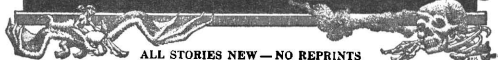


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1950

Cover by Frank Kelly Freas

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

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The Body-Snatchers

BY SEABURY QUINN



Heading by Vincent Napoli

Jules de Grandin said the story sounded incredible, such things did not happen—but he would withhold judgment.

STREET lights were coming on and the afterglow was faint in the west under the first cold stars as I let myself in at the front door. I'd had a hard

day at the hospital, two T and A's in the morning and a cholitonotomy in the afternoon, and at my age surgery is almost as hard on the physician as the patient. "Thank

heaven, no calls this evening," I murmured as I shrugged out of my overcoat and started toward the study where I knew Nora McGinnis would have a preprandial cocktail iced and waiting for me.

My heart sank like a plummet as the voices came to me from the consulting room. "I realize this is more a case for a lawyer than a physician, but I've known Dr. Trowbridge since I was thirty seconds old, and I *have* to talk it over with somebody. Just going to an attorney seems so sort of—well, common, if you understand, Dr. de Grandin. There's never been a divorce in our family, but—"

"Hullo, there young 'un!" I greeted with wholly meretricious cordiality as I paused at the door. "What's all this talk about divorce—"

"Oh, Dr. Trowbridge, I'm *so* glad you've come!" Nancy Northrop fairly leaped from her chair and threw her arms about me. "I—I've been so miserable, Doctor!" The held-back tears broke through her eyelids and in a moment she was sobbing like a little girl whose doll is broken.

"There, there," I soothed, patting her shoulder. "A dry Martini won't cure the trouble, but it'll help. Come into the study, both of you."

Nancy Northrop was a small, pretty woman with bright hair, a straight little nose and wide-set amber eyes "put in with a smutty finger," as the Irish say. For a long moment she was calm, immovable as the embalmed bride of a Pharaoh, staring broodingly into the tawny depths of her cocktail. "I just don't seem to have the proper words to tell it," she murmured finally. "You've known Norman and me all our lives, Doctor; you know we went together even in grammar school days, and when we married it was no more a surprise to anyone—including us—than setting down the sum beneath a column of figures would have been."

"That's so," I agreed. "You were childhood sweethearts, I remember. A lot of people thought it just one of those boy-and-girl affairs, but—"

"I said it was no more surprising than the sum arrived at when you add a line of fig-

ures," she broke in. "Well, someone made a mistake in addition, Doctor. Norman's left me."

"Eh? What d'y'e mean, child?"

"Just what I said. He's—as the old song had it—'gone with a handsomer girl.'"

"Tenez, Madame," de Grandin interrupted, "suppose we start at the beginning and work forward. How was it that Monsieur your husband left you, and when?"

"Last Monday, sir. There was a party at the Lakerim Country Club that evening, and Norman and I went. We had the first few dances together, then Norman went somewhere—he was on the committee, you know—and the next I saw of him he was dancing with a strange girl."

"A stranger?" I prompted as she fell into a thoughtful silence, turning the stem of her glass between her fingers, biting her lower lip to hold it steady.

"Yes, sir, a stranger. No one seemed to know who she was—just how she came to be at the party, or who brought her is a mystery—but there she was in his arms, and"—she offered us a pitiful, small smile—"I must admit she was attractive and danced extraordinarily well."

"Can you perhaps describe her, Madame?" de Grandin asked as the silence lengthened again.

"Can I? Was there ever a woman who couldn't describe her successful rival down to the last hair of her plucked eyebrows and and final hook and eye of her gown? She was tall, as tall as a tall man, and built exquisitely—no, not exquisitely, grandly built is more nearly correct. She was more of a Minerva than a Venus. Her hair was dark, either black or very dark brown, and her eyes an intense blue, like the sea off Ogunquit or Hamilton. She must have just come back from Cuba or Bermuda, for her neck and arms and shoulders all seemed carved of smoky amber, and she wore an evening gown of red brocade, sleeveless, of course, and belted at the waist with a gold cord, Grecian fashion. Her sandals were gold, too, and the lovely sun-tan on her feet made them look gilded, except for the red-lacquered nails. Oh"—once more she gave a rueful little smile—"I couldn't any more

compete with her than Hera or Pallas could with Aphrodite! I'd never felt a pang of jealousy before, but when I saw my husband dancing with that gorgeous hussy I was positively green-eyed.

"They were playing *Tales From the Vienna Woods*, and she and Norm were waltzing to it like a pair of ballroom professionals when a man came from the conservatory and cut in. As she danced away with her new partner I could see her signaling Norman, positively teasing him with her eyes.

"The strange couple circled round the floor once then danced into the conservatory, and I felt everything inside me coming loose as I saw Norman follow them.

