

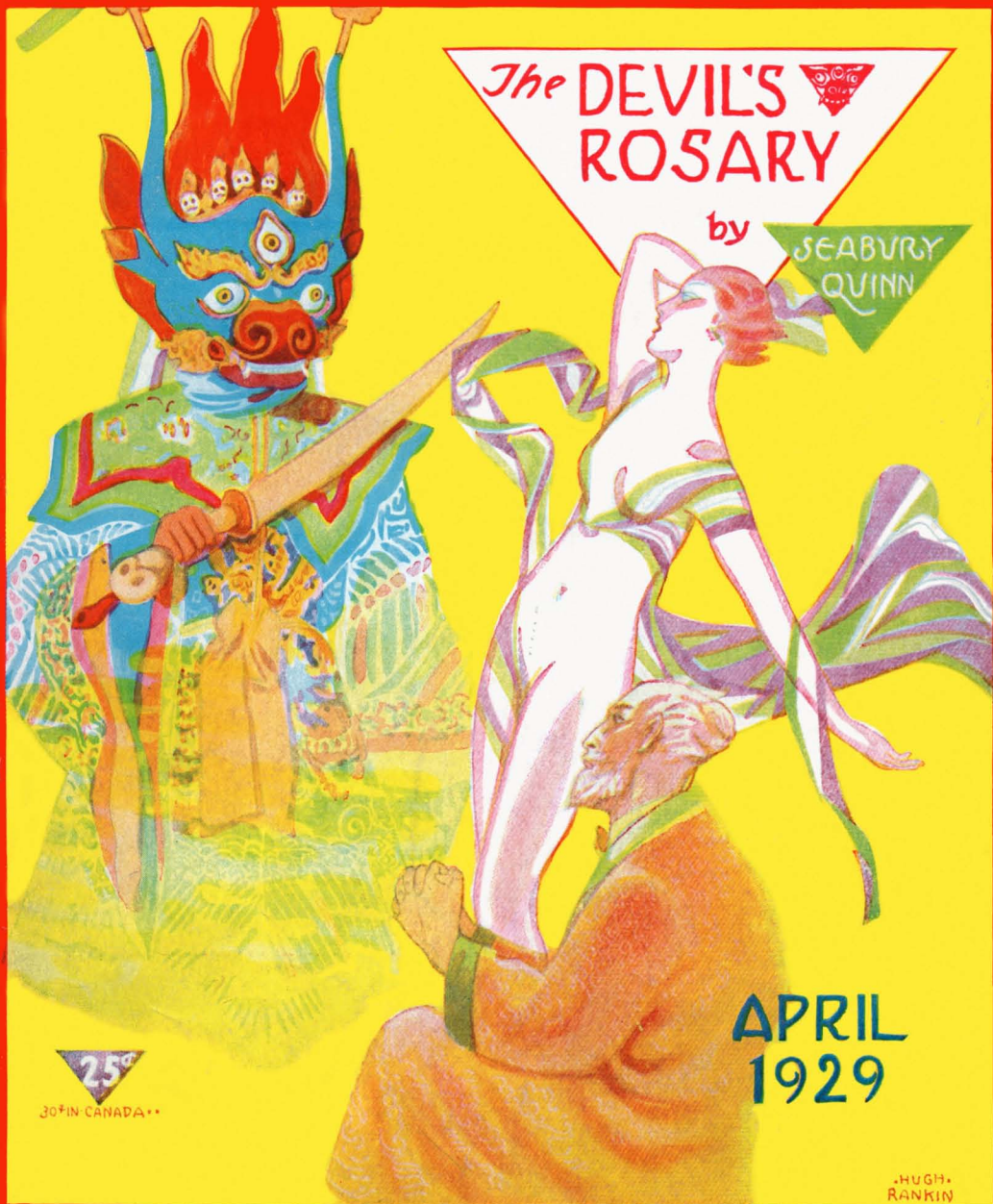
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

The DEVIL'S
ROSARY

by

SEABURY
QUINN



APRIL
1929

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HUGH
RANKIN

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Contents for April, 1929

- Cover Design** **Hugh Rankin**
Illustrating a scene in "The Devil's Rosary"
- Neptune's Neighbors** **Cristel Hastings** 436
Verse
- The Devil's Rosary** **Seabury Quinn** 437
Tibetan devil-worshipers play a thrilling part in this very tale of the French occultist, Jules de Grandin
- The World-Wrecker (Part 1)** **Arlton Eadie** 455
A stirring three-part weird-scientific serial about a scientist who pulled the world from its position in the solar system
- In a Dead Man's Shoes** **Harold Markham** 465
A story of Tyburn gallows and vengeance from beyond the grave—disaster seized the man who betrayed his friend
- Folks Used to Believe:**
- The Unicorn** **Alvin F. Harlow** 472
One of the strange beliefs of our ancestors

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

The Hermit of Chemeketa Mountain	Thomas de V. Harper	473
<i>A strange tale of anthropomorphism, and the fate that befell the man who investigated the hermit and his dogs</i>		
A Dinner at Imola	August W. Derleth	478
<i>Abandoning poison for once, Caesar Borgia took an unusual way to rid himself of an enemy</i>		
The Dunwich Horror	H. P. Lovecraft	481
<i>A colossal story of eerie happenings in a drab New England settlement—a tale of blood-chilling horror</i>		
The City of Iron Cubes (Conclusion)	H. F. Arnold	509
<i>A two-part weird-scientific story by the author of "The Night Wire"—strange invaders from space land in Peru</i>		
Up Irriwaddy Way	Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner	519
<i>A story of man-eating plants and giant fungus growths that attack human beings</i>		
The Goddess of the Painted Priests	Drury D. Sharp	532
<i>Down into the nest of venomous snakes and sparkling jewels she went, to the amazement of the Indian priests</i>		
Sonnet	Clark Ashton Smith	442
<i>Verse</i>		
The Damsel and Her Cat	David H. Keller	543
<i>The high-born maiden lay in a deathlike swoon, but outside the castle terrible things were happening</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Diamond Lens	Fitz-James O'Brien	547
<i>This was the first of the great weird-scientific stories, and it made its author famous</i>		
Moon Mockery	Robert E. Howard	562
<i>Verse</i>		
The Eyrie		563
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		

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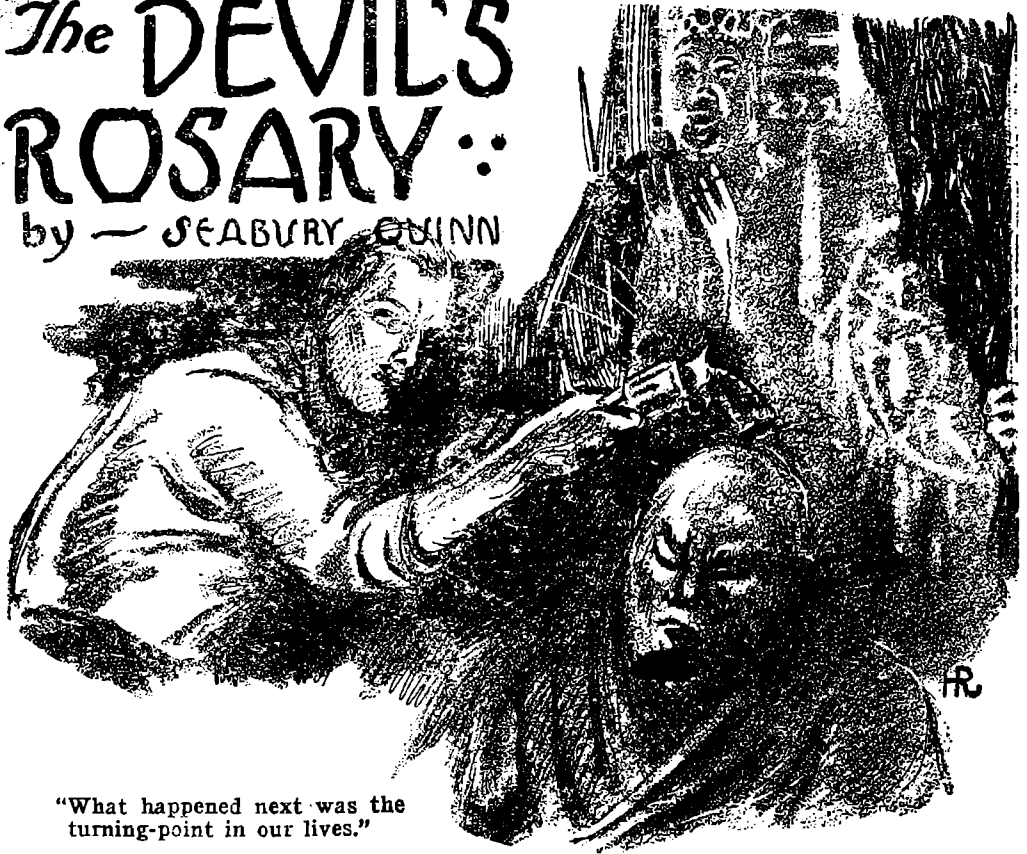
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The DEVIL'S ROSARY

by — SEABURY QUINN



"What happened next was the turning-point in our lives."

