

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE



A MAGAZINE of the

BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIII

NUMBER 2

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. 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.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1929, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

Contents for February, 1929

- Cover Design** ----- **Hugh Rankin**
Illustrating a scene in "The Star-Stealers"
- The Ghosts of the Gods** ----- **E. M. Hill 148**
Verse; decoration by Hugh Rankin
- The Star-Stealers** ----- **Edmond Hamilton 149**
A dread menace from outside the universe threatens to drag the solar system to destruction in the cold of outer space
- The Devil-People** ----- **Seabury Quinn 169**
Ghostly and ghastly were the Malay foes against whom the little French phantom-fighter went into action
- Highwaymen** ----- **W. Benson Dooling 191**
A brief story of a highwayman who was outmatched by a shadowy figure on horseback
- The Vengeance of the Dead (Part 1)** ----- **Eli Colter 193**
A two-part serial story of a strange monster whose ghastly depredations terrified the guests at Waggener Wilds

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]



"She was once more a woman of the never-changing East, an elemental female creature stark bare of all the conventions."

A BLEAK northeast wind, sweeping down from the coast of New England and freighted with mingled rain and sleet, howled riotously through the streets as we emerged from Symphony Hall.

"*Cordieu, Friend Trowbridge,*" de Grandin exclaimed between chattering teeth as he turned the fur collar of his greatcoat up about his ears and sunk his head between his shoulders, "Monsieur Washington was undoubtedly a most admirable gentleman in every respect, but of a certainty he chose a most damnable, execrable day on which to be born! Name of a green duck, I am already famished with the cold; come, let us seek shelter, and that with quickness, or I shall expire completely and leave

you nothing but the dead corpse of Jules de Grandin for company!"

Grinning at his vehemence, I bent my head to the blast as we buffeted our way against the howling gale, fighting a path over the sleet-swept sidewalks to the glass-and-iron porte-cochère of *La Pantoufle Dorée*.

As we swept through the revolving plate-glass doors a sleek-looking gigolo with greased hair and beady eyes set too close together snatched at our hats and wraps with an avidity which betrayed his Levantine ancestry, and we marched down a narrow, mirror-lined hall lighted with red-shaded electric bulbs. From the dining-room beyond came the low, dolorous moaning of saxophones blended with the blurred monody of

indiscriminate conversation and the shrill, piping overtones of women's laughter. On the cleared dancing-floor in the center of the room a file of shapely young women in costumes consisting principally of beads and glittering rhinestones danced hec-tically, their bare, powdered arms, legs and torsos gleaming in the glare of the spotlight. The close, super-heated air reeked with the odor of broken food and the effluvia from women's perfumed gowns and bodies, while the savage, heathen snarl of the jazz band's jungle music throbbed and palpitated like a fever patient's pulses. Soft fronds of particolored silk, sweeping gracefully down from the center of the ceiling, formed a tentlike roof which billowed gracefully with each draft from the doors, and the varicolored lights of the great crystal chandelier gleamed dully through the drifting fog-whorls of tobacco smoke.

"U'm?" de Grandin surveyed the scene from the threshold. "These children of present-day America enjoy more luxury than did their country's father on his birthday at Valley Forge a hundred and fifty-two years ago tonight, Friend Trowbridge," he commented dryly.

"How many in the party, please?" demanded the head waiter. "Only two?" Disdain and hauteur seemed fighting for possession of his hard-shaven face as he eyed us frigidly.

"Two, most certainly," de Grandin replied, then tapped the satin lapel of the functionary's dress coat with an impressive forefinger, "but two with the appetites—and thirsts—of four, *mon garçon*."

Something like a smile flickered across the cruel, arrogant lips of the servitor as he beckoned to a waiter-captain, who led us to a table near the wall.

"*Volcurs*—robbers, bandits!" the little Frenchman exclaimed as he surveyed the price list of the menu. "However, it is *nécessaire* that one

eats," he added philosophically as he made his choice known to the hovering waiter.

A matronly-looking, buxom woman of uncertain age in a modestly cut evening gown circulated among the guests. Seemingly acquainted with everyone present, she stopped here and there, slapping a masculine back in frank friendship and camaraderie every once in a while, exchanging a quip or word of greeting with the women patrons.

"Hullo, boys," she greeted cordially as she reached our table, "having a good time? Need anything more to brighten the corner where you are?"

"*Madame*," de Grandin bent forward from the hips in a formal Continental bow, "if you possess the influence in this establishment, you can confer the priceless favor on us by procuring a *soupeçon* of *eau-de-vie*. Consider: we are but just in from the outdoor cold and are frozen to the bone on all sides. If——"

"French!" From the delighted expression on the lady's face it was apparent that the discovery of de Grandin's nationality was the one thing needed to make her happiness complete. "I knew it the moment I laid eyes on you," she assured him. "You boys from across the pond simply *must* have your little nip, mustn't you? Fix it? I'll tell the world I can. Leave it to Mamma; she'll see you get a shot that'll start your blood circulatin'. Back in a minute, Frenchy, and, by the way"—she paused, a genial smile on her broad, rather homely face—"how about a little playmate to liven things up? Someone to share the loneliness of a stranger in a strange land? I got just the little lady to do the trick. She's from over the water, too."

"*Mordieu*, my friend, it seems I have put my foot in it up to the elbow," de Grandin deplored with a grimace of comic tragedy. "My request for a drink brings us not only

the liquor, but a partner to help consume it, it would seem. Two hundred francs at the least, this will cost us, I fear."

I was about to voice a protest, for supping at a night club was one thing, while consorting with the paid entertainers was something very different, but my remonstrances died half uttered, for the hostess bore down upon us, her face wreathed in smiles, a waiter with a long-necked bottle preceding her and a young woman—dark, pretty and with an air of shy timidity—following docilely in her wake. The girl—she was little more—wore a rich, black fur coat over a black evening gown and swung a small black grosgrain slipper bag from her left wrist.

"Shake hands with Ma'mselle Mutina, Frenchy," the hostess bade. "She's just as lonesome and thirsty as you are. You'll get along like mocha and java, you two."

"*Enchanté, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin assured her as he raised her slender white fingers to his lips and withdrew a chair for her. "You will have a bit of food, some champagne, perhaps, some——" he rattled on with a string of gallantries worthy of a professional boulevardier while I watched him in mingled fascination and disapproval. This was a facet of the many-sided little Frenchman I had never seen before, and I was not especially pleased with it.

Our table-mate seated herself, letting her opulent coat fall back over her chair and revealing a pair of white, rounded shoulders and arms of singular loveliness. Her eyes rested on the table in timid confusion. As de Grandin monopolized the conversation, I studied her attentively. There was no doubting her charm. Slim, youthful, vibrant, she was, yet restrained with a sort of patrician calm. Her skin was not the dead white of the powder-filmed performers of the cabaret, nor yet the pink of the athletic woman's; rather

it seemed to glow with a delicate undertone of tan, like the old ivory of ancient Chinese carvings or the richest of cream. Her face was heart-shaped rather than oval, with almost straight eyebrows of jetty blackness, a small, straight nose and a low, broad forehead, blue-black hair that lapped smoothly over her tiny ears like folded raven's wings, and delicate, sensitive lips which, I knew instinctively, would have been lusciously red even without the aid of the rouge with which they were tinted. When she raised timid, troubled eyes to de Grandin's face I saw the irises inside the silken frames of curling black lashes were purple as pansy petals. "Humph," I commented mentally, "she's beautiful—entirely too good-looking to be respectable!"

The waiter brought a chicken sandwich and—to my unbounded astonishment—a bottle of ginger ale for her, and as she was about to lift a morsel of food to her lips I saw her purple eyes suddenly widen with dread and her cheeks go ash-pale with fright.

"*M'sieu,*" she whispered, leaning impulsively across the table, "do not look at once, I implore you, but in a moment glance casually at the table at the far corner of the room and tell me if you see anyone there!"

Restraining an impulse to wheel in my chair, I held myself steady a moment, then with elaborate unconcern surveyed the room slowly. At the table indicated by the girl sat four men in dinner clothes. Leanness—the cadaverous emaciation of dissecting-room material—was their outstanding characteristic. Their cheeks were gaunt and hollow, their lips so thin that the outline of the teeth could be marked through them, and every articulation of their skulls could be traced through the tightly stretched, saddle-brown skin of their faces. But a second's study of their death's-head countenances revealed a more sinister feature. Their eyes

were obliquely set, like cats', yellow-green and cruel, with long slits for pupils. Changeless in expression they were; set, fixed, inscrutable, pitiless as any panther's—waiting, watching, seeing all, revealing nothing. I shuddered in spite of myself as I forced my gaze to travel casually over the remainder of the room.

De Grandin was speaking in a low, suppressed whisper, and in his little round blue eyes there snapped and sparkled the icy flashes which betrayed excitement. "*Mademoiselle,*" he said, "I see four monkey-faced heathen seated at that table. Hindoos they are by their features, perhaps Berbers from Africa, but devil's offspring by their eyes, which are like razors. Do they annoy you? I will order them away, I will pull their crooked noses—*pardieu*, I shall twist their flap-ears before I boot them from the place if you do but say the word!"

