

Weird Tales

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The Ghost-Helper

By SEABURY QUINN

*Jules de Grandin, long known as a ghost-breaker, essays a new rôle,
that of "ghost-helper"*

"**N**ON, my friend, I mean it," Jules de Grandin persisted. "You Americans are a gloomy people; even in your pleasures you are melancholy!"

I grinned at him despite myself. The Chez Pantoufle Dorée certainly showed no signs of melancholia which I could see. Waiters scurried here and there between the rows of softly illuminated tables; the air was heavy with the odor of well-cooked food, warm, perfumed woman-flesh and the smoke of excellent tobacco; the muted clatter of china and table silver mingled with the hum of conversation, lilting, flirtatious laughter and the syncopated overtone of the jazz band's throbbing appeal to elemental passion. "Not much evidence of gloom here, is there?" I queried, attacking the Welsh rabbit the waiter placed before me and decanting a mugful of illegal but most enjoyable ale.

"But yes," he nodded, "that is what I mean, *précisément*. Observe these people; they are typical. How is it your popular song says? 'I Dance With the Tear in My Eye?' That is it. The gaiety is forced, unnatural. They are like a group of pallbearers telling each other funny stories while they ride to the cemetery; like little boys whistling to tell themselves how brave they are as they walk quick past the graveyard after dark. 'See us,' they say, 'we are devils of fellows; gay, carefree, debonair; we care for nothing, we fear nothing!' But always they look fearfully across their shoulders, and always in the shadows behind they

see the hovering, disapproving ghosts of Calvin, Knox and Wesley, of Cotton Mather and William Jennings Bryan. So they are *triste*. Yes.

"Take those ones, by example"—he nodded to the tenants of a table somewhat to our left—"c'est un couple bien assorti, n'est-ce-pas? They should have every mark of happiness upon them, and yet observe—is not discomfort, even fear, written in their faces? I think yes. *Que diable?* Is that the way of joyousness?"

Waiting a decent interval, I turned my head and followed his critical glance. The man was tall, slender, stoop-shouldered, thin-faced and studious-looking, a perfect example of American gentleman with generations of Anglo-Saxon heritage behind him. His duplicate could be found on all our college faculties, in half our law offices and experimental laboratories, in many of the higher branches of our Government departments. Calm, level-headed and efficient, but without the blatant hall-mark of the "go-getter" on him, he showed the ideal combination of seriousness and humor which has enabled science and the arts to keep alive amid the hustle of our New World tempo—and to find practical application in the usages of business.

His companion was a sight to draw the eye in any company. Long-bodied and long-limbed in build, graceful as a panther, with a small, proud head crowned with a skull-cap of close-cut hair the shade of ripened maize, long, insolent eyes of darkest blue set under almost horizontal brows of startling black-



"She felt a queer, pursued sensation."

ness, straight-nosed, firm-chinned, thin-lipped, her skin as white as pearl and seemingly almost transparent, she, too, was eloquent of breeding, but her ancestors had bred their women-folk for physical appeal. However fine her mind
 W. T.—3

might be, no man could forget her brilliant body and allure even for a moment, and though she might show gentleness at times, I knew it would be but the mildness of a cat-creature whose claws are only thinly masked in velvet paws.

I took them in with one swift glance, then turned back to de Grandin. "Why, it's Idris Breakstone and his wife," I said. "You know them?"

"I know him. I ought to. I helped bring him to Harrisonville thirty-six years ago, and I'd treated his parents for five years before that. The woman I don't know. He married her out of town. She's his second wife, and——"

"U'm?" his murmured comment cut me short. "And is that look—that air of malaise which he and his so charming lady display—entirely natural to them?"