MY FRIEND Jules de Grandin was in a seasonably sentimental mood. "It is the springtime, Friend Trowbridge," he reminded as we walked down Tonawanda Avenue. "The horse-chestnuts are in bloom and the blackbirds whistle among the branches at St. Cloud; the tables are once more set before the cafés, and—*grand Dieu, la belle créature!*" He cut short his remarks to stare in undisguised admiration at a girl about to enter an old-fashioned horse-drawn victoria at the curb.

Embarrassed, I plucked him by the elbow, intent on drawing him onward, but he snatched his arm away and bounded forward with a cry, even as my fingers touched his sleeve. "Attend her, my friend," he called; "she faints!"

As she seated herself on the taupe cushions of her carriage, the girl reached inside her silver mesh bag, evidently in search of a handkerchief, fumbled a moment among the miscellany of feminine fripperies inside the reticule, then wilted forward as though bludgeoned.

"*Mademoiselle*, you are ill, you are in trouble, you must let us help you!" de Grandin exclaimed as he mounted the vehicle's step. "We are physicians," he added in belated explanation as the elderly coachman turned and favored us with a hostile stare.

The girl was plainly fighting hard for consciousness. Her face had gone death-gray beneath its film of delicate make-up, and her lips trembled and quavered like those of a child about to weep, but she made a brave effort at composure. "I—I'm—all—right—

thank—you," she murmured disjointedly. "It's—just—the—heat——" Her protest died half uttered and her eyelids fluttered down as her head fell forward on de Grandin's ready shoulder.

"*Morbleu*, she has swooned!" the little Frenchman whispered. "To Dr. Trowbridge's house—993. Susquehanna Avenue!" he called authoritatively to the coachman. "*Mademoiselle* is indisposed." Turning to the girl he busied himself making her as comfortable as possible as the rubber-tired vehicle rolled smoothly over the asphalt roadway.

She was, as de Grandin had said, a "*belle créature*." From the top of her velour hat to the pointed tips of her suede pumps she was all in gray, a platinum fox scarf complementing the soft, clinging stuff of her costume, a tiny bouquet of early-spring violets lending the sole touch of color to her ensemble. A single tendril of daffodil-yellow hair escaped from beneath the margin of her close-fitting hat lay across a cheek as creamy-smooth and delicate as a babe's.

"Gently, my friend," de Grandin bade as the carriage stopped before my door. "Take her arm—so. Now, we shall soon have her recovered."

In the surgery he assisted the girl to a chair and mixed a strong dose of aromatic ammonia, then held it to the patient's blanched lips.

"Ah—so, she revives," he commented in a satisfied voice as the delicate, violet-veined lids fluttered uncertainly a moment, then rose slowly, unveiling a pair of wide, frightened purple eyes.

"Oh——" the girl began in a sort of choked whisper, half rising from her seat, but de Grandin put a hand gently on her shoulder and forced her back.

"Make haste slowly, *ma belle petite*," he counseled. "You are still weak from shock and it is not well to tax your strength. If you will be so good as to drink this——" He extended the glass of ammonia toward

her with a bow, but she seemed not to see it. Instead, she stared about the room with a dazed, panic-stricken look, her lips trembling, her whole body quaking in a perfect ague of unreasoning terror. Somehow, as I watched, I was reminded of a spectacle I had once witnessed at the zoo when Rajah, a thirty-foot Indian python, had refused food, and the curators, rather than lose a valuable reptile by starvation, overrode their compunctions and thrust a poor, helpless white rabbit into the monster's glass-walled den.

"I've seen it; I've seen it; *I've seen it!*" She chanted the litany of terror, each repetition higher, more intense, nearer the boundary of hysteria than the one before.

"*Mademoiselle!*" de Grandin's peremptory tone cut her terrified iteration short. "You will please not repeat meaningless nothings to yourself while we stand here like a pair of stone monkeys. What is it you have seen, if you please?"

The unemotional, icy monotone in which he spoke brought the girl from her near-hysteria as a sudden dash of cold water in the face might have done. "This!" she cried in a sort of frenzied desperation as she thrust her hand into the mesh bag pendent from her wrist. For a moment she ransacked its interior with groping fingers; then, gingerly, as though she held something live and venomous, brought forth a tiny object and extended it to him.

"U'm?" he murmured non-committally, taking the thing from her and holding it up to the light as though it were an oddity of nature.

It was somewhat smaller than a hazel-nut, smooth as ivory, and stained a brilliant red. Through its axis was bored a hole, evidently for the purpose of accommodating a cord. Obviously, it was one of a strand of inexpensive beads, though I was at a loss to say of what material it was made. In any event, I could see nothing about the commonplace little

trinket to warrant such evident terror as our patient displayed.

Jules de Grandin was apparently struck by the incongruity of cause and effect, too, for he glanced from the little red globule to the girl, then back again, and his narrow, dark eyebrows raised interrogatively. At length: "I do not think I apprehend the connection," he confessed. "This"—he tapped the tiny ball with a well manicured forefinger—"may have deep significance to you, *Mademoiselle*, but to me it appears—"

"Significance?" the girl echoed. "It has! When my mother was drowned in Paris, a ball like this was found clutched in her hand. When my brother died in London, we found one on the counterpane of his bed. Last summer my sister was drowned while swimming at Atlantic Highlands. When they recovered her body, they found one of these terrible beads hidden in her bathing-cap!" She broke off with a retching sob and rested her arm on the surgery table, pillowing her face on it and surrendering herself to a paroxysm of weeping.

"Oh, I'm doomed," she wailed between blanching lips. "There's no help for me, and—I'm too young; I don't want to die!"

"Few people do, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin remarked dryly. "However, I see no cause of immediate despair. Over an hour has passed since you discovered this evil talisman, and you still live. So much for the past. For the future you may trust in the mercy of heaven and the cleverness of Jules de Grandin. Meantime, if you are sufficiently recovered, we shall do ourselves the honor of escorting you home."

UNDER de Grandin's adroit questioning we learned much of the girl's story during our homeward drive. She was Haroldine Arkright, daughter of James Arkright, a wealthy widower who had lately

moved to Harrisonville and leased the Broussard mansion in the fashionable west end. Though only nineteen years old, she had spent so much time abroad that America was more foreign to her than France, Spain or England.

Born in Waterbury, Connecticut, she had lived there during her first twelve years, and her family had been somewhat less than moderately well-to-do. Her father was an engineer, and spent much time abroad. Occasionally, when his remittances were delayed, the family felt the pinch of undisguised poverty. One day her father returned home unexpectedly, apparently in a state of great agitation. There had been mysterious whisperings, much furtive going and coming; then the family entrained for Boston, going immediately to the Hoosac Tunnel Docks and taking ship for Europe.

She and her sister were put to school in a convent at Rheims, and though they had frequent and affectionate letters from their parents, the communications came from different places each time; so she had the impression her elders led a Bedouin existence.

At the outbreak of the war the girls were taken to a Spanish seminary, where they remained until two years before, when they joined their parents in Paris.

"We'd lived there only a little while," she continued, "when two gendarmes came to our apartment one afternoon and asked for Daddy. One of them whispered something to him and he turned white as a sheet; then, when the other took something from his pocket and showed it, Daddy fell over in a dead faint. It wasn't till several hours later that we children were told. Mother's body had been found floating in the Seine, and one of those horrible little red balls was in her hand. That was the first we ever heard of them.

"Though Daddy was terribly affected by the tragedy, there was some-

thing we couldn't understand about his actions. As soon as the *Pompes Funèbres* (the municipal undertakers) had conducted the services, he made arrangements with a solicitor to sell all our furniture, and we moved to London without stopping to pack anything but a few clothes and toilet articles.

"In London we took a little cottage out by Garden City, and we lived—it seemed to me—almost in hiding; but before we'd lived there a year my brother Philip died, and—they found the second of these red beads lying on the cover of his bed.

"Father seemed almost beside himself when Phil died. We left—fled would be a better word—just as we had gone from Paris, without stopping to pack a thing but our clothes. When we arrived in America we lived in a little hotel in downtown New York for a while, then moved to Harrisonville and rented this house furnished.

"Last summer Charlotte went down to the Highlands with a party of friends, and——" she paused again, and de Grandin nodded understandingly.

"Has *Monsieur* your father ever taken you into his confidence?" he asked at length. "Has he, by any chance, told you the origin of these so mysterious little red pellets and——"

"Not till Charlotte drowned," she cut in. "After that he told me that if I ever saw such a ball anywhere—whether worn as an ornament by some person, or among my things, or even lying in the street—I was to come to him at once."

"U'm?" he nodded gravely. "And have you, perhaps, some idea how this might have come into your purse?"

"No. I'm sure it wasn't there when I left home this morning, and it wasn't there when I opened my bag to put my change in after making my purchases at Braunstein's, either. The first I saw of it was when I felt for a handkerchief after getting into

the carriage, and—oh, I'm terribly afraid, Dr. de Grandin. I'm too young to die! It's not fair; I'm only nineteen, and I was to have been married this June and——"

"Softly, *ma chère*," he soothed. "Do not distress yourself unnecessarily. Remember, I am with you."

"But what can you do?" she demanded. "I tell you, when one of these beads appears anywhere about a member of our family, it's too late for——"

"*Mademoiselle*," he interrupted, "it is never too late for Jules de Grandin—if he be called in time. In your case we have——" His words were drowned by a sudden angry roar as a sheet of vivid lightning tore across the sky, followed by the bellow of a deafening crash of thunder.