"Oh, no, no!" the girl breathed with a frightened shudder, and I could see it was as if a current of cold horror, something nameless and terrible, flowed from the strange men to her. "Do not appear to notice them, sir, but—*Aristide!*" she beckoned to a waiter hurrying past with a tray of glasses.

"Yes, *Ma'mselle?*" the man answered, pausing with a smile beside her chair.

"Those gentlemen in the corner by the orchestra"—she nodded ever so slightly toward the macabre group—"have you ever seen them here before?"

"Gentlemen. *Ma'mselle?*" the waiter replied with a puzzled frown as he surveyed the table intently. "Surely, you make the joke with *Aristide*. That table, she are vacant—the only vacant one in the place. It are specially reserved and paid for, but——"

"Never mind," the girl interrupted with a smile, and the man hurried off on his errand.

"You see?" she asked simply.

"*Barbe d'une poule bleu*, but I do not!" de Grandin asserted. "But——"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "Oh, do not let them think we notice them; it would make them frenzied. When the lights go out for the next number of the show, I shall ask a great favor of you, sir. You are a chivalrous gentleman and will not refuse. I shall take a package from my handbag—see, I trust you perfectly—and pass it to you beneath the table, and you will take it at once to 849 Algonquin Avenue and await me there. Please!" Her warm soft fingers curled themselves about his hand with an appealing pressure. "You will do this for me? You will not fail?—you are not afraid?"

"*Mademoiselle,*" he assured her solemnly, returning her handclasp with compound interest, "I shall do it, though forty thousand devils and devilkins bar the way."

As the lights in the big central chandelier dimmed and the spotlight shot its effulgence over the dancing-floor, a petite blond maiden arrayed in silver trunks, bandeau and slippers pranced out between the rows of tables and began singing in a rasping, nasal voice while she strutted and jiggled through the intricate movements of the Baltimore.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge," ordered de Grandin abruptly, stowing something in his pocket at the same time. "We go, we leave; *allez-vous-en!*"

I followed stumblingly through the comparative darkness of the dining-room, but paused on the threshold for a final backward glance. The zone of spotlight on the dancing-floor made the remainder of the place inky black by contrast, and only the highlights of the table napery, the men's shirt-fronts and the women's arms and shoulders showed indistinctly through the gloom, but it seemed to me the oblique, unchanging eyes of the sinister quartet at the corner table

followed us through the dark and shone with sardonic phosphorescence, as the queeting eyes of hungry cats spy out the movements of mice among the shadows.

“THIS is the craziest thing you’ve ever done,” I scolded as our taxi gathered speed over the slippery street. “What do we know about that girl? Nothing, except she’s an habitu  of a none too reputable night club. She may be a dope peddler for all we know, and this may be just a scheme to have us carry her contraband stuff past the police; or it may be a plan for hold-up and robbery and those devilish-looking men her accomplices. I’d not put any sort of villainy past a gang like that, and—”

De Grandin’s slender, mocha-gloved fingers beat a devil’s tattoo on the silver knob of his ebony cane as he regarded me with a fixed, unwinking stare of disapproval. “All that you say may be true, my friend,” he admitted; “nevertheless, I have a mind to see this business through. Are you with me?”

“Of course, but—”

“There are no buts, *cher ami*. Unless I mistake rightly, we shall see remarkable things before we have done, and I would not miss the sight for half a dozen peaceful nights in bed.”

As we rounded a corner and turned into the wide, tree-bordered roadway of Algonquin Avenue another car sped past us through the storm, whirling skid-chains snarling savagely against its mudguards.

2

A REAL estate agent’s sign announced that the substantial brownstone residence which was 849 Algonquin Avenue was for sale or rent on long-term lease and would be altered to suit the tenant. Otherwise the place was as much like every other

house in the block as one grain of rice is like the others in a bag.

Hastening up the short flagstone path leading from the sidewalk, de Grandin mounted the low brownstone stoop, felt uncertainly a moment, located the old-fashioned pull-door-bell and gave the brass knob a vigorous yank.

Through the mosaic of brightly stained glass in the front door panel we could desery a light in the hall, but no footsteps came in answer to our summons. “*Morbleu*, this is villainous!” the little Frenchman muttered as an especially vicious puff of wind hurled a barrage of sleet into his face. “Are we to stand here till death puts an end to our sufferings? I will not have it!” He struck a resounding blow on the door with the knob of his walking-stick.

As though waiting only the slightest pressure, the unlatched door swung back beneath the impact of his cane, and we found ourselves staring down a long, high-ceiled hall. Under the flickering light of an old-fashioned, prism-fringed gas chandelier we glimpsed the riotous colors of the Oriental rugs with which the place was carpeted, caught a flash of king-blue, rose, and rust-red from the sumptuous prayer cloth suspended tapestrywise on the wall, but gave no second glance to the draperies, for at the far end of the passage was that which brought an excited “*A-a-ah?*” from de Grandin and a gasp of horror from me.

The place was a shambles. I lunched forward like a doll with a broken back, an undersized, dark-skinned man in white drill jacket, batik sarong and yellow turban squatted in a low, blackwood chair and stared endlessly before him into infinity with the glazed, half-pleading, half-expressionless eyes of the newly dead. A smear of red, wider than the palm of a man’s hand, and still slowly spreading, disfigured the

left breast of his white jacket and told the reason for his death.

Half-way up the stairway which curved from the farther end of the hall another man, similarly attired, had fallen backward, apparently in the act of flight, and lay against the stair-treads like a worn-out tailor's dummy carelessly tossed upon the carpet. His bare brown feet, oddly bent on flaccid ankles, pointed upward; head and hands, jolling downward with an awful awkwardness, were toward us, and I went sick with horror at sight of the open, gasping mouth and set, staring eyes in the reversed face. Under his back-bent chin a terrific wound gaped in his throat like the butcher's mark upon a slaughtered sheep.

"*Grand Dieu!*" de Grandin murmured, surveying the tragic relics a moment; "they were thorough, those assassins."

Darting down the corridor he paused beside the corpses, letting his hand rest on each a moment, then turned away with a shrug. "*Dead comme un mouton,*" he observed almost indifferently, "but not long so, my friend. They are still soft and warm. If we could but—*Dieu de Dieu*—another? Oh, villainous! monstrous! infamous!"

Stepping through an arched doorway we had entered a large room to the left of the hall. A carved black-wood divan stood at the apartment's farther end, and a peacock screen immediately behind it. A red-shaded lamp threw its softly diffused light over the place, mellowing, to some extent, the dreadful tableau spread before us. Full length among the gaudy, heaped-up pillows of the divan a woman reclined indolently, one bare, brown arm extended toward us, wrist bent, hand drooping, a long, thin cheroot of black tobacco held listlessly between her red-stained fingers. Small, she was, almost childishly so, her skin golden as sun-ripened fruit, her lips red as though

stained with fresh pomegranate juice, and on the loose robe of sheer yellow muslin which was her only garment glowed a redder stain beneath the gentle swell of her left bosom. Death had been kinder to her than to the men, for her large, black-fringed eyes were closed as though in natural sleep, and her lips were softly parted as if she had gently sighed her life away. The illusion of slumber was heightened by the fact that on the henna-stained toes of one slender foot was balanced a red-velvet slipper heavily embroidered with silver thread while its mate had fallen to the floor, as though listlessly kicked off by its wearer.

Treading softly as though passing the sanctuary of a church, the little Frenchman approached the dead woman, felt her soft, rounded arm a moment, then pinched daintily at the cheroot between her dead fingers. "*Parbleu, yes!*" he nodded vigorously. "It was recent, most recent, Friend Trowbridge. The vile miscreants who did this deed of shame had but just gone when we arrived; for see, her flesh still glows with the warmth of life, and the memory of its fire still lingers in this cigar's tobacco. Not more than ten, nor eight, nor scarcely six minutes can have passed since these poor ones were done to death.

"*Eh bien!*"—he bent his left hand palm upward, consulting the tiny watch strapped to the under side of his wrist, and turned toward the door with a faint shrug—"anyone can deplore these deaths; it is for Jules de Grandin to avenge them. Come, we must notify the gendarmes and the coroner, then——"

"What about Mademoiselle Mutina?" I asked maliciously. "You promised to wait here for her, you know."

He paused a moment, regarding me intently with his fixed, level stare. "*Précisément,*" he assented grimly, "what about her? It remains to be

seen. As for my promise—*mordieu*, when I was a little lad I promised myself I should one day be President of the *République*, but when I grew to a man's estate I found too many important things to do." He swung back the front door, thrust his collar up about his ears with a savage jerk and strode across the low porch into the howling storm.

What warned me to look up I shall never know, for the natural course to have followed would have been that taken by de Grandin and bend my head against the wind; but a subtle something, something so tangible that it was almost physical, seemed to jerk my chin up from my greatcoat collar just in time. From the areaway beneath the porch steps, staring at the retreating Frenchman with a malignancy utterly bestial, was a pair of oblique, yellow-green eyes.

"Look out, de Grandin!" I shrieked, and even as I called I realized the warning was too late, for an arm shot upward, poising a dully gleaming weapon—a dagger of some sort, I thought—for a throw.

Scarcely conscious of my act, I acted. Throwing both feet forward, I slipped on the glassy sleet with which the stone steps were veneered, and catapulted down them like a trunk sweeping down a baggage-chute. My feet landed squarely against the Frenchman's legs, knocking him sprawling, and something whizzed past my ear with a deadly, whirring sound and struck against the flagstone path beyond with a brittle, crackling clash.