I looked again. The little Frenchman was right. In both Idris' face and that of his companion there was a look of vague fear, a sort of haunted expression which a fugitive from justice might wear when strangers were about and any moment might bring the tapping hand and grim announcement of arrest. "No-o," I answered slowly. "I don't think it is. Now you mention it, they *do* look ill at ease, but——"

"Perhaps that one is to blame?" De Grandin cast his glance beyond the Breakstones' table to a man sitting alone. "He looks like Nemesis' twin—or Satan's. Observe how he regards the lady. *Pardieu*, were she a mouse and he a cat, I should not care to undertake insuring her life!"

I followed the direction of his gaze. Seated in an angle of the wall was a man of slight, boyish build with almost feminine, delicate hands idly toying with his watch chain in a listless, indolent fashion. His old face, long, hard-shaven like a priest's or actor's, was in odd contrast to his youthful body, and in the aged, wrinkle-etched countenance there burned a pair of great, sorrowful eyes—eyes like Lucifer's as he broods upon the high estate from which he fell—which gazed stedfastly and unchangingly at the smoothly brushed blond hair above the nape of Mrs. Breakstone's creamy neck.

I shook my head and wrinkled my brow in distaste. It seemed to me that every atom of liquor-heated masculine desire in the room had been merged into the fixed, unwavering stare of those two sad yet pitiless eyes set in that old, wicked face which topped the lithe, incongruously youthful body of the stranger.

"What do you make of him?" de Grandin prompted as I held my peace.

I shook off the sort of trance which held me. For a moment I had been deaf to the café's clatter, blind to its softly

glowing lights, unmindful of the food which cooled before me as a single thought-desire seemed to overwhelm me—an almost uncontrollable desire to rise and cross the floor and dash my knotted fist into that old and sinful face, bruise those sorrowful, steadfast eyes and trample that frail, boyish body underfoot.

"Eh?" I returned as I emerged from my fog of primordial fury like a sleeper coming out of sleep. "Oh—excuse me; I was thinking."

"*Exactement*; I think I know your thoughts; I have the same," de Grandin answered with a laugh. "But ere we give way to desire and slay that unclean-looking person, tell me what you think of him. Is he the cause of Monsieur and Madame Breakstone's perturbation?"

"No," I returned, "I do not think so. I doubt if they realize he's there. If she did, she'd surely tell her husband, and if Idris saw him looking at his wife that way—well, I think our impulse would be translated into action, and without much delay."

The little Frenchman nodded understandingly. "I agree," he told me. "Come, let us eat and go, my friend. If we remain much longer I shall most certainly do that one an injury, and I have no desire to be embroiled with the police so late at night."

THE numbing cold of the evening had abated somewhat and a fine, crisp snow had fallen, covering streets and lawns with an inch or so of gleaming veneer; but the snow had ceased and the moon had risen and silvered the sleeping city with an overlay of nacre when the shrilling of my bedside telephone summoned me from sleep. The biting caress of the light, early-morning wind filtering through the stripped trees made me shiver as I snatched up the instrument and growled a sleepy "Hullo?"

"Idris Breakstone speaking, Doctor Trowbridge," the caller responded. "Can you come over? Muriel—my wife—she's—please hurry; this is urgent!"

"H'm, it had better be!" I murmured grimly as I reached for the clothes which a lifetime of experience as a general practitioner had taught me to keep in order on the bedside chair against such emergencies as this. "Confounded nuisance, knocking a man out of bed like this. Why——"

"What is it, my friend?" Wrapped in a mauve-silk dressing-gown, purple kid slippers on his womanishly small feet, a pink-and-lavender muffler about his throat, Jules de Grandin appeared at the bedroom door, all trace of sleep banished from his little, round blue eyes as he surveyed me with an elfish grin.

"Oh? It woke you too, eh?" I countered, jamming my foot into a shoe and fumbling with the lacings. "Well, misery loves company. No, I doubt it's important; it's Muriel Breakstone, the girl we saw in the night club, you know—her husband just 'phoned, and"—I tied the knot of my second shoe and drew on my waistcoat and jacket—"and she's probably got indigestion from too much rich food or some of that funny liquor they serve there. Little fool! If she'd had sense enough to stick to good, wholesome beer——"

"Await me, my old one; I hasten, I rush, I fly!" de Grandin interrupted as he swung about and raced down the hall toward his room. "The lady will surely not expire if you delay until I dress, and I damn think anything concerning her should interest us. Oh, undoubtedly, yes."