"I hadn't any business doing it, I know, it was a cheap, unworthy way to act, but I went in after them. Just as I reached the entrance to the greenhouse I heard voices raised in angry argument, then a crash, and Norman and the strange girl brushed past me. 'Brushed' is the verb, too. I might have been just one of the potted plants for all the notice they took of me. As they passed she linked her fingers round his arm and laughed. I heard her say, 'How handsome you are—' "

Nancy paused in her recital, and a puzzled frown formed on her face, as if she were endeavoring to see something just beyond her vision.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"That's what's worrying me, Doctor. What she called him. It wasn't Norm or Norman nor even Mr. Northrop. It was

some other name, some strange name I had never heard."

HER preoccupation with the trifle annoyed me. "What happened next?" I asked a little acidly.

"I went into the conservatory, and as I staggered between the plants I knew just how an injured animal that crawls away to die must feel. I was so blinded by my tears that I didn't see the other man until I stumbled over him. He was lying on his back, both arms flung out as if he had been crucified against the floor, and blood was running from a cut in his head where he'd struck it against a jardinière as he fell.

"The first thing I thought was, 'He's dead. Norman's killed him!' but when I bent down I could hear him breathing hoarsely, and knew that he was only unconscious. I don't know how long I waited beside him. You see, I wanted to make sure that Norman had a chance to get away before I gave the alarm, but finally I ran back to the ballroom and told Ed Pennybacker what I'd found. Of course, I didn't tell him anything about the struggle I'd heard, or even about seeing Norman and the strange woman in the greenhouse. Dr. Ferris was at the dance, and went to give the man first aid, but in a moment he came back looking serious and muttering something about concussion. They called an ambulance and took him to Mercy Hospital."

"And where was Norman all this time?" I asked as she lapsed into brooding silence once more.

"I don't know, Doctor. I haven't seen him since."

"Wh—what?"

"That's correct, sir. He didn't come to take me home. Our car was gone from the parking lot, and I had to ride back with Joe and Louise Tralor. He didn't come home that night. He hasn't been home since, nor has he been to the office. O-oh!"

Her cry was a small sad sound that heightened and grew thinner, finally ravelled out to nothingness like a pulled woolen thread. "He's gone, Doctor; left me; deserted me!"

There are times when nothing we can say seems adequate. This was one of them, and so I had to content myself with patting her shoulder and murmuring, "There, there!"

She turned on me, eyes blazing with a sudden heat that fairly burned the tears away as she put her forefinger to her dimpled chin, made me a bobbing little curtsy and, like a little girl reciting, repeated:

"There, little girl; don't cry!

They have broken your heart, I know—"

Her voice cracked like a shattering glass, and her laughter was a ghastly thing to hear as she ran from the study and out the front door.

"THERE'S a Mистер Northrop to see yez, gentlemen," Nora McGinnis told us as de Grandin and I sat over brandy, coffee and cigars in the drawing room after dinner that evening. "He says as how it's most important."

"Tiens," de Grandin murmured. "Is it that the errant husband comes to tell us his side of the story, one wonders?"

"Humpf, it had better be a good tale he's cooked up," I answered. "The unconscionable young pup, treating Nancy that way—"

"Mистер Northrop," Nora interrupted from the doorway.

He was a very ugly little man, some sixty-five years old, I judged, for his face was criss-crossed by a network of deep wrinkles and his small mustache was quite white. His eyes were small, black and deep-

set, and what we could see of his hair was also white, though for the most part it was covered by a Sayer's occipital bandage. His clothes were well cut and of good material, very neatly pressed, but obviously not new. "Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted as he paused at the door.

"Mr. Northrop?" I asked inquiringly. "I don't think that I've had the pleasure—"

The laugh that interrupted me was mirthless as the bark of a teased dog. "Oh, yes, we've met before, Doctor," he corrected. "It was thirty-two years ago, on the seventeenth of January, to be exact, in Mercy Hospital. I'm Norman Northrop."

I could feel a wash of angry blood in my cheeks. "If this is a joke—" I began, but once more his eerie, bitter laugh broke in.

"If it's a joke it's on me, Doctor. I don't understand it any more than you do, but I'm Norman Northrop."

"Grand Dieu des porcs!" I heard de Grandin murmur almost soundlessly, then aloud, "Come in, Monsieur; come in and tell us how it comes that you are strange to Dr. Trowbridge, and, I damn suspect, to yourself also."

"Thank you, Doctor," the caller bowed acknowledgement of de Grandin's invitation and came into the drawing room. I noticed that he limped a little, as if he had suffered a slight stroke some time before, for his right foot dragged and turned in as he stepped.

"And now, Monsieur?" de Grandin poured an ounce or so of brandy into an inhaler, filled a demi-tasse and placed them at the stranger's elbow, motioning toward the cigars as he did so. "You are, one takes it, the husband of Madame Northrop who called on us this after—"

"Nancy's been here?" Our caller's face, already nearly colorless, went absolutely corpse-gray, and the hand that held his brandy glass shook with something more than the slight senile tremor I had noticed. "What did she tell you?"

"Tiens, the story was not pretty, Monsieur. She told us that you had deserted her; that you fought with some strange man for the favors of a strange woman; that then you went with your new charmer without so

much as one small backward look by way of valedictory."