"*Parbleu*, we shall be drenched!" de Grandin cried, eyeing the cloud-hung heavens apprehensively. "Quick, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, assist *Mademoiselle* Haroldine to alight. I think we would better hail a taxi and permit the coachman to return alone with the carriage.

"One moment, if you please, *Mademoiselle*," he ordered as the girl took my outstretched hand; "that little red ball which you did so unaccountably find in your purse, you will let me have it—a little wetting will make it none the less interesting to your father." Without so much as a word of apology, he opened the girl's bag, extracted the sinister red globule and deposited it between the cushions of the carriage seat, then, with the coachman's aid, proceeded to raise the vehicle's collache top.

As the covered carriage rolled rapidly away, he raised his hand, halting a taxicab, and calling sharply to the chauffeur: "Make haste, my friend. Should you arrive at our destination before the storm breaks, there is in my pocket an extra dollar for you."

The driver earned his fee with compound interest, for it seemed to me we transgressed every traffic ordi-

nance on the books in the course of our ride, cutting corners on two wheels, racing madly in the wrong direction through one-way streets, taking more than one chance of fatal collision with passing vehicles.

The floodgates of the clouds were just opening, and great torrents of water were cataracting down when we drew up beneath the Arkright porte-cochère and de Grandin handed Haroldine from the cab with a ceremonious bow, then turned to pay the taxi-man his well-earned bonus.

"*Mordieu*, our luck holds excellently well——" he began as we turned toward the door, but a blaze of lightning more savage than any we had seen thus far and the roaring detonation of a thunderclap which seemed fairly to split the heavens blotted out the remainder of his sentence.

The girl shrank against me with a frightened little cry as the lightning seared our eyes, and I sympathized with her terror, for it seemed to me the flash must have struck almost at our feet, so nearly simultaneous were fire and thunder, but a wild, half-hysterical laugh from de Grandin brought me round with an astonished exclamation.

The little Frenchman had rushed from the shelter of the mansion's porch and pointed dramatically toward the big stone pillars flanking the entrance to the grounds. There, toppled on its side as though struck fairly by a high-explosive shell, lay the victoria we had ordered to follow us, the horses kicking wildly at their shattered harness, the coachman thrown a clear dozen feet from his vehicle, and the carriage itself reduced to splinters scarcely larger than match-staves.

Heedless of the drenching rain, we raced across the lawn and halted by the prostrate postilion. Miraculously, the man was not only living, but regaining consciousness as we reached him. "Glory be to God!" he exclaimed piously as we helped him to

his feet. "'Tis only by th' mercy o' heaven I'm still a livin' man!"

"*Eh bien*, my friend"—de Grandin gave his little blond mustache a sharp twist as he surveyed the ruined carriage—"perhapsly the stupidity of hell may have something to do with it. Look to your horses; they seem scarcely worse off than yourself, but they may be up to mischief if they remain unchaperoned."

Once more beneath the shelter of the porte-cochère, as calmly as though discussing the probability of the storm's abatement, he proposed: "Let us go in, my friends. The horses and coachman will soon be all right. As for the carriage"—he raised his narrow shoulders in a fatalistic shrug—"Mademoiselle, I hope *Monsieur* your father carried adequate insurance on it."

2

THE little Frenchman laid his hand on the polished brass handle of the big oak door, but the portal held its place unyieldingly, and it was not till the girl had pressed the bell button several times that a butler who looked as if his early training had been acquired while serving as guard in a penitentiary appeared and paid us the compliment of a searching inspection before standing aside to admit us.

"Your father's in the living-room, Miss Haroldine," he answered the girl's quick question, then followed us half-way down the hall, as though reluctant to let us out of sight.

Heavy draperies of mulberry and gold brocade were drawn across the living-room windows, shutting out the lightning flashes and muffling the rumble of the thunder. A fire of resined logs burned cheerfully in the marble-arched fireplace, taking the edge from the early-spring chill; electric lamps under painted shades spilled pools of light on Turkey carpets, mahogany shelves loaded with ranks of morocco-bound volumes and

the blurred blues, reds and purples of Oriental porcelains. On the walls the dwarfed perfection of several beautifully executed miniatures showed, and in the far corner of the apartment loomed the magnificence of a massive grand piano.

James Arkright leaped from the overstuffed armchair in which he had been lounging before the fire and whirled to face us as we entered the room, almost, it seemed to me, as though he were expecting an attack. He was a middle-aged man, slender almost to the point of emaciation, with an oddly parchmentlike skin and a long, gaunt face rendered longer by the iron-gray imperial pendant from his chin. His nose was thin and high-bridged, like the beak of a predatory bird, and his ears queer, Panesque appendages, giving his face an odd, impish look. But it was his eyes which riveted our attention most of all. They were of an indeterminate color, neither gray nor hazel, but somewhere between, and darted continually here and there, keeping us constantly in view, yet seeming to watch every corner of the room at the same time. For a moment, as we trooped into the room, he surveyed us in turn with that strange, roving glance, a light of inquiring uncertainty in his eyes fading to a temporary relief as his daughter presented us.

As he resumed his seat before the fire the skirt of his jacket flicked back and I caught a fleeting glimpse of the corrugated stock of a heavy revolver holstered to his belt.

The customary courtesies having been exchanged we lapsed into a silence which stretched and lengthened until I began to feel like a bashful lad seeking an excuse for bidding his sweetheart adieu. I cleared my throat, preparatory to making some inane remark concerning the sudden storm, but de Grandin forestalled me.

"*Monsieur*," he asked as his direct, unwinking stare bored straight into Arkright's oddly watchful eyes,

"when was it you were in Tibet, if you please?"

The effect was electric. Our host bounded from his chair as though propelled by an uncoiled spring, and for once his eyes ceased to rove as he regarded the little Frenchman with a gaze of mixed incredulity and horror. His hand slipped beneath his jacket to the butt of the concealed weapon, but:

"Violence is unnecessary, my friend," de Grandin assured him coolly. "We are come to help you, if possible, and besides I have you covered"—he glanced momentarily at the bulge in his jacket pocket where the muzzle of his tiny Ortgies automatic pressed against the cloth—"and it would be but an instant's work to kill you several times before you could reach your pistol. Very good"—he gave one of his quick, elfish smiles as the other subsided into his chair—"we do make progress.

"You wonder, perhaps, how comes it I ask that question? Very well. A half-hour or so ago, when *Mademoiselle* your lovely daughter was recovered from her fainting-spell in Dr. Trowbridge's office, she tells us of the sinister red bead she has found in her purse, and of the evil fortune such little balls have been connected with in the past.

"I, *Monsieur*, have traveled a very great much. In darkest Africa, in innermost Asia, where few white men have gone and lived to boast of it, I have been there. Among the head-hunters of Papua, beside the upper banks of the Amazon, Jules de Grandin has been. *Alors*, is it so strange that I recognize this so mysterious ball for what it is? *Parbleu*, in disguise I have fingered many such in the lamaseries of Tibet!

"*Mademoiselle's* story, it tells me much; but there is much more I would learn from you if I am to be of service. You were once poor. That is no disgrace. You suddenly became rich; that also is no disgrace, nor is the fact

that you traveled up and down the world almost constantly after the acquisition of your fortune necessarily confession of wrongdoing. But"—he fixed his eyes challengingly on our host—"but what of the other occurrences? How comes it that *Madame* your wife (God rest her spirit!) was found floating in the Seine with such a red ball clutched in her poor, dead hand?

"Me, I have recognized this ball. It is a bead from the rosary of a Buddhist lama of that devil-ridden gable of the world we call Tibet. How came *Madame* to be grasping it? Who knows?

"When next we see one of these red beads, it is on the occasion of the sudden sad death of the young *Monsieur*, your son.

"Later, when you have fled like one pursued to America and settled in this small city which nestles in the shadow of the great New York, comes the death of your daughter, *Mademoiselle* Charlotte—and once more the red ball appears.

"This afternoon *Mademoiselle* *Haroldine* finds the talisman of impending doom in her purse and forthwith swoons in terror. *Dr. Trowbridge* and I succor her and are conveying her to you when a storm arises out of a clear sky. We change vehicles and I leave the red bead behind. All goes well until—*pouf!*—a bolt of lightning strikes the carriage in which the holder of this devil's rosary seems to ride, and demolishes it. But horses and coachman are spared. *Cordieu*, it is more than merely strange; it is surprising, it is amazing, it is astonishing! One who does not know what *Jules de Grandin* knows would think it incomprehensible.

"It is not so. I know what I have seen. In Tibet I have seen those masked devil-dancers cause the rain to fall and the winds to blow and the lightning bolts to strike where they willed. They are worshipers of the demons of the air, my friends, and it

was not for nothing the wise old Hebrews named Satan, the rejected of God, the Prince of the Powers of the Air. No.

"Very well. We have here so many elements that we need scarcely guess to know what the answer is. *Monsieur* *Arkright*, as the roast follows the fish and coffee and cognac follow both, it follows that you once wrested from the lamas of Tibet some secret they wished kept; that by that secret you did obtain much wealth; and that in revenge those old heathen monks of the mountains follow you and yours with implacable hatred. Each time they strike, it would appear, they leave one of these beads from the red rosary of vengeance as sign and seal of their accomplished purpose. Am I not right?" He looked expectantly at our host a moment; then, with a gestured application for permission from *Haroldine*, produced a French cigarette, set it alight and inhaled its acrid, ill-flavored smoke with gusto.