Fighting to regain my footing like a cat essaying the ascent of a slate gable, I scrambled helplessly on the sleet-glazed walk, saw de Grandin right himself with an oath and dive head-foremost toward the area where his assailant lurked.

For an instant everything was chaos. I saw de Grandin miss his step and lurch drunkenly over the icy footwalk; saw his brown-skinned

assailant spring upon him like a panther on its prey; realized dimly that someone had charged across the narrow yard and sprung to my little friend's aid; then was knocked flat once more by a vicious kick which missed my face only a hair's breadth and almost dislocated my shoulder.

"Catch him, Friend Trowbridge—he flies!" de Grandin shouted, disengaging himself from his rescuer's arms and rushing futilely after his fleeing opponent. Sure-footed as a lynx, the fellow ran over the slippery pavement, crossed the roadway and bolted down the connecting street, disappearing from sight as though swallowed up by the enveloping storm.

"*Merci beaucoup, Monsieur,*" de Grandin acknowledged as he turned to his deliverer, "I have not the honor of knowing your name, but my obligation is as great as your help was timely. If you will be so good as to—Trowbridge, my friend, catch him, he swoons!"

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," the Frenchman ordered, "do you improvise some sort of bandage while I seek conveyance; we must bear him to the house and staunch his wound, else he will bleed to death."

WHILE de Grandin sought frantically for a taxicab I opened the stranger's clothes and wadded my handkerchief against the ugly knife-wound in his upper arm. Crude and makeshift as the device was, it stopped the flow of blood to some extent, and, while still unconscious, the man did not appear measurably worse off when we arrived at my office some twenty minutes later. While I cut away his shirt sleeve and adjusted a proper pad and bandage, de Grandin was busily telephoning our gruesome discoveries to police headquarters.

A stiff drink of brandy and water forced between his lips brought a semblance of color back to the fainting man's cheeks. He turned his head

slowly on the pillow of the examination table and muttered something unintelligible; then, with a start, he rose to a sitting posture and cried: "Mutina, dear love: it is I—Richard! Wait, Mutina, wait a mo——"

As if a curtain had been lifted from before his eyes he saw us and turned from one to the other with an expression of blank bewilderment. "Where—how——" he began dazedly; then: "Oh, I remember, that devil was assaulting you and I rushed in to——"

"To save a total stranger from a most unpleasant predicament, *Monsieur*, for which the stranger greatly thanks you," de Grandin supplied. "And now, if you are feeling somewhat better, will you not be good enough to take another drink—somewhat larger this time, if you please—of this so excellent brandy, then tell us why you call on Mademoiselle Mutina? It so happens that we, too, have much interest in that young lady."

"Who are you?" the youth demanded with sharp suspicion.

"I am Jules de Grandin, doctor of medicine and of the faculty of the Sorbonne, and sometime special agent of the *Sûreté Général*, and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, my very good friend and host," the Frenchman returned with a formal bow. "While saving my life from that miserable, execrable rogue who would have assassinated me, you received an ugly wound, and we brought you here to dress it. And now that social amenities are completed, perhaps you will have the goodness to answer my question concerning Mademoiselle Mutina. Who, may I ask, is she, and what is it you know of her? Believe me, young sir, it is not from idle curiosity, but in the interest of justice, that we ask."

"She is my wife," the young man answered after a moment's thoughtful silence in which he seemed to weigh the advisability of speaking.

"I am Richard Starkweather—perhaps you know my father, Dr. Trowbridge"—he turned to me—"he was president of the old Harrisonville Street Railway before the Public Service took it over."

I nodded. "Yes, I remember him," I replied. "He was two classes ahead of me at Amherst, but we met at alumni gatherings; and——"

"Never mind the reminiscences, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin interrupted, his logical French mind refusing to be swerved from the matter in hand. "You were about to tell us, *Monsieur*——" He paused significantly, glancing at our patient with raised, quizzical eyebrows.

"I married Mutina in Sabuah Sulu, then again in Manila, but——"

"*Parbleu*—you did marry her twice?" de Grandin demanded incredulously. "How comes it?"

Starkweather took a deep breath, like a man about to dive into a cold stream, then:

"I met Mutina in Sabuah Sulu," he began. "Possibly you gentlemen have read my book, *Malay Pirates as I Knew Them*, and wondered how I became so intimately acquainted with the engaging scoundrels. The fact is, it was all a matter of luck. The Dutch tramp steamer, *Wilhelmina*, on which I was going from Batavia to Manila, put in at Labuah, and that's how it began. We all went ashore to see the place, which was only a cluster of Chinese *godowns*, a dozen or so European business places and a couple of hotels of sorts. We saw all we wanted of the dried-mud-and-sand town in a couple of hours, but as the ship wasn't pushing out until sometime in the early morning, several of us looked in on a *honky-tonk* which was in full blast at one of the saloons. I don't know what it was they gave me to drink, but it was surely powerful medicine—probably a mixture of crude white rum and *n'yopi*—whatever it was, it affected me as no Western liquor ever did, and I was dead

to the world in three drinks. The next thing I remember was waking up the following morning, well after sun-up, to find myself with empty pockets and a dreadful headache, floating out of sight of land in a Chinese *sampan*. I haven't the faintest idea how I got there, though I suspect the other members of the party were too drunk to miss me when they put back for the ship, and the proprietor of the dive, seeing me sprawled out there, improved his opportunity to go through my pockets, then lugged me to the waterfront, dumped me into the first empty boat he found and let me shift for myself. Maybe he cut me adrift; maybe the boat's painter came untied by accident. At any rate, there I was, washed out to sea by the ebbing tide, with no water, no food, and not the slightest idea where I was or how far away the nearest land lay.

"I had barely sense and strength left to set the *sampan's* matting sail before I fell half conscious into the bottom again, still so sick and weak with liquor that I didn't care particularly whether I ever made land again.

"Just how long I lay there asleep—drugged would be a better term, for that Eastern liquor acts more like opium than alcohol—I haven't the slightest idea. Certainly it was all day; perhaps I slept clear around the clock. When I awoke, the stars were out and the boat was drifting side-on toward a rocky, jagged shore as if she were in a mill-flume.

"I jumped up and snatched the steering paddle, striving with might and main to bring her head around, but I might as well have tried paddling a canoe with a teaspoon. She drove straight for those rocks as if some invisible hand were guiding her to destruction; then, just as I thought I was gone, a big wave caught her squarely under the poop, lifted her over a saw-toothed reef and deposited her on a narrow, sandy

shingle almost as gently as if she'd been beached by professional sailors.

"I climbed out as quickly as I could and staggered up the beach, but fell before I'd traversed a quarter-mile. The next thing I knew, it was daylight again and a couple of ugly-looking Malays were standing over me, talking in some outlandish tongue, apparently arguing whether to kill me then or wait a while. I suppose the only thing which saved me was the fact that they'd already been through my pockets and decided that as I had nothing but the tattered clothes I lay in, my live body was more valuable than my wardrobe. Anyhow, they prodded me to my feet with a spear butt and drove me along the beach for almost an hour.

"We finally came to a little horse-shoe-shaped cleft in the shore, and just where the sandy shingle met the jungle of *lalang* grass was a village of half a hundred or so white huts clustering about a much larger house. One of my captors pointed toward the bigger building and said something about 'Kapal Besar', which I assumed to be the name of the village headman.

"He was more than that. He was really a sort of petty sultan, and ruled his little principality with a rod of iron, notwithstanding he was nearly ninety years old and a hopeless paralytic.

"When we got into the village I saw the big house was a sort of combined palace and fortress, for it was surrounded by a high wall of sun-dried brick loopholed for cannon and musketry, and with three or four pieces of ancient ordnance sticking their brass muzzles through the apertures. The wall was topped with an abatis of sharpened bamboo stakes, and a man armed with a Civil War model musket and bayonet stood guard at the gateway through which my finders drove me like a pig on its way to market.

"Inside the encircling wall was a space of smooth sand perhaps ten or twelve feet broad; then a wide, brick-floored piazza roofed over with beams of teak as thick as railway ties laid close together on equally heavy stringers, and from the porch opened any number of doorways into the house.

"My guards led, or drove, me through one of these and down a tiled corridor, while a half-naked boy who popped up out of the darkness like a jack-in-the-box from his ease ran on ahead yelling, '*Kapal Besar—hai, Kapal Tuan!*' at the top of his shrill, nasal voice.

"I was surprized at the size of the room to which I was taken. It was roughly oval in shape, quite fifty feet long by twenty-five or thirty at its greatest width, and paved with alternate black and red tiles. The roof, which rose like a sugar-loaf in the center, was supported on A-beams resting on columns of skinned palm-tree boles, and to these were nailed brackets from which swung red-glass bowls filled with coconut-oil with a floating wick burning in each. The result was the place was fairly well illuminated, and I had a good view of the thin, aged man sitting in a chair of carved, blackwood at the farther end of the chamber.

"He was a cadaverous old fellow, seemingly almost bloodless, with skin the color of old parchment stretched tight as a drumhead over his skull; thin, pale lips, and a long, straggling white beard sweeping over his tight green jacket. When he looked at me I saw his eyes were light hazel, almost gray, and piercing and direct as those of a hawk. His thin, high-bridged nose reminded me of a hawk's beak, too, and the bony, almost transparent hands which clutched and fingered the silver-mounted bamboo cane in his lap were like a hawk's talons.