THE caller seemed to shrink in on himself. The wrinkled skin around his mouth and on his neck seemed trembling like the dewlaps of a hound, and tears came in his small black eyes. "Please, gentlemen," he begged, "be kind enough to hear me through. Before I'm half done you'll call me a damned liar, and when I've finished you will think I'm drunk or crazy, maybe both; but what I have to say is true, every word of it.

"Nancy must have told you how we went to Lakerim Monday night. We had the first three dances together, and just as the band began playing for the fourth I saw Bob Eastman beckoning. Bob was on the committee, though why they put him there Lord only knows. If there's any way of snafuing a deal he'll find it. We'd gone all out on the refreshments, and Braunstein's were to furnish baked Alaskas for dessert. They hadn't come, and Bob was in a hissy. He'd called the caterer's, and they'd told him their wagon had left half an hour before. What should we do about it?

"I got Braunstein's on the 'phone and found that Bob had given orders for the desserts to be delivered to the Lake View Club instead of the Lakerim. Lake View is over by Morristown, you know, and Bob had belonged there before transferring to Lakerim. I suppose it was a pardonable slip of the tongue, but it had certainly snarled our party up. After several minutes' conversation I got 'em to promise to send another wagon out to Lakerim, and was hurrying to rejoin Nancy when I bumped into a girl.

"I mean that literally. The floor outside the steward's office was slippery. She was hurrying one way, I was barging through the door, and we collided like a pair of kids on roller skates. Both our feet went out from under us, and there we sat on our respective fannies, not hurt but with the wind knocked out of us. For a moment we grinned at each other, then I helped her up and apologized.

"She seemed to be taking inventory. 'I'm

not hurt,' she told me, 'but I seem to have broken something. Will you take me to the powder room where I can make a few repairs, please?'

"The quickest way to the powder room was across the dance floor, and the quickest way to cross the dance floor was to dance rather than trying to dodge between the couples. So we danced.

"She was a superb dancer; you'd have thought the music ran through her nerves like wind through an Æolian harp.

"Just as we reached the far side of the ballroom her hand tightened on mine. 'Don't look now,' she whispered, 'but I'm being pursued by the Big Bad Wolf. He's been trailing me all evening.' She didn't seem frightened, just a little nervous and annoyed, and I didn't think much of it.

"Let's circle round the floor again," she suggested. 'Maybe he'll get discouraged and go back to the bar.' So we waltzed around the floor again, and she went on, 'He's an old friend of my father's, a widower who's looking for a replacement. Honestly, he persecutes me! If he catches us he'll want to cut in, and I suppose you'll have to let him, but if you want to do your Boy Scout's daily good deed please follow us. He'll head for the conservatory—that's his technique—and all you'll have to do is wait a moment, then come barging in and say, "This is our dance, I believe," or something similarly original. Can do?'

"Can do," I promised, and, as she predicted, there was her aged Lothario lying in ambush by the entrance to the conservatory.

"May I cut in?" he asked as he tapped me on the shoulder, and as I resigned my partner to him she whispered, 'Remember, Perseus, Andromeda'll be waiting to be rescued!'

"I watched them circle the ballroom and noticed that though he danced quite well he dragged his right foot. Sure enough, he guided her into the greenhouse, and in a moment I followed.

"I don't know just what I'd expected to find, but I was certainly unprepared for the tableau on which I stumbled. The little man had backed her up against the wall,

and stood threatening her with one of those case-knives—those things that snap an eight-inch blade out when you press a spring, you know. 'If I can't have you, no one else shall,' I heard him say as I entered the conservatory.

"I knew I had to do something, and do it in a hurry. The man was little, scarcely larger than a half-grown boy, but a crazy man armed with an eight-inch dirk is not a pleasant customer to deal with, and for a moment I was at a loss. Then the girl's appeal sparked me to action. 'Please, please!' she begged. 'He's crazy—mad as a hatter—'

"Put that knife up, I told him. 'You're acting like a—'

"**H**E TURNED from her and came at me, and I knew I really had a maniac to deal with, for there was no light of sanity in his eyes, and at the corners of his mouth I could see little flecks of foam. 'So you're the favored swain tonight?' he rasped in a hard, gritty voice.

"Hit him; knock him senseless!' the girl begged. 'He'll kill us if you don't—'

"I hit as hard as I could, bringing my fist up from the hip and pivoting on my right foot to put my weight behind the blow. He went down like a pole-axed ox, but something seemed to go wrong with me at the same time. A paralyzing tingling, like the pins and needles we feel when a foot has gone to sleep, went up my arm as my fist struck his chin, and in a moment every nerve in my body seemed shrieking in agony.

"The pain was almost unendurable, but I couldn't make a move, just stood there, trembling as with a galvanic shock and saw the girl go up to him, take his left hand in her right, then felt her grasp my right in her left. The man got up and put his free hand over mine, so in a moment we had formed a circle, and they were moving slowly round and round, dragging me after them.

"I don't know what it was they said, or rather sang in a monotonous crooning tune, the words seemed meaningless—perhaps they were in some foreign tongue, perhaps they were just doggerel—but they kept re-

peating over and over, as near as I can remember:

"*'Aristeas, Kartaphilos,
Abasverus, Buitadaeus.'*"

"*'Morbleu!'* ejaculated Jules de Grandin. "Are you sure that is what they said, Monsieur?"