JAMES ARKRIGHT regarded the little Frenchman as a respectable matron might look at the blackmailer threatening to disclose an indiscretion of her youth. With a deep, shuddering sigh he slumped forward in his chair like a man from whom all the resistance has been squeezed with a single titanic pressure. "You're right, *Dr. de Grandin*," he admitted in a toneless voice, and his eyes no longer seemed to take inventory of everything about him. "I was in Tibet; it was there I stole the *Pi Yü* Stone—would God I'd never seen the damned thing!"

"Ah?" murmured *de Grandin*, emitting a twin column of mordant smoke from his narrow nostrils. "We make progress. Say on, *Monsieur*; I listen with ears like the rabbit's. This *Pi Yü* Stone, it is what?"

Something like diffidence showed in *Arkright's* face as he replied, "You won't believe me, when I've told you."

De Grandin emitted a final puff of smoke and ground the fire from his cigarette against the bottom of a cloisonné bowl. "*Eh bien, Monsieur,*" he answered with an impatient shrug, "it is not the wondrous things men refuse to credit. Tell the ordinary citizen that Mars is sixty million miles from the earth, and he believes you without question. Hang up a sign informing him that a fence is newly painted, and he must needs smear his finger to prove your veracity. Proceed, if you please."

"I was born in Waterbury," Arkright began in a sort of half-fearful, half-stubborn monotone, "and educated as an engineer. My father was a Congregational clergyman, and money was none too plentiful with us; so, when I completed my course at Sheff, I took the first job that offered. They don't pay any too princely salaries to cubs just out of school, you know, and the very necessity of my finding employment right away kept me from making a decent bargain for myself.

"For ten years I sweated for the N. Y., N. H. & H., watching most of my classmates pass me by as though I stood stone-still. Finally I was fed up. I had a wife and three children, and hardly enough money to feed them, let alone give them the things my classmates' families had. So, when I got an offer from a British house to do some work in the Himalayas it looked about as gorgeous to me as the fairy godmother's gifts did to Cinderella. It would get me away from America and the constant reminders of my failure, at any rate.

"The job took me into upper Nepal and I worked at it for close to three years, earning the customary vacation at last. Instead of going down into India, as most of the men did, I pushed up into Tibet with another chap who was keen on research, and a party of six Bhotia bearers. We had no particular goal in mind, but we'd been so fed up on stories of the weird

happenings in those mountain lamaseries, we thought we'd go up and have a look—see on our own.

"There was some good shooting on the way, and what few natives we ran into were harmless enough if you kept 'em far enough away to prevent their cooties from climbing aboard you; so we really didn't get much excitement out of the trip, and had about decided it was a bust when we came on a little lamasery perched like an eagle's nest on the edge of an enormous cliff.

"We managed to scramble up the zigzag path to the place, and had some difficulty getting in, but at last the ta-lama agreed we might spend the night there.

"They didn't seem to take any particular notice of us after we'd unslung our packs in the courtyard, and we had the run of the place pretty much to ourselves. Clendenning, my English companion, had knocked about Central Asia for upward of twenty years, and spoke several Chinese dialects as well as Tibetan, but for some reason he'd played dumb when we knocked at the gates and let our head man interpret for us.

"About 4 o'clock in the afternoon he came to me in a perfect fever of excitement. 'Arkright, old boy,' he whispered, 'this blighted place is simply filthy with gold—raw, virgin gold!'

"'You're spoofing,' I told him; 'these poor old duffers are so God-awful poor they'd crawl a mile on their bare knees and elbows for a handful of copper cash.'

"'Cash my hat!' he returned. 'I tell you, they've got great heaps and stacks of gold here; gold enough to make our perishing fortunes ten times over if we could shift to get the blighted stuff away. Come along, I'll show you.'

"He fairly dragged me across the courtyard where our duffle was stored, through a low doorway, and down a passage cut in the solid rock. There

wasn't a lama or servant in sight as we made our way through one tunnel after another; I suppose they were so sure we couldn't understand their lingo that they thought it a waste of time to watch us. At any rate, no one offered us any interruption while we clambered down three or four flights of stairs to a sort of cavern which had been artificially enlarged to make a big, vaulted cellar.

"Gentlemen" — Arkright looked from de Grandin to me and back again—"I don't know what it is, but something seems to get into a white man's blood when he goes to the far corners of the world. Men who wouldn't think of stealing a canceled postage stamp at home will loot a Chinese or Indian treasure house clean and never stop to give the moral aspects of their actions a second thought. That's the way it was with Clendenning and me. When we saw those stacks of golden ingots piled up in that cave like firewood around the sides of a New England woodshed, we just went off our heads. Nothing but the fact that the two of us couldn't so much as lift, much less carry, a single one of the bars kept us from

making off with the treasure that minute.

"When we saw we couldn't carry any of it off we were almost wild. Scheme after scheme for getting away with the stuff was broached, only to be discarded. Stealth was no go, for we'd be sure to be seen if we tried to lead our bearers down the tunnels; force was out of the question, for the lamas outnumbered us ten to one, and the ugly-looking knives they wore



"Within five minutes the camp was reduced to hopeless wreckage."

were sufficient warning to us not to get them roused.

"Finally, when we were almost insane with futile planning, Clendenning suggested, 'Come on, let's get out of this cursed place. If we look around a little we may find a cache of jewels—we wouldn't need a derriek to carry off a couple of Imperial quarts of them, at any rate.'

"The underground passages were like a Cretan labyrinth, and we lost our way more than once while we stumbled around with no light but the flicker of Clendenning's electric torch, but after an hour or more of floundering over the damp, slippery stones of the tunnels, we came to a door stopped with a curtain of yak's hide. A fat, shaven-headed lama was sitting beside it, but he was sound asleep and we didn't trouble to waken him.

"Inside was a fair-sized room, partly hollowed out of the living rock, partly natural grotto. Multicolored flags draped from the low ceiling, each emblazoned with prayers or mottoes in Chinese ideographs or painted with effigies of holy saints or gods and goddesses. Big bands of silk cloth festooned down the walls. On each side of the doorway were prayer wheels ready to be spun, and a plate of beaten gold with the signs of the Chinese zodiac was above the lintel. On both sides of the approach to the altar were low, red-lacquered benches for the lamas and the choir. Small lamps with tiny, flickering flames threw their rays on the gold and silver vessels and candlesticks. At the extreme end of the room, veiling the sanctuary, hung a heavy curtain of yellow silk painted with Tibetan inscriptions.

"While we were standing there, wondering what our next move would be, the shuffle of feet and the faint tinkle of bells came to us. 'Quick,' Clendenning ordered, 'we mustn't be caught here!' He ran to the door, but it was too late, for the monk on guard

was already awake, and we could see the faint gleam of light from candles borne in procession at the farther end of the corridor.

"WHAT happened next was the turning-point in our lives, gentlemen. Without stopping to think, apparently, Clendenning acted. Snatching the heavy Browning from his belt he hit the guardian monk a terrific blow over the head, dragged him through the doorway and ripped off his robe. 'Here, Arkright, put this on!' he commanded as he lugged the unconscious man's body into a dark corner of the room and concealed himself behind one of the wall draperies.

"I slipped the yellow gown over my clothes and squatted in front of the nearest prayer wheel, spinning the thing like mad.

"I suppose you've already noticed I've a rather Mongolian cast of features?" he asked with a bleak smile.

"*Nom d'un fusil, Monsieur*, let us not discuss personal pulchritude, or its lack, if you please!" de Grandin exclaimed testily. "Be so good as to advance with your narrative!"

"It wasn't vanity which prompted the question," Arkright replied. "Even with my beard, I'm sometimes taken for a Chinaman or a half-caste. In those days I was clean-shaven, and both Clendenning and I had had our heads shaved for sanitary reasons before setting out on our trip; so, with the lama's robe pulled up about my neck, in the dim light of the sanctuary I passed very well for one of the brotherhood, and not one of the monks in the procession gave me so much as a second glance.

"The ta-lama—I suppose you'd call him the abbot of the community—led the procession into the temple and halted before the sanctuary curtain. Two subordinate lamas pulled the veil aside, and out of the dim light from the flickering lamps there gradually appeared the great golden statue of

Buddha seated in the Golden Lotus. The face of the image was indifferent and calm with only the softest gleam of light animating it, yet despite the repose of the bloated features it seemed to me there was something malignant about the countenance.

"Glancing up under my brows as I turned the prayer wheel, I could see the main idol was flanked on each side by dozens of smaller statues, each, apparently, of solid gold.

"The ta-lama struck a great bronze gong with a padded drumstick to attract the Buddha's attention to his prayer, then closed his eyes, placed his hands together before his face and prayed. As his sleeve fell away, I noticed a rosary of red beads, like those I was later to know with such horror, looped about his left wrist.

"The subordinate lamas all bent their foreheads to the floor while their master prayed standing before the face of Buddha. Finally, the abbot lowered his hands, and his followers rose and gathered at the foot of the altar. He opened a small, ovenlike receptacle beneath the calyx of the Golden Lotus and took from it a little golden image which one of his subordinates placed among the ranks of subsidiary Buddhas to the right of the great idol. Then he replaced the golden statuette with another exactly like it, except fashioned of lead, closed the sliding door to the little cavity and turned from the altar. Then, followed by his company, he marched from the chapel, leaving Clendenning and me in possession.