He was dressed in less time than it took me to go to the garage for my car, and was waiting, my medicine kit beneath his arm, as I drove round to the front door.

I gave him a curious sidelong glance as we swung out into the quiet, snow-muffled street. "What's up?" I asked. "I know you can smell a mystery as far as a Scotsman can scent a bargain, but——"

"*Hélas*, I can not tell you with assurance," he replied. "I have only what you call a hunch to go on; but this so attractive lady with her ill-at-ease manner, and that old-young one who watched her so intently, they intrigue me. I damn think we shall hear more of them, and meantime I would keep in touch with the situation——"

"Well, here's your chance," I interrupted as I brought the car to a halt. "Here we are."

The wide front door of Breakstone's house swung back as we mounted the porch steps, letting a path of warmth and lamplight stream out across the snow. Idris himself let us in and hurried us across the hall with its pavement of turf-soft rugs. "It happened half an hour ago," he told us, and from the way his lips trembled and his firm, cleft chin quivered, we could see that panic fear was tugging at his nerves. "We were out late tonight, and stayed up talking after we got back. We went to bed only a little while ago, and I don't think either of us had more than just gone to sleep when—come up and see her, gentlemen. Do what you can for her—then I'd like to talk with you."

I glanced curiously at his stooped shoulders as we followed him up the stairs. I'd known Idris from his first second of life, and this nervous, trembling, incoherent man was a stranger to me.

A bandeau of black lace held Muriel Breakstone's smoothly shingled and marcelled blond hair in place, and her diaphanous black lace-and-chiffon nightrobe disclosed low breasts and arms and shoul-

ders white and dimpled as a baby's. I bent to feel her pulse, and noted with a start that it was weak and feeble. Her flesh was cold as clay, despite the double blanket of thick camel's hair and the down-filled comforter upon the bed, and all along her hands and forearms there showed the tiny hummocks of horripilation. Her eyes were wide and glassy, and about her nose where it joined the cheeks were the faint-drawn lines of exhaustion. As I leaned forward to listen at her heart her breath struck my cheek, cold and damp as a draft from a cellar—or a mausoleum.

"Pain?" I asked sententiously, laying my left hand palm-down across her right iliac fossa and tapping its back gently with the fingers of my right. To de Grandin I muttered: "Subnormal temperature, light, increased pulsation, low vitality. Almost too soon for para-appendicitis, but——"

"No," the patient answered feebly, fumbling listlessly with the hemstitched edge of the pale-pink linen sheet, "I'm not suffering any, only—terribly—frightened—Doctor. Please——" her voice trailed off to an inaudible whisper, and again a light shudder ran through her, while the goose-flesh on her arms became more pronounced.

"She woke up screaming something had her by the throat," Idris broke in. "At first she was hysterical, but she's been like this since just before I called you, and——"

"Get me an electric pad, or a hot water bottle, if you haven't that," I interrupted. "What d'ye say, de Grandin? Shock?"

"*Mais oui*," he agreed with a nod. "I concur. External heat, a little ether, some brandy later, perhaps, then a sedative. Undoubtedly it is shock, as you say, my friend. Yes."

We gave our treatment quickly, and when the patient rested in a light, calm

sleep, trooped down the stairs to the library.

"**N**ow, what's the cause of this?" I asked as Idris preceded us into the luxurious room and switched on the lights. "What did she eat at the *Pantoufle Dorée* tonight? I'm convinced this comes from a nightmare induced by indigestion, though I'm willing to admit I found no evidences of dyspepsia. Still——"

"*Zut*, my old one, we are here to listen, not to talk," de Grandin reminded. Then, to Idris:

"You wished to speak with us, *Monsieur*?"