"My two guards made profound

salaams, but I contented myself with the barest nod civility required.

"The old chap looked appraisingly at me while my discoverers harangued him at great length; then, with an impatient motion of his cane, he waved them to silence and began addressing me in Malayan. I didn't know a dozen words of the language, and made signs to him that I couldn't understand, whereupon he switched to an odd, slurring sort of Spanish which I was able to make out with some difficulty.

"Before he'd spoken five minutes I understood my status, and was none too delighted to learn I was regarded as a legitimate piece of sea-salvage—a slave, in plain language. If I had any special talent, I was informed, I'd better be trotting it out for display right off; for, lacking something to recommend me for service in the palace, I would be forthwith shipped off to the yam fields or the groves where the copra was prepared.

"I was at a loss just how to answer the old duffer when I happened to see a sort of guitar lying on the pavement near the door leading to one of the passages which radiated from the audience chamber like wheel-spokes from a hub. Snatching up the instrument, I tuned it quickly, and picking some sort of accompaniment on it, began to sing. I've a pretty fair baritone, and I put more into it that day than I ever did with the college glee club.

"*Juanita, Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground, Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight*, and *Over There* went big with the old man, but the song that seemed to touch his heart was *John Brown's Body*, and I had to sing the thing from beginning to end at least a dozen times.

"The upshot of it was that I found myself permanently retained as court minstrel, had my torn white duds replaced by a gorgeous red jacket and yellow turban and a brilliantly striped *sarong*, and was assigned one

of the best rooms in the palace—which isn't saying much from the standpoint of modern conveniences."

The young man paused a moment, and despite his evident distress a boyish grin spread over his lean, brown countenance. "My big chance came when I'd been there about two months," he continued.

"I prepped at St. John's, and put in a full hitch with the infantry during the war, so the I. D. R. and the manuals of guard duty were as familiar to me as the Scriptures are to a circuit-riding preacher. One day when the disorganized mob old Kapal called his army were slouching through their idea of a guard mount, I snatched his musket from the fellow who acted as top sergeant and showed 'em how to do the thing in proper style. The captain of the guard was sore as a pup, but old Kapal was sitting in the piazza watching the drill, and made 'em take orders from me. In half an hour I had them presenting, porting, ordering and shouldering arms in pretty fair shape, and in two weeks they could do the whole manual, go right by squads and come on right into line as snappily as any outfit you ever saw.

"That settled it. I was made captain-general of the army, wore two swords and a brace of old-fashioned brass-mounted powder and ball revolvers in my waist shawl, and was officially known as Riek-kard Tuan. I taught the soldiers to salute, and the civil population took up the custom. In six months' time I couldn't go for a five-minute stroll without gathering more salutes to the yard than a newly commissioned shavetail in the National Army.

"I'd managed to pick up a working knowledge of the language, and was seeing the people at first-hand, living their lives and almost thinking their thoughts—that's where I got the material for my book. That's how I got Mutina, too.

"One morning after drill Kapal

Besar called me into the audience chamber and waved me to a seat. I was the only person on the island privileged to sit in his presence, by the way.

"My son," he said, "I have been thinking much of your future, of late. In you I have found a very pearl among men, and it is my wish that you rear strong sons to take your place in the years to come. Mine, too, mayhap, for I have no men-children to rule after me and there is none I would rather have govern in my stead when it shall have pleased Allah (praised be His glorious name!) to call me hence to Paradise. Therefore, you shall have the choice of my women forthwith." He clapped his thin old hands in signal as he spoke, and a file of tittering, giggling girls sidled through one of the doors and ranged themselves along the wall.

"Like all Oriental despots, Kapal Besar maintained the *droit de seigneur* rigidly—every woman who pleased him was taken into his seraglio, though the old chap, being close to ninety, and paralyzed from the waist down for nearly twenty years, could be nothing more than nominal husband to them, of course.

"Marriage is simple in Malaya, and divorce simpler. 'Thou art divorced,' is all the husband need say to free himself from an unwanted wife, and the whole thing is finished without courts, lawyers or fees.

"I passed down the line of simpering females, wondering how I was going to sidestep this latest honor royalty had thrust upon me, when I came to Mutina. Mutina signifies 'the Pearl' in Malayan, and this girl hadn't been misnamed. Believe me or not, gentlemen, it was a case of love at first sight, as far as I was concerned.

"She was small, even for a Malay girl—not more than four feet ten, or five feet tall at the most—with smooth, glossy black hair and the tiniest feet and hands I've ever seen.

Though she had gone unshod the greater part of her life her feet were slender and high-arched as those of a duchess of the Bourbon court, with long, straight toes and delicate, filbert-shaped nails; and her hands, though used to the heavy work all native women, royal or not, performed, were fine and tapering, and *clean*. She was light-skinned, too, really fairer than I, for her flesh was the color of ivory, while I was deeply sun-burned; and, what attracted me to her more than anything else, I think, her lips and teeth were unstained by betel-nut and there was no smudge or snuff about her nostrils. As she stood there in her prim, modest Malay costume, her eyes modestly cast down and a faint blush staining her face, she was simply ravishing. I felt my heart miss a beat as I paused before her.

"There was a sort of scandalized buzz-buzz of conversation among the women when I turned to Kapal to announce my choice, and the old fellow himself looked surprized for a moment. I thought he was going to renege on his offer, but it developed he thought I'd made an unworthy decision. I'd noticed without thinking of it that the other women kept apart from Mutina, and old Kapal explained the reason in a few terse words. She was, it seemed, *anak gampang*: that is, no one knew who her father was, and such a condition is even more of a social handicap in Malaya than with us. Further, she was suspected of black magical practises, and Kapal went so far as to intimate she had secured the honor of admission to the *zenana* by the use of *guna-guna*, or love potions. Of course, if I wanted her after all he'd said, why, the misfortune was mine—but I was not to complain I hadn't been fairly warned.

"I told him I wanted her if she'd have me, at which he let out a shrill cackle of a laugh, called her to the

foot of his throne and spoke so quickly for a minute or so that I couldn't follow him, then waved us all away, saying he wanted to take his siesta.

"I MARCHED from the audience chamber to my quarters feeling pretty well satisfied. It really had been a case of love at first sight as far as I was concerned, and I'd made up my mind to pay real courtship to the lovely girl and try to induce her to marry me, for I was determined that, Kapal Besar or no Kapal Besar, I'd not have her as a gift from anyone but herself.

"As I entered my quarters and turned to lay my swords on the couch, I was startled to see a form dart across the threshold and drop crouching to the floor before me.

"It was Mutina. Her little, soft feet had followed me noiselessly down the corridor, and she must have been at my heels when I entered the room.

"*'Kakasih,'* she said as she knelt before me and drew aside her veil, revealing her blushing face, *'laki kakasih amba angku memuji—husband, beloved, I adore thee.'*

"Gentlemen, did you ever take a drink of rich old sherry and feel its warming glow creep through every vein and nerve in your body? That was the way I felt when I realized what had happened. The rigmarole old Kapal reeled off in the throne-room was a combined divorce-and-marriage ceremony. Mutina was my wife, and—my heart raced like a coasting motor car's engine—with her own soft lips she had declared her love.

"Three weeks later they found Kapal Besar dead in his great carved chair, and fear that I would seize the government almost precipitated a riot, but when I told 'em I wouldn't have the throne as a gift and wanted nothing but a *prau* and crew to take Mutina and me to the Philippines,

they darn near forced the crown on me in gratitude.

"Two members of the guard, Hussein and Batjan, with Jobita, Hussein's young wife, asked permission to accompany us, so there was a party of five which set out in the *prau* amid the cheers of the army and the booming of the one of Kapal's brass cannon which could be fired."

Young Starkweather paused in his narrative again, and a sort of puzzled, questioning expression spread over his face. "The day before we left," he went on, "I came into the quarters to get some stuff for the ship and found Mutina backed into a corner, fending off with both hands the ugliest-looking customer I'd ever seen. He was a thin, cadaverous fellow, with slanting, yellow eyes and a face like a walking corpse. I saw in a moment Mutina was deathly afraid of him, and yelled, '*Hei badih iang chelaka!*' which may be freely translated as 'Get to hell out of here, you son of an ill-favored dog!'

"Instead of slinking away as any other native would have done if addressed that way by Rick-kard Tuan, the man just stood there and grinned unpleasantly, if you could call his ugly grimace a grin.

"Sabuah Sulu is a rough place, gentlemen, and rough methods are the rule there. I snatched one of the sabers from my cummerbund and cut at him. The fellow must have been extraordinarily agile; for though I don't see how it happened, I missed him completely, though I'd have sworn my blade cut into his neck. That couldn't have been so, though, for there was no resistance to the steel, and there the man stood, unharmed, after a slash which should have lopped the head clean off his shoulders.

"Mutina seemed more concerned about my safety than the circumstances seemed to warrant, for the intruder was unarmed, while I wore two swords and a pair of pistols, and

after he'd slunk away with a final menacing look she threw herself into my arms and wept as if her heart would break. I comforted her as best I could, then ran out to ask the guard who the mysterious man was, but the sentry swore by the teeth and beard of Allah that he had seen no stranger enter or leave the compound that day."