"It didn't take us more than a minute to rush up those altar steps, swing back the curtain and open the door under the Golden Lotus, you may be sure.

"Inside the door was a compartment about the size of a moderately large gas stove's oven, and in it were the little image we had seen the ta-lama put in and half a dozen bars of lead, iron and copper, each the exact

dimensions of the golden ingots we'd seen in the treasure chamber.

"I said the bars were lead, copper and iron, but that's a misstatement. All of them *had* been composed of those metals, *but every one was from a quarter to three-fourths solid gold.* Slowly, as a loaf of bread browns by degrees in a bake-oven, these bars of base metal were being transmuted into solid, virgin gold.

"Clendenning and I looked at each other in dumfounded amazement. We knew it couldn't be possible, yet there it was, before our eyes.

"For a moment Clendenning peered into the alchemist's cabinet, then suddenly gave a low whistle. At the extreme back of the 'oven' was a piece of odd-looking substance about the size of a child's fist; something like jade, something like amber, yet differing subtly from each. As Clendenning reached his hand into the compartment to indicate it with his finger the diamond setting of a ring he wore suddenly glowed and sparkled as though lit from within by living fire.

"'For Gawd's sake!' he exclaimed. 'D'ye see what it is, Arkright? It's the Philosopher's Stone, or I'm a Dutchman!'"

"The Philosopher's Stone?" I queried, puzzled.

De Grandin made a gesture of impatience, but Arkright's queer, haunted eyes were on me, and he failed to notice the Frenchman's annoyance.

"Yes, Dr. Trowbridge," he replied. "The ancient alchemists thought there was a substance which would convert all base metals into gold by the power of its magical emanations, you know. Nearly all noted magi believed in it, and most of them attempted to make it synthetically. Many of the things we use in everyday life were discovered as by-products while the ancients were seeking to perfect the magic formula. Bötticher stumbled on the method of making Dresden porcelain

while searching for the treasure; Roger Bacon evolved the composition of gunpowder in the same way; Gerber discovered the properties of acids, Van Helmont secured the first accurate data on the nature of gases and the famous Dr. Glauber discovered the medicinal salts which bear his name in the course of experiments in search of the Stone.

“Oddly enough, the ancients were on the right track all the while, though, of course, they could not know it; for they were wont to refer to the Stone as a substratum—from the Latin *sub* and *stratus*, of course, signifying something spread under—and hundreds of years later scientists actually discovered the uranium oxide we know as pitchblende, the chief source of radium.

“Clendenning must have realized the queer substance in the altar was possessed of remarkable radioactive properties, for instead of attempting to grasp it in his fingers, as I should have done, he seized two of the altar candlesticks, and holding them like a pair of pincers, lifted the thing bodily from its setting; then, taking great care not to touch it, wrapped and re-wrapped it in thin sheets of gold stripped from the altar ornaments. His data were incomplete, of course, but his reasoning, or perhaps his scientifically trained instinct, was accurate. You see, he inferred that since the ‘stone’ had the property of transmuting base metals with which it came in near contact into gold, gold would in all probability be the one element impervious to its radioactive rays, and consequently the only effective form of insulation. We had seen the ta-lama and his assistants grasp the little image of Buddha so recently transformed from lead to gold with their bare hands, so felt reasonably sure there would be no danger of radium burns from gold recently in contact with the substance, while there might be grave danger if

we used anything but gold as wrappings for it.

“Clendenning was for strangling the lama we had stunned when we saw the procession headed toward the chapel, but I persuaded him to tie and gag the fellow and leave him hidden in the shrine; so when we had finished this we crept through the underground passages to the courtyard where our Bhotias were squatting beside the luggage and ordered them to break camp at once.

“The old ta-lama came to bid us a courteous good-bye and refused our offered payment for our entertainment, and we set off on the trail toward Nepal as if the devil were on our heels. He was, though we didn’t know it then.

“OUR way was mostly downhill, and everything seemed in our favor. We pushed on long after the sun had set, and by 10 o’clock were well past the third *tach-davan*, or pass, from the lamasery. When we finally made camp Clendenning could hardly wait for our tent to be pitched before experimenting with our loot.

“Unwrapping the strange substance, we noticed that it glowed in the half-light of the tent with a sort of greenish phosphorescence, which made Clendenning christen it *Pi Yü*, which is Chinese for jade, and by that name we knew it thereafter. We put a pair of pistol bullets inside the wrappings, and lay down for a few hours’ sleep with the *Pi Yü* between us. At 5 the next morning when we routed out the bearers and prepared to get under way, the entire leaden portions of the cartridges had been transmuted to gold and the copper powder-jackets were beginning to take on a decided golden glint. Forcing the shells off, we found the powder with which the cartridges were charged had become pure gold dust. This afforded us some valuable data. Lead was transmuted more quickly

than copper, and semi-metallic substances like gunpowder were apparently even more susceptible than pure metals, though the powder's granular form might have sped its transmutation.

"We drove the bearers like slave-masters that day, and they were on the point of open mutiny when evening came. Poor devils, if they'd known what lay behind there'd have been little enough need to urge them on.

"Camp had been made and we had all settled down to a sleep of utter exhaustion when I first heard it. Very faint and far away it was, so faint as to be scarcely recognizable, but growing louder each second—the rumbling whistle of a wind of hurricane velocity shrieking and tearing down the passes.

"I kicked Clendenning awake, and together we made for a cleft in the rocks, yelling to our Bhotias to take cover at the same time. The poor devils were too waterlogged with sleep to realize what we shouted, and before we could give a second warning the thing was among them. Demoniactal blasts of wind so fierce we could almost see them shrieked and screamed and howled through the camp, each gust seeming to be aimed with dreadful accuracy. They whirled and twisted and tore about, scattering blazing logs like sparks from bursting fire-crackers, literally tearing our tents into scraps no larger than a man's hand, picking up beasts and men bodily and hurling them against the cliff-walls till they were battered out of all semblance of their original form. Within five minutes our camp was reduced to such hopeless wreckage as may be seen only in the wake of a tornado, and Clendenning and I were the only living things within a radius of five miles.

"We were about to crawl from our hiding-place when something warned me the danger was not yet past, and I grabbed at Clendenning's arm. He pulled away, but left the musette bag

in which the *Pi Yü* was packed in my hand. Next moment he walked to the center of the shambles which had been our camp and began looking around in a dazed sort of way. Almost as he came to a halt, a terrific roar sounded and the entire air seemed to burn with the fury of a bursting lightning-bolt. Clendenning was wiped out as though he had never been—torn literally to dust by the unspeakable force of the lightning, and even the rock where he had stood was scarred and blackened as though water-blasted. But the terrible performance didn't stop there. Bolt after bolt of frightful lightning was hurled down like an accurately aimed barrage till every shred of our men, our yaks, our tents and our camp paraphernalia had not only been milled to dust, but completely obliterated.

"How long the artillery-fire from the sky lasted I do not know. To me, as I crouched in the little cave between the rocks, it seemed hours, years, centuries. Actually, I suppose, it kept up for something like five minutes. I think I must have fainted with the horror of it at the last, for the next thing I knew the sun was shining and the air was clear and icy-cold. No one passing could have told from the keenest observation that anything living had occupied our camp-site in years. There was no sign or trace—absolutely none—of human or animal occupancy to be found. Only the cracked and lightning-blackened rocks bore witness to the terrible bombardment which had been laid down.

"I wasted precious hours in searching, but not a shred of cloth or flesh, not a lock of hair or a congealed drop of blood remained of my companions.

"THE following days were like a nightmare—one of those awful dreams in which the sleeper is forever fleeing and forever pursued by something unnamably horrible. A dozen times a day I'd hear the skirling tempests rushing down the passes be-

hind and scuttle to the nearest hole in the rocks like a panic-stricken rabbit when the falcon's shadow suddenly appears across its path. Sometimes I'd be storm-bound for hours while the wind howled like a troop of demons outside my retreat and the lightning-strokes rattled almost like hailstones on the rubble outside. Sometimes the vengeful tempest would last only a few minutes and I'd be released to fly like a mouse seeking sanctuary from the cat for a few miles before I was driven to cover once more.

"There were several packs of emergency rations in the musette bag, and I made out for drink by chipping off bits of ice from the frozen mountain springs and melting them in my tin cup, but I was a mere rack of bones and tattered hide encased in still more tattered clothes when I finally staggered into an outpost settlement in Nepal and fell babbling like an imbecile into the arms of a *sowar* sentry.

"The lamas' vengeance seemed confined to the territorial limits of Tibet, for I was unmolested during the entire period of my illness and convalescence in the Nepalese village.

"When I was strong enough to travel I was passed down country to my outfit, but I was still so ill and nervous that the company doctor gave me a certificate of physical disability and I was furnished with transportation home.

"I'd procured some scrap metal before embarking on the P. and O boat, and in the privacy of my cabin I amused myself by testing the powers of the *Pi Yü*. Travel had not altered them, and in three days I had about ten pounds of gold where I'd had half that weight of iron.