"No, sir, I'm not. But that's as near as I can come to it."

"*'Très bon, my friend. Continue.'*" The little Frenchman had leant forward, his small blue eyes fixed on our caller's face intently as a cat pins its gaze on a rathole. "Say on, Monsieur," he ordered. "We are listening."

"Well, in a moment it seemed that the greenhouse was in motion, too; turning in reverse to the way we moved. That is, we moved from right to left, counter-clockwise, while it seemed to revolve from left to right, and somehow I was being twisted mentally.

"It's hard to put in words, but somehow—don't ask me how, I don't know!—I seemed to be becoming someone else. The first thing that I noticed was that my right foot was dragging, and somehow I seemed smaller. I had to look up at the tall girl holding my right hand, and in a moment I seemed looking at myself—as if I saw my own reflection in a mirror, yet held the hand of the man in the looking-glass. All images were rather blurred, like things seen under water. Then suddenly I felt a dull ache at the back of my head as my knees sagged under me."

THE caller stopped his narrative and looked at us in turn, as though expecting us to finish the story.

"And then, Monsieur?" de Grandin prompted when the silence had lasted at least a minute.

"The next thing I knew I was lying in a bed. The bed was white, the walls of the room were white, everything around me was white and sterile. It was a hospital bedroom, I realized, but how I'd gotten there I had no idea. For a moment I lay there, trying to gather my wits, then I put out my

hand for the call-bell. That was the first shock I got. The hand I moved *wasn't mine*. I'm thirty-two years old, as you know, Dr. Trowbridge. The hand that moved when I reached for the bell was that of an old man, thin, bony, high-veined, speckled with liver-spots.

"I lay there for a moment, wondering if I were delirious, then called, 'Anybody around?' and that was the second shock. The voice that sounded when I formed the words in my mind wasn't mine. It was the thin, rasping treble of an old man. I recognized it! I had heard it in the conservatory when I found the old man threatening the girl.

"I don't know how long I lay there after that, and the more I tried to make sense of the senseless business the less sense it seemed to make. At last a nurse came in and greeted me with that false cheeriness they always use on patients. 'Good morning! Feeling better? That was a nasty crack on the head you had.'

"Nurse, I begged, and my fear grew into absolute panic as I heard the senile piping of the voice with which I spoke, 'Please get me a mirror.'

"Oh, you're not disfigured, gran'paw,' she assured me as she took a hand-glass from the dresser and gave it to me. 'You'll be right as rain in a day or two.'

"There's not much use in trying to describe my feelings as I looked into the glass. The face that gazed back at me was not mine, but that of the old man whom I had knocked out in the conservatory.

"That's not—that isn't I!' I screamed. 'That's not my face—'

"The nurse took the mirror away. 'Take it easy, gran'paw,' she advised. 'Who'd you expect to see, Charles Boyer, or maybe Mickey Mouse?' She stepped out to the corridor and in a moment a young interne hurried in.

"Still pretty bad, eh?' I heard him whisper. He swabbed my arm with alcohol and drove a hypo into it. The anesthetic acted almost immediately, and I was out almost before I had a chance to protest.

"When I woke up the sun was slanting in the window and there were shadows in the corners of the room that hadn't been there when I first regained consciousness. My first thought was to ring the bell and ask to see the superintendent. Then I reconsidered. How I came to be in this old body I had no idea. It was like one of those dreadful things you read about in fairy-story books—or books of witchcraft and black magic—but one thing was sure: If I attempted to disclaim the body into which I seemed to have been thrust I'd get nowhere, except into the psychopathic ward. They'd given me a shot of dope that morning when they thought that I was still delirious from the blow on the head. Now, when I'd regained full consciousness, if I still insisted I was someone else—what would *you* have done if a patient acted that way, Dr. Trowbridge?"

"I'd be inclined to certify him—" I began, but he cut in sharply:

"Exactly. And you, Dr. de Grandin?"

JULES DE GRANDIN pursed his lips as if he were about to whistle, and tweaked the ends of his small blond mustache. "I do not know, my friend," he answered. "What you have told us sounds incredible. Such things just do not happen, as Dr. Trowbridge—or any jury of a lunacy commission—will assure you; but I withhold the judgment. Will you proceed?"

Our caller drew a deep, quick breath, whether of relief or excitement I could not determine. Then: "I realized that I had to 'go along with the gag,' so to speak," he said. "If I continued to deny my body I was headed straight for the padded cell; the only chance I had to gain my liberty was to keep silent, get out of the hospital as quickly as I could, and get in touch with Nancy. I wasn't sure that I could make her believe me, or that I could convince anybody, but it was worth a trial, while I was sure to be incarcerated if I fought against the form that had been thrust on me.

"So when the house physician came to see me I was meek as the proverbial Moses, making up a name and address for myself, answering all questions that he asked as promptly and with as much show of reason as I could. At four o'clock this afternoon they signed my release and I left Mercy Hospital.