"U'm—a-a-ah?" murmured Jules de Grandin, twisting furiously at the ends of his little golden mustache. "Say on, my friend, this is of the most decided interest."

"We got to Manila without much trouble," Starkweather continued as he shot a wondering look at the little Frenchman. "We passed through the Sulu Sea, landed on southern Luzon and completed the trip overland. We were married with Christian ceremonies by an army chaplain at Manila, and I cabled home for money, then arranged passage for our entire party.

"Coming back to the hotel after making some last-minute sailing arrangements, I thought I noticed the shifty-eyed johnny who annoyed Mutina the day before we left Sabuah Sulu sneaking down the street, and it seemed to me he looked at me with a malicious grin as he ducked around the corner. It couldn't have been the same man, of course, but the resemblance was striking, and so was the coincidence.

"I felt a sort of premonition of evil as I rushed up to our suite, and I was in a perfect frenzy of apprehension when I opened the door and found the rooms empty. Mutina was gone. So were Hussein, Batjan and Jobita. There was no clue to their whereabouts, nothing to tell why or where they'd gone; nothing at all but—this."

From an inside pocket he drew a leather case and extracted a folded sheet of note-paper from it. He passed it to de Grandin, who perused

it quickly, nodded once, and handed it to me. A single line of odd, unintelligible characters scrawled across the sheet, but I could make nothing of them till Starkweather translated.

"It's Malayan," he explained. "The same words she first spoke to me: '*Laki kakasih amba anghau memuji*—husband, beloved, I adore thee.'

"I was like a crazy man for the next two months. The police did everything possible to find Mutina, and I hired a small army of private detectives, but we never got one trace of any of the three.

"Finally I came home, tried to reconstruct my life as best I could, and wrote my book on the pirates as I had known them.

"Just tonight I learned that Mutina, accompanied by Hussein and Jobita and Batjan, is living in Harrisonville, and that she's an entertainer at La Pantoufle Dorée. I got her address in Algonquin Avenue from one of the club attendants and rushed out there as fast as I could. Just as I entered the yard I saw you scuffling with someone and—believe it or not—I'm sure the man who assaulted you was the one I saw in Sabnah Sulu and later in Manila. I'd recognize those devilish eyes of his anywhere on earth.

"It was good of you gentlemen to bring me here and patch me up instead of sending me to the hospital," he concluded. "but I'm feeling pretty fit again, now, and I must be off. Men, you don't realize, Mutina's in that house, and that slant-eyed devil's hanging around. I've got to go to her right away. I must see Mutina!"

"Then ye'll be after goin' to th' jail, an' nowheres else, I'm thinkin' me boy," a heavy Irish voice announced truculently from the consulting-room door, and Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello strode across the threshold.

3

"MUTINA—in jail?" the young man faltered unbelievably.

"Sure, good an' tight, an' where else should she be?" returned the detective with a nod to de Grandin and me. "'Tis sorry I am ter come sneakin' in on yez like this, gentlemen," he apologized, "but th' office sent me up to Algonquin Avenue hot-foot when yer message wuz received, an' after I'd made me arrest I thought I'd best be comin' here ter talk matters over wid yez. Th' bell didn't seem to ring when I pushed th' button, an' it's a cruel cold night outside, so I let meself in, seein' as how yer light wuz goin' an' I knew ye'd be up an' ready ter talk."

"Assuredly," de Grandin assented with a nod. "But how comes it that you put Mademoiselle—Madame Mutina under arrest, my friend?"

"Why"—the big Irishman looked wonderingly at the little Frenchman—"what else wuz there ter do, Dr. de Grandin, sor? 'Twas yerself as saw what a howly slaughter-house they'd made o' her place, an' dead men—an' women—don't die widout help. So, when th' young woman comes rushin' up ter th' place in a taxi all out o' breath, as ye might say, hot as fire ter be after gittin' inside ter meet someone, why, sez I to meself, 'Ah-ho, me gur-rl, 'tis yerself, an' no one else, as knows sumpin' more about these shenanigans than meets th' naked eye, else ye wouldn't be so anxious ter meet someone—wid never a livin' soul save th' pore dead creatures inside th' house ter meet at all, at all.'

"She started some cock-an'-bull story about havin' a date wid a gent whose name she didn't know at th' house—some foreign man, he were, she said. I'll be bettin' me Sunday boots he wuz a foreigner, too—'twas no Christian American who did those bloody murders, an' ye can be sure o' that, too, savin' yer presence, Dr. de Grandin, sor."

The little Frenchman stroked his tiny wheaten mustache caressingly. "I agree with you, *mon cher*," he assented, "but the young lady's story was not entirely of the gentleman chicken and cow, for it was I whom she was to meet at her house. It was for the purpose of meeting her that Friend Trowbridge and I went there, and found what we discovered. Sergeant Costello, am I a fool?"

"Howly Mither, no!" denied the Irishman. "If they wuz more fools like you in th' wor-rld, Dr. de Grandin, sor, we'd be after havin' fewer funny houses ter keep th' nitwits in, I'm thinkin'."

"Precisely," de Grandin assented. "But I tell you, *mon brave*, Madame Mutina not only did not commit those killings; she suspected nothing of them. Consider: Is it likely she would have made an assignation with Friend Trowbridge and me had she thought we would find evidences of murder there?"

Costello shook his head.

"*Très bon*. Again: It was twenty-one minutes past 11 when Friend Trowbridge and I left her at La Pantoufle Dorée; it was not later than half-past when we arrived at her house, and the poor ones had not been long dead when we got there—their flesh was warm and there was still heat in the murdered woman's cigar; but they had been dead from ten to fifteen minutes, though not much longer. Nevertheless, if we were with Madame Mutina nine minutes before, she could not have been present at the killing."

"But she might 'a' known sumpin about it," the Irishman persisted.

"I doubt it much. At the night club both Friend Trowbridge and I saw several most unbeautiful men who frightened her greatly. It was at sight of them she entrusted some object to me and begged I go to her home with all speed, there to await her coming. As we drove through

the storm on our errand another car passed us with great swiftness. Whether the four unlovely ones rode in it or not I can not say, but I believe they did. In any event, as we left the house after viewing the murdered bodies, a man closely resembling one of them attacked me from behind, and had it not been for good, brave Friend Trowbridge and this so excellent young man here, Jules de Grandin would now be happy in heaven—I hope.

"As it is"—he seized the pointed tips of his mustache in a sudden fierce grip and twisted them till I thought he would tear the hairs loose—"as it is, I still live, and there is earthly work to do. Come, let us go, let us hasten, let us repair immediately to the jail where I may interview the unfortunate, beautiful Madame Mutina.

"No, my friend," he denied as Starkweather would have risen to accompany us, "it is better that you remain away for a time. Mc, I shall undertake that no harm comes to your lady, but for the purposes I have in mind I think it best she sees you not for a time. Be assured, I shall give you leave to greet her at the earliest possible moment."

HIS chin thrust moodily into the upturned collar of his greatcoat, the little Frenchman sat beside me in silence as I drove him and Costello toward police headquarters. As we rounded a corner, driving cautiously to avoid skidding over the sleety pavement, he seemed suddenly to arrive at a decision. "Through Tunlaw Street, if you please, good friend," he ordered. "I would stop at the excellent Bacigalupo's for a little minute."

"At Bacigalupo's?" I echoed in amazement. "Why, Mike has been in bed for hours!"

"Then he must arise," was the uncompromising reply. "I would do the business with him."

No light burned in the windows of the tiny flat where Mike Bacigalupo lived above his prosperous fruit stand, but repeated rings at the bell and poundings on the door finally brought a sleepy and none too amiable Italian head from one of the darkened openings, like an irate tortoise peeping from its shell.

"*Holà, my friend,*" de Grandin hailed, "we are come to buy limes. Have the goodness to put ten or a dozen in a bag for us at once."

"Limas?" demanded the Italian in a shocked voice. "You wanta da lima at half-pas' 14 o'clock? You come to hell—I not come down to sell limas to Benito Mussolini deesa time o' night. *Sap-r-risti!* You mus' t'inka me craze."

For answer de Grandin broke into a flood of rapid, voluble Italian. What he said I do not know, but five minutes later the fruit merchant, shivering with cold inside the folds of a red-flannel bathrobe, appeared at the door and handed him a small paper parcel. More, as we turned away he waved his hand and called, "*Arrivederci, amico mio.*"

I was burning with curiosity as we drove toward headquarters, but long experience with the eccentric little Frenchman had taught me better then to attempt to force his confidence.

It was a frightened and pathetic little figure the police matron ushered into the headquarters room a few minutes later. "*M'sieu'*," she exclaimed piteously at sight of de Grandin, running forward and holding out both slender ivory hands to him, "you have come to save me from this place?"

"More than that, *ma petit chère*: I have come to save you from those who persecute you, if it please heaven," he replied soberly. "You know not why you are arrested, do you?"

"N-no," she faltered. "I came from the club as quickly as I could, but this man and others seized me as I alighted from my taxi. They would not let me enter my own house or see my faithful friends. Oh, *M'sieu'*, make them let me see Hussein and Batjan and Jobita, please."