"I was bursting with the wonderful news when I reached Waterbury, and could scarcely wait to tell my wife, but as I walked up the street toward my house an ugly, Mongolian-faced man suddenly stepped out from be-

hind a roadside tree and barred my way. He did not utter a syllable, but stood immovable in the path before me, regarding me with such a look of concentrated malice and hatred that my breath caught fast in my throat. For perhaps half a minute he glared at me, then raised his left hand and pointed directly at my face. As his sleeve fell back, I caught the gleam of a string of small, red beads looped round his wrist. Next instant he turned away and seemed to walk through an invisible door in the air—one moment I saw him, the next he had disappeared. As I stood staring stupidly at the spot where he had vanished, I felt a terrific blast of ice-cold wind blowing about me, tearing off my hat and sending me staggering against the nearest front-yard fence.

"The wind subsided in a moment, but it had blown away my peace of mind forever. From that instant I knew myself to be a marked man, a man whose only safety lay in flight and concealment.

"My daughter has told you the remainder of the story, how my wife was first to go, and how they found that accursed red bead which is the trade mark of the lamas' blood-vengeance clasped in her hand; how my son was the next victim of those Tibetan devils' revenge, then my daughter Charlotte; now she, too, is marked for destruction. Oh, gentlemen"—his eyes once more roved restlessly about—"if you only knew the inferno of terror and uncertainty I've been through during these terrible years, you'd realize I've paid my debt to those mountain fiends ten times over with compound interest compounded tenfold!"

Our host ended his narrative almost in a shriek, then settled forward in his chair, chin sunk on breast, hands lying flaccidly in his lap, almost as if the death of which he lived in daily dread had overtaken him at last.

In the silence of the dimly lit drawing-room the logs burned with a soft-

ly hissing crackle; the little ormolu eclock on the marble mantel beat off the seconds with hushed, hurrying strokes as though it held its breath and went on tiptoe in fear of something lurking in the shadows. Outside the curtained windows the subsiding storm moaned dismally, like an animal in pain.

Jules de Grandin darted his quick, birdlike glance from the dejected Arkright to his white-lipped daughter, then at me, then back again at Arkright. "*Tiens, Monsieur,*" he remarked, "it would appear you find yourself in what the Americans call one damn-bad fix. *Sacré bleu,* those ape-faced men of the mountains know how to hate well, and they have the powers of the tempest at their command, while you have nothing but Jules de Grandin.

"No matter; it is enough. I do not think you will be attacked again today. Make yourselves as happy as may be, keep careful watch for more of those damnation red beads, and notify me immediately one of them reappears. Meantime I go to dinner and to consult a friend whose counsel will assuredly show us a way out of our troubles. *Mademoiselle, Monsieur,* I wish you a very good evening." Bending formally from the hips, he turned on his heel and strode from the drawing-room.

"Do you think there was anything in that cock-and-bull story of Arkright's?" I asked as we walked home through the clear, rain-washed April evening.

"Assuredly," he responded with a nod. "It has altogether the ring of truth, my friend. From what he tells us, the *Pi Yü* Stone which he and his friend stole from the men of the mountain is merely some little-known form of radium, and what do we know of radium, when all is said and done? *Barbe d'un pou,* nothing or less!

"True, we know the terrific and incessant discharge of etheric waves

consequent on the disintegration of the radium atoms is so powerful that even such known and powerful forces as electrical energy are completely destroyed by it. In the presence of radium, we know, non-conductors of electricity become conductors, differences of potential cease to exist and electroscopes and Leyden jars fail to retain their charges. But all this is but the barest fraction of the possibilities.

"Consider: Not long ago we believed the atom to be the ultimate particle of matter, and thought all atoms had individuality. An atom of iron, for instance, was to us the smallest particle of iron possible, and differed distinctly from an atom of hydrogen. But with even such little knowledge as we already have of radioactive substances we have learned that all matter is composed of varying charges of electricity. The atom, we now believe, consists of a proton composed of a charge of positive electricity surrounded by a number of electrons, or negative charges, and the number of these electrons determines the nature of the atom. Radium itself, if left to itself, disintegrated into helium, finally into lead. Suppose, however, the process be reversed. Suppose the radioactive emanations of this *Pi Yü* which Monsieur Arkright thieved away from the lamas, so affect the balance of protons and electrons of metals brought close to it as to change their atoms from atoms of zinc, lead or iron to atoms of pure gold. All that would be needed to do it would be a rearrangement of protons and electrons. The hypothesis is simple and believable, though not to be easily explained. You see?"

"No, I don't," I confessed, "but I'm willing to take your word for it. Meantime——"

"Meantime we have the important matter of dinner to consider," he interrupted with a smile as we turned into my front yard. "*Pipe d'un chameau,* I am hungry like a family

of famished wolyes with all this learned talk."

3

"TROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*, they are at their devil's work again—have you seen the evening papers?" de Grandin exclaimed as he burst into the office several days later.

"Eh—what?" I demanded, putting aside the copy of Corwin's monograph on Multiple Neuritis and staring at him. "Who are 'they,' and what have 'they' been up to?"

"Who? Name of a little green man, those devils of the mountains, those Tibetan priests, those servants of the *Pi Yü Stone!*" he responded. "Peruse *le journal*, if you please." He thrust a copy of the afternoon paper into my hand, seated himself on the corner of the desk and regarded his brightly polished nails with an air of deep solicitude. I read:

Gangland Suspected in Beauty's Death

Police believe it was to put the seal of eternal silence on her rouged lips that pretty Lillian Conover was "taken for a ride" late last night or early this morning. The young woman's body, terribly beaten and almost denuded of clothing, was found lying in one of the bunkers of the Sedge-moor Country Club's golf course near the Albemarle Pike shortly after 6 o'clock this morning by an employee of the club. From the fact that no blood was found near the body, despite the terrible mauling it had received, police believe the young woman had been "put on the spot" somewhere else, then brought to the deserted links and left there by the slayers or their accomplices.

The Conover girl was known to have been intimate with a number of questionable characters, and had been arrested several times for shoplifting and petty thefts. It is thought she might have learned something of the secrets of a gang of bootleggers or hijackers and threatened to betray them to rival gangsters, necessitating her silencing by the approved methods of gangland.

The body, when found, was clothed in the remnants of a gray ensemble with a gray fox neck-piece and a silver mesh bag was still looped about one of her wrists. In the purse were four ten-dollar bills and some silver, showing conclusively that robbery was not the motive for the crime.

The authorities are checking up the girl's

movements on the day before her death, and an arrest is promised within twenty-four hours.

"U'm?" I remarked, laying down the paper.

"U'm?" he mocked. "May the devil's choicest imps fly away with your 'u'ms', Friend Trowbridge. Come, get the car; we must be off."

"Off where?"

"Beard of a small blue pig, where, indeed, but to the spot where this so unfortunate girl's dead corpse was discovered? Delay not, we must utilize what little light remains!"

THE bunker where poor Lillian Conover's broken body had been found was a banked sand-trap in the golf course about twenty-five yards from the highway. Throngs of morbidly curious sightseers had trampled the smoothly kept fairways all day, brazenly defying the "Private Property—No Trespassing" signs with which the links were posted.

To my surprize, de Grandin showed little annoyance at the multitude of footprints about, but turned at once to the business of surveying the terrain. After half an hour's crawling back and forth across the turf, he rose and dusted his trouser knees with a satisfied sigh.

"*Succès!*" he exclaimed, raising his hand, thumb and forefinger clasped together on something which reflected the last rays of the sinking sun with an ominous red glow. "Behold, *mon ami*, I have found it; it is even as I suspected."

Looking closely, I saw he held a red bead, about the size of a small hazelnut, the exact duplicate of the little globule Haroldine Arkright had discovered in her reticule.

"Well?" I asked.

"*Barbe d'un lièvre*, yes; it is very well, indeed," he assented with a vigorous nod. "I was certain I should find it here, but had I not, I should have been greatly worried. Let us return, good friend; our quest is done."

I knew better than to question him as we drove slowly home, but my ears were open wide for any chance remark he might drop. However, he vouchsafed no comment till we reached home; then he hurried to the study and put an urgent call through to the Arkright mansion. Five minutes later he joined me in the library, a smile of satisfaction on his lips. "It is as I thought," he announced. "*Mademoiselle* Haroldine went shopping yesterday afternoon, and the unfortunate Conover girl picked her pocket in the store. Forty dollars was stolen—forty dollars *and a red bead!*"

"She told you this?" I asked. "Why——"

"*Non, non,*" he shook his head. "She did tell me of the forty dollars, yes; the red bead's loss I already knew. Recall, my friend, how was it the poor dead one was dressed, according to the paper?"

"Er——"

"*Précisément.* Her costume was a cheap copy, a caricature, if you please, of the smart ensemble affected by *Mademoiselle* Haroldine. Poor creature, she plied her pitiful trade of pocket-picking once too often, removed the contents of Haroldine's purse, including the sign of vengeance which had been put there, *le bon Dieu* knows how, and walked forth to her doom. Those who watched for a gray-clad woman with the fatal red ball seized upon her and called down their winds of destruction, even as they did upon the camp of Monsieur Arkright in the mountains of Tibet long years ago. Yes, it is undoubtedly so."