"The only clothes I had were those I wore when I came to the hospital, of course, and they were a dinner kit. I couldn't very well go marching round in that, but fortunately there had been considerable money in the pockets, so when all charges had been paid at the hospital I still had better than a hundred dollars left. I called a cab and had him drive me to South Second Street, where the second-hand clothing stores are, you know. In one of those I got a pretty good outfit for fifty dollars, and the dealer allowed me twenty in trade for the clothes I wore, so I was not completely destitute.

"Next, I tried to get in touch with Nancy. I phoned her several times and got no answer, and when I went to the house it was closed and dark. I waited outside for a while, then when no one came, I thought of you and Dr. de Grandin, and—here I am."

The look he turned on us was that sick, apprehensive, slightly hopeful glance I'd seen so many patients wear when they were waiting for a diagnosis in suspected carcinoma. Despite myself I felt a pang of pity. This was a clean-cut case of organic dementia, probably consequent upon a head injury. What the hospital authorities were thinking of to turn a man in his condition out of doors was more than I could imagine. The patient seemed in a bland humor, but—

DE GRANDIN'S level voice broke through my thoughts. "I do not understand your case, Monsieur," he told the caller, "but I believe what you have said. What we can do about it I am not certain, but what we can do will be done, I assure you. You say you have sufficient money to provide for your immediate wants?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. I would suggest that you find yourself lodgings and let us know where we can get in touch with you. Meantime, I shall make such investigations as seem necessary at the moment, and consult with you when I have completed them. Shall we say tomorrow afternoon at half-past four? Very well. Till then, Monsieur."

"That was the cruelest thing I've ever seen you do," I accused as the door closed behind the caller. "You know as well as I that he's a dement, probably suffering organic dementia as the result of a head wound, possibly complicated by senile dementia. To pretend belief in his delusions—"

"Can you remember what it was he said the man and woman chanted in the conservatory?" he broke in irrelevantly.

"Remember what they chanted—what in the world—"

"There are so many things in the world, my friend, not all of them to be found in the medical textbooks. Attend me, did he not say they repeated:

"*'Aristeas, Kartapbilos,
Abasverus, Buttadaems?'*

Do those words mean anything to you?"

"No more than hickory, dickory, dock, or

enic, meenie, mini, mo," I answered rather curtly.

"U'm? Are you familiar with the legend of the Wandering Jew?"

"You mean the character of whom Eugene Sue wrote?"

"*Monsieur le Général*, among others. In Greek tradition he is known as Aristeas, the Jewish folklore calls him Kartaphilos, another legend names him Ahasverus, while in the German lore he is called John Butidaeus.

"*Le bon Dieu* only knows where the old legend started. It has been current throughout Europe for almost two thousand years, and has gathered many accretions in retelling, but one thing all the folk-tales have in common, whether they be Greek or Jewish, German, French or Italian: At the end of every century, or a cycle of approximately that length of time, the wretched man, accursed with immortality, falls into stupor of some kind and wakes up as a young man of somewhere in the vicinity of Italy."

"Are you suggesting that this man who kills himself Norman Northrop might be—"

"I am suggesting nothing, my old one. That I have tried to point out is the possible connection between the names of one who had his youth miraculously restored and this species of possession which we seem to have here. It is not likely, I admit, at it is possible that by some kind of black magic the man who wore the body of the one who just left us was able to exchange his aging frame for the young, vigorous body worn by Monsieur Northrop, much as tramp might steal the garments of a swimmer and leave his own rags in their place. Do you comprehend?"

"I should say not!" I jerked back. "This is the most fantastic, incredible sort of nonsense—"

"Forrester!" he exclaimed. "*Morbleu*, I do remember now! *Pour la barbe d'un bouc*!; that is it!"

"Whatever are you raving about?" I demanded.

"Her name, *pardieu*; I had forgotten it, now it is that I remember!"

SHORTLY after luncheon the next day he came into the office, pleased as Punch with himself. "Observe, peruse, read him, if you will be so kind, my friend," he ordered, holding out a paper. "Does he not answer some, at least, of our so vexing questions?"

"AGED WOMAN COMMITTED"

the headline read, and under it:

A jury in Judge Anslem's court today ruled that an unidentified old woman was insane. The respondent in the lunacy inquiry had claimed to be Margaret Forrester, nationally known swimming champion, who disappeared near Port of Spain, Trinidad, while bathing in the sea some time ago. The respondent had a fixed delusion that the missing young woman's soul had entered her body at the moment she was lost in the sea, and insisted that she be addressed as Miss Forrester, that the bank in which the missing swimmer's account was honor her checks, and that all property of the vanished young woman was hers.

Miss Forrester, it will be remembered, was an orphan without near kin, and her estate has been in the hands of a conservator since her disappearance.

"Well?" I asked as I laid down the photostat.

He shook his head. "I do not think that it is well, Friend Trowbridge. That one person should suffer such obsessions is not matter for remark, but when two—a man and woman—suffer from identical delusions there is a smell of fish upon the business. Nor is that all. Not by any means. On my way from the office of *le journal* I called at Madame Northrop's and showed her a newspaper picture of the missing Margaret Forrester. What do you think she said?"