"*Ma pauvre,*" de Grandin replied, resting his hands gently on her shoulders, "you can not see them ever again. Those of whom we wot—they arrived first."

"D-dead?" the girl stammered half comprehendingly.

He nodded silently as he led her to a seat. Then: "We must see that others do not travel the same path," he added. "You, yourself, may be their next target. You are guilty of no crime, but perhaps it would be safer were you to remain here until——"

As he spoke, never taking his eyes from hers, he rummaged about in his overcoat pocket and suddenly snatched his hand out, crushing one of the limes we had obtained from Bacigalupo between his long, deceptively slender fingers. The pale-gold rind broke beneath his pressure, and a stream of amber juice spurted through the rent, splattering on the girl's bare arm.

"O-o-o-oh—*ai, ai!*" she screamed as the acid liquid touched her flesh, then writhed away from him as though the lime juice had been burning oil.

"*A-hee!*" she gave the shrill, piercing mourning cry of the East as her eyes fastened on the glistening spots of moisture on her forearm, and their round pupils suddenly drew in and shrank to slits like those of a cat coming suddenly into a darkened room from the light.

"*Bien—très bon!*" de Grandin exclaimed, snatching a silk handkerchief from his cuff and drying her arm. "I am sorry, truly sorry, my

poor one; believe me, sooner would Jules de Grandin suffer torture than cause you pain, but it was necessary that I do it. See, it is all well, now."

But it was not all well. Where the gushing lime juice had struck her tender flesh there was a cluster of ugly, red weals on the girl's arm as though her white, soft skin were scalded.

4

FOR a moment they faced each other in silence, the alert, blond Frenchman and the magnolia-white Eastern girl, and mutual understanding shone in their eyes.

"How—how did you know?" she faltered.

"I did not know, my little one," de Grandin confessed in a low voice, "but what I learned tonight caused me to suspect. *Hélas*, I was only too right in my surmise!"

He gazed thoughtfully at the prison floor, his narrow chin tightly gripped between his thumb and forefinger, then:

"Are you greatly attached to the Prophet, my child?" he asked. "Would you consent to Christian baptism?"

She looked at him in bewilderment as she replied: "Of course: is not the man of my heart of the Nazarenes? If it so be they go endlessly to be companions of hell-fire, as the Prophet (on whom be peace!) declares in the book of Imran's family, then let Mutina's face be blackened too at the last great day, and let her go to everlasting torment with the man she loves. I ask nothing better in the hereafter than to share his torture, if torture be his portion, but in this life it is written that I must keep far away, else I bring on him the vengeance of——"

"Enough!" de Grandin interrupted almost sternly. "Sergeant, we must release Madame Mutina in-

stantly. Come, I am impatient to take her hence. Trowbridge, my friend, do you engage a clergyman at once and have him at the house without delay. It is of importance that we act with speed."

Mutina had been booked for detention only as a material witness, and it was not difficult for Costello to procure her release. In five minutes they had left for my house in a taxicab while I drove toward Saint Luke's rectory, intent on dragging the Reverend Leon Barley from his bed.

With the clergyman in tow I entered the study an hour later, finding de Grandin, Mutina and Costello talking earnestly, but Starkweather nowhere in sight. "Why, where is——" I began, but the Frenchman's uplifted finger cut my question off half uttered.

"It is better that we name no names at present. Friend Trowbridge," he warned, then to Dr. Barley:

"This young lady has the desire for baptism, *mon père*; you will officiate forthwith? Dr. Trowbridge and I will stand sponsors."

"Why, it's a little unusual," the pastor began, but de Grandin interrupted with a vigorous nod of his head. "*Parbleu*, it is more unusual than you can suppose," he agreed. "It is with the unusual we have to deal tonight, my friend, and the ungodly, as well. Come, do us your office and do it quickly, for be assured we have not dragged you from the comfort of your bed for nothing this night."

The Reverend Leon Barley, pious man of God and knowing man of the world, was not the sort of carping stickler for the purity of ecclesiastical rules who casts discredit on the clergy. Though uninformed concerning the ceremony, he realized haste was necessary, and adjusted his stole with the deft quickness learned from service with the A. E. F., and before that in the Philippine insurrection.

Swiftly the beautiful, dignified service proceeded:

"Wilt thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of thy life?" asked Dr. Barley.

"I will, by God's help," murmured Mutina softly.

"Mutina"—Dr. Barley's hand dipped into the Minton salad bowl of water standing on the table and sprinkled a few drops on the girl's bowed head—"I baptize thee in the name of the——"

The solemn pronouncement was drowned in a terrible, blood-chilling scream, for as the sacramental water touched her head Mutina fell forward to the floor and lay there writhing as though in mortal agony.

"Gawd A'mighty!" cried Costello hoarsely. "'Tis th' divil's wor-rk, fer sure!"

"*Sang de Dieu!*" cried Jules de Grandin, bending above the prostrate girl. "Look, Friend Trowbridge, for the love of good God, look!"

Face downward, clawing at the rugs and seemingly convulsed in un-supportable torture, lay Mutina, and the gleaming black hair sleekly parted on her small head *was turning snowy white before our eyes!*

"Great heavens, what is it?" asked the minister unsteadily.

The girl's hysterical movements ceased as de Grandin held a glass of aromatic ammonia and water to her lips, and she whimpered softly as her head rolled weakly in the crook of his elbow.

For a moment he regarded her solicitously; then, as he helped her to a chair, he turned to the clergyman. "It would seem the devil makes much ado about being cheated of a victim," he remarked almost casually. "This poor one was the inheritor of a curse with which she had no more to do than the unborn child with the color of his father's hair. *Eh bien*, I have that upstairs which will do more to

revive her body and spirit than all the *eau bénite* in all the world's fountains."

Tiptoeing to the stairs he called: "Richard—Richard, my friend, come down forthwith and see what we have brought!"

There was a pounding of feet on the steps, a glad, wondering cry from the study door, and Richard Starkweather and Mutina, his wife, were locked in each other's arms.

"Come away, quickly, my friends," de Grandin ordered in a sharp whisper as he motioned us from the room. "It is a profanation for our eyes to look on their reunion. Anon we must interrupt them, for there is much to be said and much more to be done, but this moment is theirs, and theirs alone."

5

FIVE of us gathered in my drawing-room after dinner the following evening. Sergeant Costello, mellowed with the effects of an excellent meal, several glasses of fifteen-year-old *liqueur Chartreuse* and the fragrant fumes of an Hoyo de Monterey, lolled in the wing chair to the right of the crackling log fire. Richard and Mutina Starkweather, fingers entwined, occupied the lounge before the fireplace, while I sat opposite Costello. In the center, back to the blaze, small blue eyes flashing and dancing with excitement, tiny waxed mustache quivering like the whiskers of an irritable tom-cat, Jules de Grandin stood with his feet well apart, eyeing us in rapid succession. "Observe, my friends," he commanded, thrusting his hand into the inside pocket of his dinner coat and fishing out a newspaper stone-proof some four inches by eight inches in size; "is it not the grand surprize I have prepared for our evil-eyed friends?"

With a grandiloquent bow he handed me the paper, bidding me

read it aloud. In boldface type the notice announced:

**CHEZ LA PANTOUFLE DORÉE
ENGAGEMENT EXTRAORDINARY!**

The Sensation of the Year!
**La Belle Mutina, former High Priestess of
The Rakshasas**

Will Positively Appear at this Club
During the Supper Hour
Tomorrow Night!

**La Mutina, Far-famed Malayan Beauty,
Will Perform the Notorious**

**DANCE OF THE INDONG
MUTINA**

Disclosing for the First Time
in the Western Hemisphere
The Devilish Rites of the
Rakshasas

(Reservations for this extraordinary attrac-
tion will positively not be received
by mail or telephone.)

I glanced at Mutina, sitting demurely beside her husband, then at the exuberant little Frenchman. "All right, what does it mean?" I asked.

"Ah, my friends, what does it not mean?" he replied with a wave of his hand. "Attend me—carefully, if you please:

"Last night at the club, when the good *Madame* took pity on us and lightened our darkness with the lovely presence of Madame Mutina, I was enchanted. When Madame Mutina invited our attention to the pussy-faced evil ones seated at the corner table I was enraged. When we proceeded to Madame Mutina's house and beheld the new-dead stretched so quietly and pitifully there, their spilled blood crying aloud to heaven—and me—for vengeance, *parbleu*, I was greatly interested.

"My friends, the little feet of Jules de Grandin have covered much territory. Where the eternal snows of the northland fly forever before the ceaseless gales, I have been there. Where the sun burns and burns like the fires of the fundamentalists' hell, there have I been. Nowhere, no land, is a stranger to me. And on my many

travels I have kept my mind, my eyes and my ears widely open. Ah, I have heard the muted mumblings of the dwellers round Sierra Leone, when the frightened blacks crouch in their cabins and scarce breathe the name of the human leopards for fear of dreadful vengeance. In Haiti I have beheld the unclean rites of *voudois* and witnessed the power of *papaloi* and *mamaloi*. The djinns and efrects of Araby, the *dracus*, werewolves and vampires of Hungary, Russia and Rumania, the *bhuts* of India—I know them all. Also I have been in the Malay Archipelago, and know the *rakshasas*. Certainly.