"Do you think they'll try again?" I asked. "They've already muffed things twice, and——"

"And, as your proverb has it, the third time is the charm," he cut in. "Yes, my friend, they will doubtlessly try again, and again, until they have worked their will, or been diverted. We must bend our energies toward the latter consummation."

"But that's impossible!" I re-

turned. "If those lamas are powerful enough to seek their victims out in France, England and this country and kill them, there's not much chance for the Arkrights in flight, and it's hardly likely we'll be able to argue them out of their determination to exact payment for the theft of their——"

"*Zut!*" he interrupted with a smile. "You do talk much but say little, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I think it highly probable we shall convince the fish-faced gentlemen from Tibet they have more to gain by foregoing their vengeance than by collecting their debt."

4

HARRISONVILLE'S newest citizen had delayed her debut with truly feminine capriciousness, and my vigil at City Hospital had been long and nerve-racking. Half an hour before I had resorted to the Weigand-Martin method of ending the performance, and, shaking with nervous reaction, took the red, wrinkled and astonishingly vocal morsel of humanity from the nurse's hands and laid it in its mother's arms; then, nearer exhaustion than I cared to admit, set out for home and bed.

A rivulet of light trickled under the study door and the murmur of voices mingled with the acrid aroma of de Grandin's cigarette came to me as I let myself in the front door. "*Eh bien,* my friend," the little Frenchman was asserting, "I damn realize that he who sups with the devil must have a long spoon; therefore I have requested your so invaluable advice."

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" his uncannily sharp ears recognized my tread as I stepped softly into the hall, "may we trespass on your time a moment? It is of interest."

With a sigh of regret for my lost sleep I put my obstetrical kit on a chair and pushed open the study door.

Opposite de Grandin was seated a figure which might have been the original of the queer little manikins

with which Chinese ivory-carvers love to ornament their work. Hardly more than five feet tall, his girth was so great that he seemed to overflow the confines of the armchair in which he lounged. His head, almost totally void of hair, was nearly globular in shape, and the smooth, hairless skin seemed stretched drum-tight over the fat with which his skull was generously upholstered. Cheeks plump to the point of puffiness almost forced his oblique eyes shut; yet, though his eyes could scarcely be seen, it required no deep intuition to know that they always saw. Between his broad, flat nose and a succession of chins was set incongruously a small, sensitive mouth, full-lipped but mobile, and drooping at the corners in a sort of perpetual sad smile.

"Dr. Feng," de Grandin introduced, "this is my very good friend, Dr. Trowbridge. Trowbridge, my friend, this is Dr. Feng Yuin-han, whose wisdom is about to enable us to foil the machinations of those wicked ones who threaten Mademoiselle Haroldine. Proceed, if you please, *cher ami*," he motioned the fat little Chinaman to continue the remark he had cut short to acknowledge the introduction.

"It is rather difficult to explain," the visitor returned in a soft, unaccented voice, "but if we stop to remember that the bird stands midway between the reptile and the mammal we may perhaps understand why it is that the cock's blood is most acceptable to those elemental forces which my unfortunate superstitious countrymen seek to propitiate in their temples. These malignant influences were undoubtedly potent in the days we refer to as the age of reptiles, and it may be the cock's lineal descent from the pterodactyl gives his blood the quality of possessing certain emanations soothing to the tempest spirits. In any event, I think you would be well advised to employ such

blood in your protective experiments."

"And the ashes?" de Grandin put in eagerly.

"Those I can procure for you by noon tomorrow. Camphor wood is something of a rarity here, but I can obtain enough for your purpose, I am sure."

"*Bon, très bon!*" the Frenchman exclaimed delightedly. "If those camel-faces will but have the consideration to wait our preparations, I damn think we shall tender them the party of surprize. Yes. *Parbleu*, we shall astonish them!"

SHORTLY after noon the following day an asthmatic Ford delivery wagon bearing the picture of a crowing cockerel and the legend

P. GRASSO
Vendita di Pollame Vivi

on its weatherworn leatherette sides drew up before the house, and an Italian youth in badly soiled corduroys and with a permanent expression indicative of some secret sorrow climbed lugubriously from the driver's seat, took a covered two-gallon can, obviously originally intended as a container for Quick's Grade A Lard, from the interior of the vehicle and advanced toward the front porch.

"Docta de Grandin 'ere?" he demanded as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, answered his ring.

"No, he ain't," the indignant Nora informed him, "an' if he wuz, 'tis at th' back door th' likes o' you should be inquirin' fer 'im!"

The descendant of the Cæsars was in no mood for argument. "You taka dissa bucket an' tella heem I breeng it—Pete Grasso," he returned, thrusting the lard tin into the scandalized housekeeper's hands. "You tella heem I sella da han, I sella da roosta, too, an' I keela heem w'an my customers ask for it; but I no lika for sella da blood. No, *santissimo Dio*, not me!"

(Continued on page 567)

The Devil's Rosary

(Continued from page 454)

Perchè il sangue è la vita—how you say? Da blood, he are da life; I not lika for carry heem aroun'."

"Howly Mither, is it blood ye're afther givin' me ter hold onto?" exclaimed Nora in rising horror. "Ye murtherin' dago, come back 'ere an' take yer divilish——"

But P. Grasso, dealer in live poultry, had cranked his decrepit flivver into a state of agitated life and set off down the street, oblivious of the choice insults which Mrs. McGinnis sent in pursuit of him.

"Sure, Dr. Trowbridge, sor," she confided as she entered the consulting-room, the lard tin held at arm's length, "'tis th' fine gintleman Dr. de Grandin is entirety; but he do be afther doin' some crazy things at times. Wud ye be afther takin' charge o' this mess o' blood fer him? 'Tis meself as wouldn't touch it wid a fifty-foot pole, so I wouldn't, once I've got it out o' me hands!"

"Well," I laughed as I espied a trim little figure turning into my front yard, "here he comes now. You can tell him your opinion of his practises if you want."

"Ah, Dothor, darlin', ye know I'd niver have th' heart to scold 'im," she confessed with a shamefaced grin. "Sure, he's th'——"

The sudden hysterical cachinnation of the office telephone bell cut through her words, and I turned to the shrilling instrument.

For a moment there was no response to my rather impatient "Hello?"; then dimly, as one entering a darkened room slowly begins to descry objects about him, I made out the hoarse, ralelike rasp of deep-drawn, irregular breathing.

"Hello?" I repeated, more sharply.

"Dr. Trowbridge," a low, almost breathless feminine voice whispered

over the wire, "this is Haroldine Arkright. Can you come right over with Dr. de Grandin? Right away? Please. It—it's *here!*"

"Right away!" I called back, and wheeled about, almost colliding with the little Frenchman, who had been listening over my shoulder.

"Quick, speed, haste!" he cried, as I related her message. "We must rush, we must hurry, we must fly, my friend! There is not a second to lose!"

As I charged down the hall and across the porch to my waiting car he stopped long enough to seize the lard tin from beside my desk and two bulky paper parcels from a hall chair, then almost trod on my heels in his haste to enter the motor.

5

"NOT here, *Monsieur*, if you please," de Grandin ordered as he surveyed the living-room where Arkright and his daughter awaited us. "Is there no room without furniture, where we can meet the foeman face to face? I would fight over a flat terrain, if possible."

"There's a vacant bedroom on the next floor," Arkright replied, "but——"

"No buts, if you please; let us ascend at once, immediately, right away!" the Frenchman interrupted. "Oh, make haste, my friends! Your lives depend upon it, I do assure you!"

About the floor of the empty room de Grandin traced a circle of chicken's blood, painting a two-inch-wide ruddy border on the bare boards, and inside the outer circle he drew another, forcing Haroldine and her father within it. Then, with a bit of rag, he wiped a break in the outside line, and opening one of his paper parcels proceeded to scatter a thin layer of soft, white wood-ashes over the boards between the two circles.

"Now, *mon vieux*, if you will assist," he turned to me, ripping open the second package and bringing to

light a tin squirt-gun of the sort used to spray insecticide about a room infested with mosquitoes.

Dipping the nozzle of the syringe into the blood-filled lard tin, he worked the plunger back and forth a moment, then handed the contrivance to me. "Do you stand at my left," he commanded, "and should you see footprints in the ashes, spray the fowl's blood through the air above them. Remember, my friend, it is most important that you act with speed."

"Footprints in the ashes——" I began incredulously, wondering if he had lost his senses, but a sudden current of glacial air sweeping through the room chilled me into silence.

"Ah! of the beautiful form is *Mademoiselle*, and who was I to know that cold wind of Tibetan devils would display it even more than this exquisite *robe d'Orient?*" said de Grandin.

Clad in a wondrous something, she explained fright had so numbed her that dressing had been impossible.

"When did you first know they were here?" de Grandin whispered, turning his head momentarily toward the trembling couple inside the inner circle, then darting a watchful glance about the room as though he looked for an invisible enemy to materialize from the air.

"I found the horrible red ball in my bath," Haroldine replied in a low, trembling whisper. "I screamed when I saw it, and Daddy got up to come to me, and there was one of them under his ash-tray; so I telephoned your house right away, and——"

"*S-s-st!*" the Frenchman's sibilant warning cut her short. "*Garde à vous, Friend Trowbridge! Fixe!*" As though drawing a saber from its scabbard he whipped the keen steel sword blade from his walking-stick and swished it whiplike through the air. "The cry is still '*On ne passe pas!*' my friends!"