I drew bow at a venture, making as absurd a guess as seemed possible. "That the picture of Miss Forrester was that of the young woman with whom Norman went away?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" he almost shouted. "How

did you know it, my friend? Has Madame Northrop been here?"

"Of course not. I was merely trying to be as crazy as you seem."

"Crazy or not, I am convinced," he answered in a level voice. "Me, I shall investigate this business of the monkey, and see what is to be seen."

"I don't doubt it," I replied as I rose. "Run along and see what's to be seen. I've got some calls to make."

HE WAS almost as ebullient as a freshly mixed Seidlitz powder when he came bouncing in a few minutes before dinner. "Pardieu, my old, we make the progress!" he told me as he sipped his third Martini. "That Madame Nancy, she is superb, so is her brother, Monsieur Wilfred. They are most cooperative."

"How's that?" I asked as we went in to dinner.

He sampled the pottage Bellevue approvingly, and took a sip of sherry before he replied. "It seems that Monsieur Norman's watch was in a state of disrepair last Monday night, and so he borrowed Monsieur Wilfred's for the evening. It was a fine timepiece, that; a fine Swiss watch which cost four hundred dollars."

I looked at him in amazement. "I fail to see what connection there is between the value of a watch and —"

"Of course, you do, *mon ami*. I should have fallen in a swoon if you had. But listen, pay attention, regard me: When Monsieur Norman's body walked off with the strange young woman it wore Monsieur Wilfred's watch upon its wrist. To take away another's property without so much as by-your-leave is larceny, at least such actions will support a charge of theft. And so we have a police lookout broadcast for them, the one as principal, the other as accessory. I do not doubt that they will be arrested, and when they are I shall be ready for them with the party of surprise. Yes, of course."

"You speak of Norman's body as if it were a thing apart from him," I said. "Am I to understand that you believe that crazy man's story—the dement who was here last night and claimed to be Norman? Is it

your theory the both Norman and the aging man are victims of some sort of possession?"

He gave me a long, serious look. "It are entirely possible, Friend Trowbridge. Today we make fun of the old belief in demoniacal possession, and of the possibility of spirit-transference. But can we say with certainty that the old ones were wrong and we are right? We call it epilepsy, or manic-depressive insanity, or sometimes dementia. They called conditions which exhibited the same symptoms possession. The Biblical accounts are far from complete, but any modern psychiatrist examining a patient having symptoms similar to those of King Saul would have no hesitancy in pronouncing him a manic-depressive. Remember how Saul brooded in black melancholy, then flew into a sudden rage and flung a spear at David? Or take the story of the Gadarene demoniac who flew into such frenzies that no chain could restrain him. Has not that the earmarks of what we call acute mania? It may be that the old ones were not foolish, after all."

"But that all happened long ago—"

"*Et puis?* The ancients died of carcinoma and tuberculosis and nephritis, just as we do, why should not we be subject to possession just as they were? Do not mistake me, my friend. I do not say possession explains every case of so-called mental aberration, or even many of them. But in a proper case what we call lunacy might be possession in the strict Biblical meaning of the term. Remember, if you please, possession was no common thing, even in those days. The instances of it that have come down to us have been preserved in the records precisely because they were so unusual. Why should it not be met with occasionally today? Every psychiatrist will tell you he's had cases which defied both diagnosis and treatment, cases not to be explained by anything but the modernly rejected belief in demoniacal possession."

"Well—er—" I temporized, "I suppose it's barely possible, but hardly probable—"

"*Précisément, exactement, quite so,*" he nodded vigorously. "It is possibilities, not probabilities, with which we must deal here, my friend. Now—"

"Excuse me, sor, but Lieutenant Costello's on th' 'phone," Nora McGinnis interrupted. "He says as how th' pair ye wanted has been took up near Lake Owassa, an' th' s'bate troopers is bringin' 'em down. They should be here in half a hour or so."

"*Morbleu*, but it is magnificent, it is superb!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us hasten dinner, even at the peril to digestion. Either I am more mistaken than I think, or I shall show you something, me!"

LEUTENANT COSTELLO had assigned a room to de Grandin, one of those bare, ascotic cells that characterize police headquarters, and implemented it according to the little Frenchman's orders. Two comfortable chairs had been placed in the center of the floor, and above them hung a powerful electric bulb whose coned-down light was enhanced by a powerful reflector-shade. The rest of the apartment seemed pitch-dark in contrast to the almost dazzling pyramid of light. At the far end of the room, hidden in the shadows, was a large metal clock that ticked with a sound like the beating of a hammer on an anvil and a deliberation like the surging of the surf upon the beach. *Tick—tock; tick—tock*, it told the seconds off slowly, and somehow, as absurd things sometimes pop into our minds, I was reminded of the clock inside the crocodile which followed Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*.

De Grandin looked about the bleak apartment with a smile of grim satisfaction. "All is in readiness, I damn think," he told us. "Bring them to me as soon as they arrive, *mon lieutenant*."

It might have been fifteen minutes later when the errant pair were ushered in by a patrolman and seated in the chairs beneath the light.