"Consider, my friends: There is no wonder-tale which affrights mankind after the lights are lit which has not its foundation in present or past fact. The legends of the loves of Zeus with mortal women, his liaisons with Danae, Io and Europa, they are but ancestral memories of the bad old days when wicked immortals—*incubi*, if you please—worked their evil will on humanity. In the Middle Ages, when faith burned more brightly than at present, men saw more clearly. Recall the story of *Robert le Diable*, scion of Bertha, a human woman, and Bertramo, a foul fiend disguised as a worthy knight. Remember how this unfortunate Robert was the battleground of his mother's gentle nature and his sire's fiendishness; then consider our poor Madame Mutina.

"In Malaya there exists a race of beings since the beginning of the ages, known variously as the people of Antu or Rakshasa. They are inferior fiends, possessing not much of potent magic, for they are heavily admixed with human half-breeds; but at their weakest they are terrible enough. They can in certain instances make themselves invisible, though only to some people. When visible, the Malays say they can be recognized because of their evil eyes, which are yellow-green and sharp as razors. It was such eyes I saw in the villainous faces

of the ugly ones who frightened Madame Mutina at the club last night. Even so, I did not connect them with the wicked breed of Rakshasas until we had listened to young Starkweather's story. When he told us of the evil-eyed creatures who persecuted his so lovely wife, and how the sentry at the palace gate declared he had seen no stranger leave, though the scoundrel had fled but a moment before, I remembered how Aristide, the waiter, assured us no one sat at the table where we saw the unlovely four with our own eyes even as he spoke.

"Also, had not the young *Monsieur* told us his lovely lady was *anak-gampang*—without known father? But of course. What more reasonable than to suppose her mother had been imposed on by a fiend, even as Bertha of the legend married the foul incubus and was then left without husband at the birth of her daughter? Such things have been.

"Nature, as your American slang has it, is truly grand. She is exceedingly grand, my friends. For every plague with which mankind is visited, good, kind nature provides a remedy, can we but find it. The vampire can not cross running water, and is affrighted of wild garlic blooms. The holy leaves of the holly tree and the young shoots of the ash are terrible to the werewolf. So with the Rakshasa. The fruit and blossom of the lime is to him as molten lead is to us. If he makes an unclean feast of human flesh—of which he is most fond—and disguises it as curried chicken or rice, a drop of lime juice sprinkled on it unmasks it for what it is. A smear of the same juice on his flesh causes him intense anguish, and, while ordinary weapons avail not at all against him—remember how Friend Richard struck one with his saber, yet harmed him not?—a sword or bullet dipped in lime juice kills him to death. Yes.

"Last night, as I thought of these

things, I determined on an experiment. *Tiens*, though it worked perfectly, I could have struck myself for that I caused pain to Madame Mutina when I spilled the lime juice on her.

"Now, here we are: Madame Mutina, beautiful as the moon as she lies on the breast of the sea, was part human, part demon. In Mohammed's false religion they have no cure for such as she. 'What to do?' I ask me.

"'Baptize her with water and the spirit,' I answer. 'So doing we shall save her soul alive and separate that which is diabolic from that which is good in her so lovely body.'

"You all beheld what happened when the holy water of sacrament fell upon her head last night. But, *grâce à Dieu*, we have won thus far. She are now all woman. The demon in her departed when her lovely hair turned white.

"Ah, but there was more to the mystery than this. 'Why were those three poor ones done to death? Why did she leave her husband almost at the threshold of the *lune de miel*—how do you say it?—honeymoon?' Those questions I also ask me. There is but one sure way to find out. This morning I talk seriously with her.

"It are needless for me to say she is beautiful—we are men, we have all the excellent eyesight in our eyes. But it is necessary that I report that the he-creatures of the Rakshasas had also found her exceedingly fair. When it was reported that she would be truly married to Friend Richard, not to be a wife in name only to a paralyzed old dodo of a sultan, they were furious. They sent an ambassador to her to say, 'You shall not wed this man.'

"Greatly did she fear these devil-people, but greater than her fear was her love for the gallant gentleman who would take her to wife in the face of all the palace scandal.

"Now, sacred to these unclean Rakshasas is the coconut pearl, the

pearl which is truly mother-of-pearl because it contains within an outer shell of lovely naere an inner core of true pearl, as the coconut shell encloses the white meat. One of these—and they are very rare—our dear Madame Mutina stole from the Rakshasa temple to hold as hostage for the safety of her beloved. That is what she entrusted to me last night when she beheld the evil-eyed ones at the club.

“But though she held the talisman, she still feared the devil-people exceedingly, and when one of them followed her to Manila and threatened death to her beloved if she consorted with him, though it crushed her heart to do so, she fled from her husband, and hid herself securely.

“A woman’s love plumbs any depths, however, my friends. Just to be near her wedded lord brought ease to her mangled bosom, and so she followed him to America, and because she dances like a snowflake sporting with the wind and a moonbeam flitting on flowing water, she had no trouble in securing employment at La Pantoufle Dorée.

“The Rakshasas have also traveled overseas. Seeking their sacred token they traced Madame Mutina, and would, perchance, have slain her, even as they murdered her companions, had she not trusted us with the pearl and bidden us bear it away to her house. Knowing where she lived, suspecting, perhaps, that she hid the precious pearl there, the evil ones reached the house before us, slew her friends, and waited for us, but we—Friend Trowbridge and I—put one of them, at least, to flight, while the arrival of Sergeant Costello and his arrest of Madame Mutina prevented their working their will on her. Meantime, I hold the much-sought pearl.”

From his jacket pocket he took an object about the size and shape of a hen’s egg, a beautiful, opalescent thing which gave off myriad coruscating beams in the rays of the firelight.

“But where do the evil-eyed sons of Satan and his imps hide themselves? Can we find them?” he asked. “Perhaps yes; perhaps no. In any event, it will take much time, and we wish for speed. Therefore we shall resort to a *ruse de guerre*. This morning, after I talked with Madame Mutina I did rush to the office of *le journal* with a celerity beautiful to behold, and, with the consent of the proprietor of La Pantoufle Dorée, who is an excellent fellow and sells most capital liquor, I inserted the advertisement which Friend Trowbridge has just read.

“*Eh bien*, but the devil-people will surely flock to that cabaret in force tomorrow night. Will they not place reliance in their devilish ability to defy ordinary weapons and attempt to seize the pearl from Madame Mutina as she dances? I shall say they will. But”—he twisted the ends of his mustache savagely—“but they reckon without an unknown host, my friends. You, *cher sergent*, will be there. You, Friend Richard, and you, also, Friend Trowbridge, will be there. As for Jules de Grandin, by the horns, blood and tail of the Devil, he will be there with both feet!

“Ha, *Messieurs les Diables*, tomorrow night we shall show you such a party as you wot not of. Your black blood, which has defied the weapons of men for generations untold, shall flow like springtime freshets when the mounting sun unlocks the icy fetters from the streams!

“And those we do not spoil entirely in the taking, you shall have the pleasure of seating in the electric chair, *mon sergent*,” he concluded with a bow to Costello.

6

EVERY table at La Pantoufle Dorée was engaged for the supper show the following night. Here and there the bald head or closely shaven face of some regular patron caught the

soft lights from the central chandelier, but the vast majority of the tables were occupied by small, dark, sinister-looking foreigners, men with oblique eyes and an air of furtive evil which their stylishly cut dinner clothes and sleekly anointed hair could not disguise. Strategically placed, near every exit, were members of Sergeant Costello's strong-arm squad, looking decidedly uncomfortable in their hired dinner clothes and consuming vast quantities of the free menu provided by Starkweather's liberal arrangements with the management with an air of elaborate unconcern. Four patrolmen in plain clothes lounged near the checkroom counter, eyeing each incoming guest with shrewd, appraising glances.

Near the dancing-floor, facing each other across a small table, sat de Grandin and Starkweather, while Costello and I made ourselves as inconspicuous as possible in our places near the swinging doors which screened the main entrance to the club.

Not many couples whirled and glided on the dancing-floor, for the preponderance of men among the patrons was noticeable, and the usual air of well-bred hilarity which characterized the place was almost entirely lacking.

It was almost half-past 11 when de Grandin gave the signal.

"Now, customers," announced the hostess, advancing to the center of the floor, "we're in for a real treat. You all know Ma'mselle Mutina; she's danced here before, but she never did anything like she's going to show to-night. This is ab-so-lutely the cat's meow, and I don't mean perhaps, either. All set, boys and girls? Come on, then, give the little lady a big hand!"

Two attendants ran forward, spreading a rich Turkish carpet over the smoothly waxed boards of the dancing-floor, and as they retreated every light in the place winked out,

leaving the great room in sudden, absolute darkness. Then, like a thrusting sword-blade, a shaft of amethyst light stabbed through the gloom, centering on the purple velvet curtains beside the orchestra stand. No sound came from the musicians, and the place was so still I could hear Costello's heavy breathing where he sat three feet away, and the faint flutter of a menu-card sounded like the sutter of a wind-blown leaf in a quiet forest clearing.

Gazing fascinated at the curtains, I saw them move ever so slightly, flutter a moment, then draw back. Mutina stood revealed.

One little hand on each curtain, she stood like a lovely picture in a frame, a priceless jewel against a background of opulent purple velvet.