The young man took a turn across the room, lighted a cigarette, crushed its fire out against the bottom of a cloisonné ash-tray, then snapped his lighter as he set a second one aglow. "Doctor Trowbridge," he began, expelling a twin column of smoke from his nostrils, "do you believe in ghosts?"

"Eh, do I believe in—Lord bless my soul!" I answered.

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin added, "despite the admonitions of the elder churchmen, that man is a fool who states his implicit belief in anything—likewise his unqualified disbelief—we have the open mind. What is it you would tell us?"

Idris tossed his cigarette aside half smoked, then mechanically lit another. He studiously avoided glancing at us as he replied slowly:

"I think this house is haunted."

"Eh?" de Grandin answered sharply.

"Do you say it?"

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "That's just silly, boy. For one thing, the place isn't old enough. It hasn't been finished more than half a year, has it?"

"All right," the young man answered with a trace of dogged stubbornness in his voice, "let's put it another way. Sup-

pose I say we—Muriel and I—are haunted?"

"Oh——" I began, but Jules de Grandin's quick reply cut through my mocking rejoinder:

"How is that, *Monsieur*? We are interested. Tell us everything. There are no unconsidered trifles in cases such as this."

Idris dropped into an easy-chair, crossed his left knee over his right leg, then his right knee over his left, lifted the top from a cigarette box and replaced it slightly awry, then straightened it with meticulous care. "Do you remember Marjorie?" he asked irrelevantly.

"Humph!" I grunted. Was I likely to forget the sweet, old-fashioned girl he married on his return from France, the joy I'd wished them on their wedding day and the pang his marriage to the exotic creature lying upstairs had caused me when all my skill proved unavailing to keep Marjorie alive? "Yes, I remember her," I answered shortly.

"And who was she?" de Grandin asked, leaning slightly forward in his chair and fixing a level, unwinking stare on Idris.

"My wife."

"Ah? And——"

"Anything I say tonight is told you under the seal of your profession?" Idris asked.

"But certainly, in strictest confidence. Say on, *Monsieur*."

"Marjorie Denham and I were born within a city block and a single month of each other. Right, Doctor Trowbridge? You ought to know, you officiated at both our——"

"Get on with it," I ordered with a curt nod. "You're right."

"We grew up together," he continued listlessly, "made mud-pies together, played together. I never teased her or pulled her hair, or hurt her in any way,

for even as a savage little brat of a boy I was too fond of her for that. We went to school together, and I carried her books back and forth. We went to our first party together, and it was I she went out with when she wore her first long dress and put her hair up for the first time. She never had a beau, I never had a sweetheart—we weren't lovers, you see, just good, intimate friends, but each filled the other's needs for comradeship so fully that the want of other companions never seemed to enter our thoughts.

"I joined up early when the war broke out, made the first training-camp and went across in the fall of '17. Marjorie came round to the house to see me off and brought me a sweater and helmet. She cried a little, and I was pretty close to tears myself, but we didn't kiss. It just didn't occur to us—to me, at any rate.

"Every mail—every mail that was delivered, that is—brought me news of home from Marjorie. They weren't love letters; just good, long, gossipy letters of happenings around town, and they were like visits home to me.

"I got it in the lungs at Saint-Mihiel when we wiped out the salient—good stiff dose of chlorine gas that almost did me in. It put me in hospital and a convalescent home at Biarritz for almost a year. They thought I'd turn out to be a lunger, after all, but I fooled 'em—worse luck.

"It was while I was convalescing at the home I heard—through Marjorie, of course—of my parents' death. Flu sent Dad west just after the Armistice, and Mother went early in '19. Broken heart, I guess. There are such things, you know.

"There wasn't any reception committee or brass band waiting at the station when I came back to Harrisonville. Everybody was too busy making money while the

chance was good to care about a demobbed soldier then, and besides, no one knew I was coming, for I hadn't written. The camp surgeon's office out at Dix didn't make up its mind to give me a discharge till the last minute, and I didn't know whether it would be Harrisonville, New Jersey, or Nogales, Arizona, I'd be headed for an hour before my papers came through the personnel adjutant's office.