There was the fluttering of the

tiny breeze along the bedroom floor, not like a breeze from outside, but an eery, tentative sort of wind, a wind which trickled lightly over the door-sill, rose to a blast, paused a moment in reconnaissance, then crept forward experimentally, as though testing the strength of our defenses.

A light, pit-pattering noise, as though an invisible mouse were circling the room, sounded from the shadows; then, to my horrified amazement, there appeared the print of a broad, naked foot in the film of ashes de Grandin had spread upon the floor!

Wave on wave of goose-flesh rose on my arms and along my neck as I watched the first print followed by a second, for there was no body above them, no sign nor trace of any alien presence in the place; only, as the keys of a mechanical piano are depressed as the strings respond to the notes of the reeling record, the smooth coating of ashes gave token of the onward march of some invisible thing.

"Quick, my friend, shoot where you see the prints!" de Grandin cried in a shrill, excited voice, and I thrust the plunger of my pump home, sending out a shower of ruddy spray.

As invisible ink takes form when the paper is held before a flame, there was suddenly outlined in the empty air before us the visage of—

"*Sapristi!* 'Tis Yama himself, King of Hell! God of Death! *Hold, mon brave,*" de Grandin called almost jocularly as the vision took form wherever the rain of fowl's blood struck, "it seems we meet face to face, though you expected it not. *Nom d'un porc,* is this the courtesy of your country? You seem not overjoyed to meet me.

"Lower, Friend Trowbridge," he called from the corner of his mouth, keeping wary eyes fixed upon the visitant, "aim for his legs; there is a trick I wish to show him."

Obediently, I aimed the syringe at

the footless footprints in the ashes, and a pair of broad, naked feet sprang suddenly into view.

"*Bien*," the Frenchman commended, then with a sudden forward thrust of his foot engaged the masked Mongolian's ankle in a grapevine twist and sent the fellow sprawling to the floor. The blue and gold horror that was the face of Yama came off, disclosing a leering, slant-eyed lama.

"Now, *Monsieur*," de Grandin remarked, placing his sword-point against the other's throat directly above the palpitating jugular vein, "I damn think perhaps you will listen to reason, *hein?*"

The felled man gazed malignantly into his conqueror's face, but neither terror nor surrender showed in his sullen eyes.

"*Morbleu*, he is a brave savage, this one," de Grandin muttered, then lapsed into a wailing, singsong speech the like of which I had never heard.

A look of incredulous disbelief, then of interest, finally of amazed delight, spread over the copper-colored features of the fallen man as the little Frenchman progressed. Finally he answered with one or two coughing ejaculations, and at a sign from de Grandin rose to his feet and stood with his hands lifted above his head.

"*Monsieur Arkright*," the Frenchman called without taking his eyes from his captive, "have the goodness to fetch the *Pi Yü* Stone without delay. I have made a treaty with this emissary of the lamas. If you return his treasure to him at once he will repair forthwith to his lamasery and trouble you and yours no more."

"But what about my wife, and my children these fiends killed?" Arkright expostulated. "Are they to go scotfree? How do I know they'll keep their word? I'm damned if I'll return the *Pi Yü!*"

"You will most certainly be killed if you do not," de Grandin returned coolly. "As to your damnation, I am a sinful man, and do not presume to

pronounce judgment on you, though I fear the worst unless you mend your morals. Come, will you return this man his property, or do I release him and bid him do his worst?"

Muttering imprecations, Arkright stepped across the barrier of blood, left the room and returned in a few minutes with a small parcel wrapped in what appeared to be thin plates of gold.

De Grandin took it from his hand and presented it to the Tibetan with a ceremonious bow.

"*Ki lao yeh hsieh ti to lo*," the yellow man pressed his clasped hands to his breast and bowed nearly double to the Frenchman.

"*Parbleu*, yes, and Dr. Trowbridge, too," my little friend returned, indicating me with a wave of his hand.

The Tibetan bent ceremoniously toward me as de Grandin added, "*Ch'i kan*."

"What did he say?" I demanded, returning the Asiatic's salute.

"He says, 'The honorable, illustrious sir has my heartfelt thanks,' or words to that effect, and I insist that he say the same of you, my friend," de Grandin returned. "Name of a small green pig, I do desire that he understand there are two honorable men in the room besides himself.

"*En avant, mon brave*," he motioned the Tibetan toward the door with his sword, then lowered his point with a flourish, saluting the Arkrights with military punctilio.

"*Mademoiselle Haroldine*," he said, "it is a great pleasure to have served you. May your approaching marriage be a most happy one.

"*Monsieur Arkright*, I have saved your life, and, though against your will, restored your honor. It is true you have lost your gold, but self-respect is a more precious thing. Next time you desire to steal, permit that I suggest you select a less vengeful victim than a Tibetan brotherhood. *Parbleu*, those savages they have no sense of humor at all! When a man robs

them, they take it with the worst possible grace."

"PIPE d'un chameau"—Jules de Grandin brushed an imaginary fleck of dust from the sleeve of his dinner jacket and refilled his liqueur glass—"it has been a most satisfactory day, Friend Trowbridge. Our experiment was one grand, unqualified success; we have restored stolen property to its rightful owners, and I have told that Monsieur Arkright what I think of him."

"U'm," I murmured. "I suppose it's all perfectly clear to you, but I'm still in the dark about it all."

"Perfectly," he agreed with one of his quick, elfin smiles. "Howeverly, that can be remedied. Attend me, if you please:

"When first we interviewed Mademoiselle Haroldine and her father, I smelt the odor of Tibet in this so strange business. Those red beads, they could have come from but one bit of jewelry, and that was the rosary of a Buddhist monk of Tibet. Yes. Now, in the course of my travels in that devil-infested land, I had seen those old lamas do their devil-dances and command the elements to obey their summons and wreak vengeance on their enemies. 'Very well,' I tell me, 'if this be a case of lamas' magic, we must devise magic which will counteract it.'

"'Of course,' I agree with me. 'For every ill there is a remedy. Men living in the lowlands know cures for malaria; those who inhabit the peaks know the cure for mountain fever. They must do so, or they die. Very well, is it not highly probable that the Mongolian people have their own safeguards against these mountain devils? If it were not so, would not Tibet completely dominate all China?'

"'You have right,' I compliment me, 'but whom shall we call on for aid?'

"Thereupon I remember that my old friend, Dr. Feng Yuin-han, whom

I have known at the Sorbonne, is at present residing in New York, and it is to him I send my message for assistance. *Parbleu*, when he comes he is as full of wisdom as a college professor attempts to appear! He tells me much in our nighttime interview before you arrive from your work of increasing the population. I learn from him, for instance, that when these old magicians of the mountains practise their devil's art, they automatically limit their powers. Invisible they may become, yes; but while invisible, they may not overstep a pool, puddle or drop of chicken blood. For some strange reason, such blood makes a barrier which they can not pass and across which they can not hurl a missile nor send their destroying winds or devastating lightning-flashes. Further, if chicken blood be cast upon them their invisibility at once melts away, and while they are in the process of becoming visible in such circumstances their physical strength is greatly reduced. One man of normal lustiness would be a match for fifty of them half visible, half unseen because of fresh fowl's blood splashed on them.

"*Voilà*, I have my grand strategy of defense already mapped out for me. From the excellent Pierre Grasso I buy much fresh chicken blood, and from Dr. Feng I obtain the ashes of the mystic camphor tree. The blood I spread around in an almost-circle, that our enemy may attack us from one side only, and inside the outer stockade of gore I scatter camphor wood ashes that his footprints may become visible and betray his position to us. Then, inside our outer ramparts, I draw a second complete circle of blood which the enemy can not penetrate at all, so that Monsieur Arkright, but most of all his so charming daughter, may be safe. Then I wait.

"Presently comes the foe. He cir-

cles our first line of defenses, finds the break I have purposely left, and walks into our trap. In the camphor wood ashes his all-invisible feet leave visible footprints to warn of his approach.

"With your aid, then, I do spray him with the blood as soon as his footprints betray him, and make him visible so that I may slay him at my good convenience. But he are no match for me. *Non*, Jules de Grandin would not call it the sport to kill such as he; it would not be fair. Besides, is there not much to be said on his side? I think so.

"It was the cupidity of Monsieur Arkright and no other thing which brought death upon his wife and children. We have no way of telling that the identical man whom I have overthrown murdered those unfortunate ones, and it is not just to take his life for his fellows' crimes. As for legal justice, what court would listen believably to our story? *Cordieu*, to relate what we have seen these last few days to the ordinary lawyer would be little better than confessing ourselves mad or infatuated with too much of the so execrable liquor which your prosperous bootleggers supply. Me, I have no wish to be thought a fool.

"Therefore, I say to me, 'It is best that we call this battle a draw. Let us give back to the men of the mountains that which is theirs and take their promise that they will no longer pursue Monsieur Arkright and Mademoiselle Haroldine. Let there be no more beads from the Devil's rosary scattered across their path.'

"Very good. I make the equal bargain with the Tibetan; his property is returned to him and—

"My friend, I suffer!"

"Eh?" I exclaimed, shocked at the tragic face he turned to me.

"*Nom d'un canon*, yes; my glass is empty again!"

*Don't fail to read the next adventure of Jules de Grandin:
"The House of Golden Masks," by Seabury Quinn*