Over her head, covering her snowy hair, was drawn a dark-blue veil, silver-fringed and studded with silver stars, and bound about her brows was a chaplet of gold coins which held the magically glowing, opalescent *indong mutina* against her forehead like the sacred asp on an Egyptian monarch's crown. Her lovely shoulders and bosom were encased in a tight-fitting sleeveless zouave jacket of gold-embroidered cerise satin fringed with gilt hawk-bells. From hips to ankles hung a full, many-plaited skirt of sheerest white muslin which revealed the slim lines of her tapering legs with distracting frankness. About her wrists and ankles were garlands of cunningly fashioned metallic flowers, enameled in natural colors, which clashed their petals together like tiny cymbals, setting up a sweet, musical jingle-jangle each time she moved.

For a moment she poised on slim, henna-stained toes, bending her little head with its jewel of glowing pearl as if in response to an ovation; then, raising her arms full length, she laced her long, supple fingers above her head, pirouetted half a dozen

(Continued on page 284)

The Devil-People

(Continued from page 190)

times till the flower-bells on her ankles seemed to clap their petals for very joy and her sheer, diaphanous skirt stood stiffly out, whirling round her like a wheel of white. Next, with a quick, dodging motion, she advanced a step or two, retreated, and bent almost double in a profound salaam to the audience.

A second of tableau; then with a long, graceful bound she reached the center of the rug spread on the dance floor, turning to the orchestra and snapping her fingers imperatively. A flageolet burst into a strain of rippling, purling minors, a zither hummed and sang accompaniment, a tom-tom seconded with a hollow, thumping rhythm.

"*Hai!*" she cried in gipsy abandon. "*Hai, hai, hai!*"

With a slow, gliding movement she began her dance, hands and feet moving subtly, in perfect harmony. Now she leaned forward till her cerise bodice seemed barely to clear the floor, now she bent back till it seemed she could not retain her balance. Again her little naked feet were motionless on the dark carpet as twin stars reflected in a still pool while her body swayed and rippled from ankle to chin like a cobra rearing upright, and her arms, seemingly boneless, described sinuous, serpentine patterns in the air, her hands bent backward till the fingers almost touched the wrists.

Now pipe and zither were stilled and only the *rhum, rhum, rhum—rhum-rhum*, of the tom-tom spoke, and her torso throbbed and rippled in the *danse du ventre*.

The music rose suddenly to a shrill crescendo and she began to whirl on her painted toes with a wild fandango movement, her arms straight out from her shoulders as though nailed to an invisible cross, her skirt

flickering horizontally about her like some great, white-petaled flower, her little, soft feet making little, soft hissing sounds against the purple carpet as she spun round and round.

Slowly, slowly, her speed decreased. She was like a beautiful top spun at greatest speed, gradually losing its momentum. The music died to a thin, plaintive wail, the pipe whimpering softly, the zither crooning sleepily and the tom-tom's rumble growing fainter and fainter like receding summer thunder.

For a moment she paused, dead-still, only her slim breasts moving as they fought flutteringly for breath. Then, in a high, sweet soprano, she began an old Eastern love song, a languorous, beguiling tune of a people who have made a fine art of love-making for uncounted generations.

For thou, beloved, art to me
As a garden;
Even as a garden of rare and beauteous
flowers,
Roses bloom upon thy lips,
And the mountain myrtle
In thy eyes.
Thy breasts are even as the lily,
Even as the moonflower
Who unveils her pale face nightly
To the passionate caresses of the moon.
Thy hair is as the tendril of the grape. . . .

With slow, gliding steps she retreated toward the archway through which she had come, paused a moment, and held her hands out to the audience, her henna-tipped fingers curled into little, flowerlike cups.

As she halted in her recessional a great shout went up from one of the slant-eyed men nearest the dancing-floor.

In a moment the place was like an unroofed ant-hill. "Lights!" shouted de Grandin, springing from his seat. "Trowbridge—Costello, guard the door!"

In the sudden welter of bright illumination as every light in the place was snapped on, we saw a circle of the strange people forming and slowly closing on Mutina, more than one of the men stealthily drawing a wicked-looking Malay *keris* from beneath his coat.

Thrusting both hands beneath her star-sown veil the girl brought forth a pair of limes, broke their rinds with frantic haste and sprinkled a circle of the acid, amber juice about her on the floor.

An evil-eyed man who seemed to be the leader of the strangers started backward with a snarl of baffled rage as she completed the circle, and looked wonderingly about him.

"Ha, my ugly-faced friend, you did not expect that, *hein?*" asked Jules de Grandin in high good humor. "Me, I am responsible for it. As a half-breed of your cursed devil-tribe, Madame Mutina could no more have touched a lime than she could have handled a live coal, but with the aid of a Christian priest I have freed her from her curse, and now she does defy you. Meanwhile——"

He got no further. With a yell of fury like the scream of a blood-mad leopard, the razor-eyed creature leaped forward, and at his back pressed a half-score of others of his kind.

"Back to back, *mon brave*," de Grandin commanded Starkweather as he thrust his hand inside his jacket and brought forth an eighteen-inch length of flexible, rubber-bound electric cable tipped with a ball of lead in which a dozen steel spikes had been embedded.

Similarly armed, young Starkweather whirled round, bracing his shoulders to the little Frenchman's back.

Feet well apart, de Grandin and his ally swung their improvised maces with the regularity of pendulums.

Screams and curses and cries of surprized dismay followed every

down-stroke of the spiked clubs. The assailants, half their former number, drew back, mouthing obscenities at the pair, then rushed again to the attack.

Mutina was like a thing possessed. Gone was every vestige of Western culture she had picked up during her residence here. She was once more a woman of the never-changing East, an elemental female creature, stark bare of all conventions, glorying in the battle and the savage part her man played in it. Safe inside her barrier of lime juice, she danced up and down in wild elation as de Grandin and Starkweather, slowly advancing across the dance floor, beat a path toward her, smashing arms and ribs and skulls with the merciless flailing of their spiked clubs.

"Bravely struck, O defender of the fatherless!" she screamed. "*Billahi*—by the breath of God, well struck, O peerless warrior!"

"Up an' at 'em, boys!" bellowed Costello, seeming to emerge suddenly from the trance of admiration with which he had watched de Grandin and Starkweather battle. "Give 'em th' wor-rks!"

Like terriers leaping on a pitful of rats, Costello's detectives boiled over the dancing-floor. Blackjacks, previously well soaked in lime juice, brass knuckles similarly treated, and here and there a big, raw fist, still wet with its baptism of acid liquid, struck and hammered against brown faces and dashed devastating blows into wicked, slanting yellow eyes.

"**B**E DAD, DE. de Grandin, sor," declared Costello twenty minutes later as he wrung the little Frenchman's slender white hand. "'tis th' broth of a boy ye are, an' no mistake. Never in all me bor-rn days have I seen a better lad wid th' old shillalah. Glory be to Gawd, but ye'd be th' pride o' all th' colleens an' th' despair o' all the boys if ye

ever went ter Donnybrook Fair, so ye would, sor!"

"**A**VINTAGE, *Madame*," de Grandin cried to the stout hostess who hovered near, uncertain whether to bewail the fight which had emptied her establishment or add her congratulations to Costello's, "a vintage of your rarest, and let it be not less than two quarts. Me, I have serious drinking to do, now that business is finished. Have no fear of the good sergeant. Have I not heard him say more than once that legging of the boot is more a work of Christian charity than a crime? Certainly.

"To us, my friends," he pronounced when the champagne was brought and our glasses filled with bubbling, pale-yellow liquid. "To stout young Monsieur Starkweather, who fights like a very du Gueselin; to Trowbridge and Costello, than whom no man ever had better friends or better comrades; but most of all, beautiful Mutina, to you. To you, who braved the sorrows of a broken heart and the wrath of the devil-people on earth and the tortures of the False Prophet's everlasting hell hereafter for love of him who is your husband. *Cordieu*, never was toast drunk to a nobler, gentler lady—he who says otherwise is a foul liar!"

He sent the fragile goblet crashing to the floor as the pledge was finished, and turned again to the reunited couple. "Your troubles are like the shadows of him who walks westward in the evening, my friends," he assured them. "For ever and for always they lie behind you. As for the foul Rakshasas—pouf! as young Starkweather and I shattered their evil skulls, their power over you is shattered for all time, even as this——" Snatching the glowing *indong mutina* from the girl's diadem he struck it sharply against the table edge. The iridescent shell cracked, almost as though it had been an egg, and from it dropped the most

magnificent pearl I had ever seen. Large as a small marble it was, with a pigeon's-neck luster and deep, opal-like fire-gleams in its depths which held the eyes in fascination as a magic crystal might hold a devotee enthralled. Ignorant as I was of such matters, I knew the thing must be worth at least thirty thousand dollars, perhaps twice that sum.

"To a pearl among women, a pearl among pearls," de Grandin announced, taking Mutina's little hand in his and kissing her painted finger tips, one after the other, then closing them about the lustrous gem. "Take you each other to yourselves, my friends," he bade, "and may the good God bless you and yours for ever and always."

Simply as a child, wholly unmindful of the rest of us, Mutina turned her lips for her husband's caress, and as she did so, I heard her murmur softly: "*Laki kakasih umba kau puji sampei kakol*—best beloved, husband and lover, forever and forever I adore thee!"