"I was in civvies, and no one seemed to notice me when I got off the train. You can't imagine how strange the town where I'd been born seemed as I stood in the station that afternoon, gentlemen," he continued, "and when I realized my home was closed, and no one there to welcome me, I felt like lying down and crying, right there on the platform."

"*Mon pauvre!*" de Grandin murmured sympathetically.

Idris turned his head aside and winked his eyes several times, as though to clear them of a film of tears. "There was just one place I wanted to go—one place that seemed like home," he continued, lighting a cigarette and puffing it slowly. "That was our family plot in Shadow Lawns. So I jumped in a taxi and went out there.

"**I**T WAS something after four o'clock in a November afternoon, and dusk was already settling when I walked up the drive leading to their graves—my father's and mother's. I wanted to tell them, 'I'm here at last, dear old people,' and maybe kneel in the grass and whisper something intimate in Mother's grave. But——"

He paused again and drew a handkerchief from the pocket of his lounging-robe, dabbed unashamed at his eyes, and continued: "But there was some one already there when I arrived. It was Marjorie, and she'd brought two bouquets of

fresh-cut flowers, one for Mother's grave, one for Dad's.

"Then, gentlemen, I knew. Just as Saul of Tarsus saw the light when the scales dropped from his eyes at the house of Judas in the street called Straight, I saw Marjorie as she really was. I'd always thought her a nice-looking girl with fine eyes and a clear skin, but from that moment she has seemed beautiful to me. All the happiness I'd had from her companionship, all the unvarying kindness she'd shown me throughout our lives, all the dear things she'd meant to me since we were babies suddenly came home to me as I stood beside my parents' graves that afternoon.

"There wasn't any formal proposal. I just opened my arms to her and said, 'My dear!' and:

" 'I've always loved you, Idris, and I always shall,' she told me as I held her in my arms and she turned her lips up to mine and gave and took the first kiss of her life—the first kiss she'd ever had from any man outside her family.

"We were married the next week, you remember, Doctor Trowbridge.

"Poor Marjorie! I hadn't much but love to give her. The war that made 'most everybody rich had ruined my father. He was an importer of aniline dyes, and war with Germany killed his business. All he left me, except a few receipted bills, was something like a hundred dollars cash and a formula he'd worked out for making dyes. He'd died just after perfecting it; they said he'd have had more chance with the flu if he hadn't weakened himself working nights in his little laboratory on that formula.

"I got a job and Marjorie and I set up housekeeping. Dad's old place had been sold to pay his debts, so we started living in a three-room flat. Between times, when I wasn't working in the company's laboratory, I tried to market Dad's

dye formula, but nobody seemed interested. The German patents had been sequestered anyway, and with the treaty signed new importations were coming in from Europe, so no one had much time for home-made products in the dye industry.

"Then the baby—little Bobby, named for Dad, you know—came, and we had it harder than ever. Marjorie—God rest her soul!—even took in sewing to help ends meet, but—well, you know what happened, Doctor Trowbridge. Tuberculosis wouldn't touch these gas-burned lungs of mine, but it fastened on my wife like a wolf upon a lamb. Sending her away was out of the question. We didn't have carfare to take us west of Camden! Marjorie wouldn't hear of leaving me, anyway. 'We've waited so long for each other, Idris,' she told me, 'please let me have you till the last moment.'

"We'd been married with a doubling ceremony, and on the inside of her ring and mine was engraved '*Forever*.' A few days before she died she asked me, 'Idris, dear, you'll always love me, always love me more than any one, and never, never forget me?'

"I could hardly answer for the sobs that filled my throat, but I put my lip against her ear and told her, 'Always, dear love; always and forever.'

"You know what happened, Doctor Trowbridge. All my love and all hers, and all your years of experience couldn't keep her, so she left me, and her last words were: 'Promise you'll remember, Idris.'

