl's diary," de Grandin added.

"Th' divil!"

"Not quite, but almost, *mon sergent*. See, I saved him for you. I might have shot him, but I chose to throw my pistol at his head and stun him."

"Whatever for, sor? Why should ye be so tender——"

The little Frenchman grinned. "Did not I hear you once remark that you would like a quarter-hour's conversation with this one—you and a piece of rubber hose? Very well, then. You would not enjoy such a conversation with a wounded man."

"Be gob, ye're right, sor. It'll be a pleasure——"

"Doctor!" one of the patrolmen called. "This feller's hit bad——"

In our excitement we had failed to notice that Strapoli was not with us. Now we turned to see him lying by the farther wall, a spreading stain across his shirtfront. From the corners of his mouth there welled twin rivulets of blood. De Grandin gave a softly deprecating exclamation. "*C'est trop fort*—he is shot through the lung, my friend. See, it is a pulmonary hemorrhage!"

Strapoli's pulse was weakening rapidly, almost all semblance of expression had faded from his eyes, yet as we knelt beside him he achieved the vestige of a smile.

"*Mon pauvre garçon*," whispered de Grandin, "we have him in a vise, he cannot wriggle from the clutches of the law this time, and we shall make him pay through the nose——"

STRAPOLI paid no heed. His almost-vacant eyes were fixed on something which we could not see, something which appeared to be a foot or so above and be-

fore him. He raised his hands, palms facing, then drew them downward toward him. The pantomime was perfect. He held a face between his palms, drew it closer, closer to his own . . . "Stephanola!" he murmured, and we saw his lips form in a kiss, then fall apart as a bright cataract of blood poured through them, and he fell back, supine, on the floor.

The two policemen arranged him, folded hands across his breast, dropped a coat over his face. De Grandin knelt in prayer a moment, then bounded up to join Costello.

"An' it'll be th' hot squat for yours, bozo," the sergeant was saying almost jocularly to the man in tights who was now regaining consciousness. "Ye've made a monkey o' th' law a long, long time, but this time we've put th' finger on ye. Ye'll not be batin' th' rap this time. Them rubber gloves ye're wearin', wid th' pore gurrl's prints stuck on 'em, will pin a dozen burglaries on ye, but ye'll niver do a day o' time for 'em. Oh, no, my bucko! Ye've kilt a man in th' commission o' th' felony o' housebreakin', an' it's th' electric chair that ye'll be warmin' before fire-crackers pop, so help me."

The two patrolmen were arguing. "Of course I didn't put it there," denied one hotly. "Where the devil would I get it in this empty house; besides do I look like an undertaker or sumpin'?"

"Well, where'd it come from, then?"

"Whist, ye divils, have ye no shame? Where's ye're rayspict for th' dead?" Costello reproved in a bull-bellow. "What's all th' fussin' for?"

"Aw, Sarge, Milligan says I put this flower on 'im, an' I told him he was fulla prunes. Where'd I get a flower in this place?"

"What flower?" broke in Costello.

"This one, right here, sir," the young patrolman pointed to Strapoli's body.

Clasped in the pale hands folded on his breast Strapoli held a lovely Gloire de

Dijon rose, fresh, dew-jeweled, breathing out a cloud of perfume from its golden heart.

"Do not dispute, *mes enfants*," de Grandin ordered. "We know the donor of that flower." He laid a hand upon his breast and made a sweeping bow to the great empty room. "*Félicitations, mes amis*," he said, as if congratulating an affianced couple.

"**Q**UITE yes, but how can one explain it otherwise?" he said as we foregathered in my study shortly after midnight. "Did not she give the explanation when she first appeared to young Strapoli? But certainly. 'I have sinned, but there is a way open to forgiveness,' she told him. Of course, if she could bring this so vile Niccolo to justice she would acquire merit, perhaps attain to pardon for her self-destruction.

"She and the young Strapoli were in love, hence *en rapport*. She could, it seems, appear to him at will, while others could not sense her presence.

"When first he told us of his experience, how she laid her hands upon his eyes and made him see that mansion in the sky, I thought the whole occurrence too fantastic to be other than a dream.

"*Ha*, but next morning when you came with tidings of the burglary, I had at once the thought:

."He saw a house, a big, fine, empty house last night . . . such a mansion has been burglarized . . . Jules de Grandin, get a picture of that house and show it to the young Strapoli. If he recognizes it as the one his vision showed him, that is what she meant.'

"*Parbleu*, I did; he did, and the case was proved. *Assurément*.

"'She has foreknowledge of the naughty Niccolo's intentions,' I tell me. 'When next she gives her lover the impression of a house, we have only to go there and wait his coming.'

"*Tenez*, she came again. She showed him another house; he told us; we searched until we found the house of his vision. We waited there—*voilà*."