I recognized young Northrop at a glance, and saw the woman with him fitted Nancy's description exactly. A "gorgeous hussy," Nancy had called her, and she lived up to the term in every particular. Boldly but beautifully formed, she was, with long slim legs, a flat back, high, firm breasts, and a proud head set superbly on a full round throat.

"*Bon soir, Monsieur, Mademoiselle*," de Grandin greeted pleasantly. "I take it that you know why you have been made arrested?"

Norman Northrop cleared his throat a little nervously. "Some absurd charge of larceny! Bring the complainant here; I'll make good any loss he claims to have suffered—"

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin's urbane voice had just the proper tone of incredulity. "Are you so utterly naïf? Could you not guess the charge of larceny was but an *altrape*, a hoax?"

"Then what—" Norman began, seemed to think better of the question, and lapsed into silence.

De Grandin made no answer, and the metal clock in its corner ticked loudly, deliberately. *Tick—tock; tick—tock!*

The little Frenchman reached into his waistcoat pocket, and took out his slim gold watch and swung it by its chain. Back and forth, pendulum-like, in perfect accord to the clock's deliberate ticking the watch swung, its brightly polished surface shining

like a dazzling disc of radiance in the cruel white light from the electric bulb.

"Tick—tock—swing—swing! I felt my head begin to move from side to side in rhythm with the ticking clock and swaying watch. There was an almost overwhelming fascination in the synchronized sound and movement. I saw Norman and the girl look away, turn their gaze upon the floor, even close their eyes, but in a moment they again looked at the blindingly-bright watch as it swayed in time to the clock's slow tick.

"Would it astonish you to learn that the statute against witchcraft has never been repealed in this state?" de Grandin asked in an almost gentle voice. "It was an oversight on the part of the legislature, of course, but"—the watch swayed slowly and the clock ticked loudly—"but it is still entirely possible for one—or two—to be convicted of the crime today, and made to undergo the ancient penalty. The stake, the fire—" His soft voice paused, but still the clock ticked loudly, slowly; still the blindingly-bright watch swung in long, sweeping arcs.

THE prisoners watched the swaying golden disc in fascination. First their heads turned slowly as it swung before them, then only their eyes moved in their motionless faces, finally the woman's chin fell downward to her chest. The man held but a few minutes longer, but finally his eyes closed and his head inclined toward one shoulder.

"Quickly, my friend," de Grandin thrust the watch back in his pocket as he rose. "Bid Costello have the cots brought in."

The lieutenant was ready, and as I opened the door two policemen trundled in a pair of wheeled stretchers of the kind used for emergency cases, lifted the unconscious man and woman on them and stood awaiting further orders.

"Non, not that way, *mes braves*," de Grandin told them. "Their heads should be to the west and their feet to the east, that the magnetic currents of the earth may flow through them. Ah, so! *Très bon*."

For a minute or so he stood at the foot of the cots, then, "Aristeas, Kartaphilos, Ahasverus Buttadaeus, or by whatever name

you are known, I order you to quit these bodies!" he whispered sharply. "Go, seek thy proper place, wherever that may be, but trouble Norman Northrop and Margaret Forrester no more! Begone!" He struck the unconscious man a sharp blow in the face, then to the woman he ordered, "Go thou, too, female counterpart of yon male wanderer. Go, get thee hence, ere I call down the ancient judgments on thee—the rack, the thumbscrews, the stake, the fire—" A sharp slap sounded. He had struck the woman in the face.

A silence we could fairly hear succeeded, for he had stopped the clock, and even the street noises outside were insulated from the little basement cell. There came a faint moan from the man on the wheeled litter. "Nancy!" he whimpered. "Nancy, dear, please try to believe me. I know you cannot recognize me, but this is I, your husband Norman—"

"Who says you are not recognizable, Monsieur, de Grandin cut in jubilantly. "Come, rise; get on thy feet"—he held his hand out to Norman. Madame your wife is waiting in the corridor outside. She has been told much of your story, and while she does not understand—*eh bien*, did not the good St. Paul say it? 'Love believeth all things.' Go to her, take her in your arms and tell her that you love her, and her only."

He faintly pushed the young man from the room and tiptoed to the bier on which the woman lay. "Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle Forrester!" he called softly.

"Wh—what?" The girl half rose, dropped back upon the litter and gave a small mewling cry. "Oh, *don't*—I tell you I *am* Margaret Forrester—"

"Of course you are, and who says otherwise is an unconscionable liar!" the little Frenchman chuckled. "You are indeed none other. Mademoiselle, and you are in proper person, too!"

The girl sat up and looked about the barren room half fearfully. Then she looked down at her hands. "*O-o-oh!*" the exclamation was a squeal of ecstasy. "They are my hands—*my* hands; my very own!" She raised her long, slim feet and looked at them and at the shapely legs and ankles to which they

were attached as if she'd never seen anything so beautiful. "My feet my legs—"

"And very pretty feet and legs they are, too," Jules de Grandin broke in gallantly. "Come, there is one outside who will be much surprised to see you. Monsieur Horace Hendry from the bank, who has been nursing your estate in your absence." He smiled and put a finger to his lips. "We shall not tell him everything we know, shall we? When he asks where you were—*tenez*, is it not woman's right to be mysterious?"