"The irony of it! Marjorie had hardly been buried in the Breakstone plot—certainly the funeral bill was nowhere near paid—when I struck it. The Clavender Company, that had turned me down cold two years before, bid in my patent formula and gave me such a royalty contract as I'd never had the nerve to think

of asking. I've had more money than I've known what to do with ever since, and when Bobby grows up he'll be one of the richest young men in the state. And half, a tenth, a twentieth of the money I get for doing nothing every half-year now would have kept her with me!

"I haven't known what to do with either my money or myself these last few years. I've given away more than I ever hoped to own, splashed it around like dishwater, squandered it; still it kept coming in faster than I could spend it. I bought a hundred thousand shares of wildcat mining stock at two dollars. The stuff looked so worthless it wouldn't even do for wallpaper. I forgot it, but it didn't forget me. Within a year it shot up to a hundred, and, of course, I sold. Next month the bottom fell out, and the stock became utterly worthless, but I'd made a fortune in it. That's the sort of luck I've had—now that it doesn't matter any more.

"Last winter I met Muriel Maidstone on a Mediterranean cruise. You've seen her; you know her appeal. I was lonesome as Lucifer cast out of heaven, and—well, we were married. That's that.

"It wasn't long before I realized what a fool I'd been. She came from a good Southern family; poor as church mice. Like so many old families with fine traditions and scarcely any money to carry them on, they'd come to worship wealth as Deity. The mere possession of money seemed to them—and her—an end in itself. Wealth was its own justification, and luxury the only thing worth while. A racketeer with unlimited money at his disposal was greater in their estimation than Galileo and Darwin and Huxley, all together.

"Fool! I married her because she set my blood on fire and stole my thought and made me forget the emptiness of life with her Circe-lure. I learned later I

could have had all she had to give—to sell, rather—without the formality of marriage, provided I'd been willing to pay enough. It was for *that* I took off the little, cheap, plain-gold ring with 'Forever' written in it, that Marjorie had put upon my finger when we married! God pity me!

"I said money was Muriel's god, but that's only half the truth. Money's first, of course, but power's a close second. When her arms are round a man she can make him swear his soul away and never know it. And she loves to use that power. She kept at me everlastingly, making me vow my love for her, swear I loved her more than anything, finally, declare I loved her above everything in this world *or the next*.

"I haven't had a moment's peace since I took that perjured oath. My conscience has tormented me unceasingly, for I've felt I've been untrue to Marjorie—and *Marjorie knows!*

"I've felt her near me, felt her presence, just as I used to in the old, poor, happy days together, while I shave or dress, or sit here reading in the library, and Muriel's felt it, too. She says the house is spooky and uncanny and wants to sell it; but she feels a queer, pursued sensation even when she's away. It's always with her, it's almost always with me.

"Muriel hasn't much use for Bobby, you know. She hardly ever sees him and never speaks a word to him when she can avoid it. Two nights ago we went out, and, though I didn't know it, she gave the servants the night off. Bobby was left here alone. I was nearly frantic with remorse when we got back, and rushed up to the nursery to apologize to him and say I hadn't realized he was deserted that way.

" 'Oh, that's all right, Daddy,' he an-

swered. 'Mother's been here. She often is.'

"No amount of argument could make him change his story. I tried to tell him Mother was in heaven, and folks up there don't come back to earth, but he persisted.

" 'She comes to see me nearly every night,' he said. 'Sometimes she holds me in her lap and sings to me; sometimes she just sits by the bed and holds my hand until I go to sleep. One time a noise outside frightened me, and I cried, and she bent over me and smoothed my hair and kissed me and told me, "Don't be afraid, Bobbycums. Mother won't ever let *anything* hurt you; anything or any one!"'