"Oh," the girl exclaimed, as she put both feet to the floor, took de Grandin's face between her large and well formed hands and kissed him first on one cheek, then on the other, and finally on the mouth. "Oh, you wonderful, wonderful little man! It's as if you'd brought me back from the dead! When you told me that you'd try this afternoon I hadn't any faith, but—"

"Mademoiselle!" his voice was filled with shocked reproach. "Remember, I am Jules de Grandin!"

"NO, I shall not try to tell you it was simple," he assured me as we drove home. "It was most damnably complicated, and I was not at all certain of the outcome till the end. Two and two is always four, but what if one mistakes a 3 for a 2? *Pardieu*, the sum will not meet the requirements, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"I went about my adding thus: When Monsieur Norman came to us last night I thought at first as you did. 'We have here a dement, bursting with delusions,' I tell me. But as he talked and I observed the youthful ardor of his speech in such strange contrast to his aged body, I began to wonder. And then all of a sudden a memory came to me. The journal's story of the strange old woman who insisted she was Mademoiselle Forrester, and kept insisting what was obviously not so till they clapped her into durance in the lunatic asylum."

"'Jules de Grandin,' I ask me, 'are it not odd that a man and a woman should have the same delusions, and at approximately the same time?'"

"It are entirely extraordinary, Jules de Grandin, I agree with me.

"So I go to the newspaper to refresh my memory, and there I borrow a picture of the disappeared young lady. I take it to Madame Nancy for her inspection, and without a moment's hesitation she identifies it as that of the woman who had gone away with her husband.

"Then, I ask you, what was it I did? *Parbleu*, I went to the asylum where they had that aged woman in confinement and talked with her. *Nom d'une barbe d'un chameau vert*, the story that she tells is strangely like that told by the old man who claims to be Monsieur Northrop!"

"She had been swimming in the sea near Port of Spain in Trinidad when she was accosted by an aged woman who met her as she emerged from the water and heaped insults and abuse on her. At last she could endure no more and struck her tormentor, whereat her whole arm seemed to be paralyzed, and she stood helpless on the sand.

"Then up there came a man, a man of sixty years or more, who took the woman by the hand and raised her, then seized the helpless young woman's hand and started to move round and round. And as they circled round upon the sand they crooned a song about Aristeas, and Kartaphilos and the rest of those queer names by which *le juif errant* has been known in different lands.

"Now I was sure that it was 2 and 2 and not some other figures that I added, and the answer must be 4!"

"Apparently their technique was unvarying. They induced someone previously chosen for his physical appearance to strike one of them, rendering him unconscious for a moment. Then they began their chant, their dance, their witches' incantation, and when the chant and dance were ended the stricken one had moved into the victim's body, leaving his old form to house the victim's soul or spirit or ego—whatever you may care to call it."

"Mademoiselle Forrester had been chosen as the new 'house' for the female of the pair; they left her in the old body and came to this country, where they settled on Monsieur Northrop as a suitable dwelling-place for the male member of this pair of body-snatchers."

"You know the rest, or nearly all of it. You know how we sent out police alarms, how we had them arrested and brought here, how I induced hypnosis by the ticking of the clock and swinging of my watch, having put the fear of prosecution for witchcraft in them, thereby focusing their attention—forcing it into a single channel, as one might say.

"Apparently unconsciousness was a prerequisite to their leaving the bodies they occupied. I induced it by hypnosis, then, since they were unable to work their charm, they took their flight to *le bon Dieu* only knows where when I ordered them to depart. And when they left, the spirits of Monsieur Norman and Mademoiselle Margaret returned to their proper bodies."

"What became of the—er—old bodies?" I asked as we turned into my driveway.

HE CHUCKLED. "They will not be used again, my friend. I called the Avondale asylum before we left police headquarters, and was told the aged woman who had claimed to be Miss Forrester had died at just 8:55, which was the moment when I called *la Forrester* from her swoon. Another call I made also. To the rooming house

to which Monsieur Northrop went when he left us. The landlady informed me she had found her latest lodger dead in bed a few minutes before. *Voilà tout.*"

"But see here," I demanded, "who were these things, or demons, or whatever they were, who went around snatching bodies, living in them till they'd passed the climacteric, then trading them for others?"

He raised his shoulders in a shrug. "Who knows? Perhaps they were a wicked witch and wizard who had learned to make those vile exchanges, and thus acquire a pseudo-immortality. Perhaps they were a pair of elementals, that is, preadamite spirits who had never lived in human bodies, but somehow managed to get into them and liked them so well that they continued to tenant them, moving from one to another as a man may change his rented residence as it deteriorates or as he finds a more desirable dwelling.

"Who can say with certainty? Not I, the problem is too much for me."

He paused with a quick elfin grin as we entered the hall. "Is it not possible the ice box contains apple pie and beer to which we can give a more fitting home before we go to bed, Friend Trowbridge?"