"I didn't tell you this upstairs; I couldn't; but tonight when we came home from the theater and the supper club Bobby was restless. He called me several times, and finally I went into the nursery and sat with him. Muriel was furious. She called me once or twice, then came after me. When Bobby protested at my leaving she slapped his face. An hour later she woke up screaming something had her by the throat, went into hysterics, then fell into that semi-coma in which you found her.

"No, Doctor Trowbridge," he concluded, "it wasn't anything she'd eaten that caused that nightmare-fright. I know what—*who*—it was. *So does Muriel!*"

I forbore to look at Idris. Obviously the youngster was convinced of everything he told us, and to remonstrate with him would have been as unkind as arguing a child out of his belief in Santa Claus.

Jules de Grandin suffered no such reticence. "What you tell us is entirely credible, my friend," he assured young Breakstone. "As to any dereliction of faith on your part, do not reproach your-

self too harshly. The weakness of men where women are concerned is equaled only by the weakness of women where men are involved. *Madame*, your *ci-devant* wife, she understands and makes allowances, I am sure. Love may transcend death, but jealousy? I do not think so; for perfect understanding and jealousy can not exist together. No."

THE next day was a busy one for me. The customary gluttony attendant on the Christmas season produced its usual results, and I nearly suffered writer's cramp penning prescriptions for bismuth salicylate and magnesium calcinate. I was dog-tired by dinner time and ready for bed at nine.

How long I lay in the quiet slumber of exhaustion I do not know, but that I sat bolt-upright in my bed, all vestiges of sleep departed, I well remember. I had not dreamed, I know that; yet through the muffling curtains of sleep I had distinctly heard a voice which called me by name to rise and dress and go somewhere, although the destination was not plain. Now that I was awake, the summons still persisted, though it was no longer an actual, oral order, but rather a voice heard "inside my head" as one is conscious of the phrasing of a thought or of that subjective sound of ringing bells in the ears which follows an overdose of quinin.

"What?" I asked, as though an actual voice addressed me.

"Eh, you have heard it, too?" de Grandin's query came from the darkened hall. "Then it is an actuality!"

"What d'ye mean?" I asked, snapping on the bedside light and blinking at him.

"A moment hence," he replied, "I woke from sleep with the strong impression that some one—a woman, by the voice—called me and urgently requested that I proceed forthwith to 195 Leight

Street. Is there, perhaps, such an address?"

"Oh, yes," I answered. "There's such a number, and it's a pretty shabby neighborhood, too; but——"

"And did you wake in similar circumstances?" he interrupted.

"Yes, I did," I admitted, "but——"

"Then there are no buts, my friend. Come, let us go."

"Go? Where?"

"Where in Satan's name but to that Leight Street address," he returned. "Come, make haste; we must hurry."

Grumbling, I heaved myself from the bed and began to don my clothes, the little Frenchman's admonitions to speed ringing in my ears.

Leight Street, as I had told him, was a shabby neighborhood. Once, years ago, it had been fashionable; now it was like an old duchess in poverty. Drab, dismal rows of shabby old houses faced it north and south, their broken windows and weather-scarred, almost paintless doors like rheumy eyes and broken teeth in old and hopeless faces. Damp, bleak winds blew through the narrow thoroughfare from the bay, bearing a freight of dust and tattered newspapers and the heavy, unwholesome smell of coarse and poorly cooked food—the cheap boarding-house smell, redolent of human misery and degradation as the feter from a jail or madhouse. Before the old, decrepit houses stood low, rust-bitten iron fences enclosing little yards once used as gardens, but barren of any vegetation save the hardiest of weeds for many years. Somehow, they reminded me of the little fences one sometimes sees about old, neglected graves in country churchyards. Of all the melancholy houses in the melancholy, shabby-genteel street, 195 seemed most wretched. A small, fly-specked sign displayed behind the cracked panes of its French windows advised the passer-

by that lodgers were accommodated there, and a flickering gas flame burned anemically in the shelter of a cracked red-glass globe in the shabby hall behind the shabby vestibule.

We halted before the decrepit gate while de Grandin viewed the place reflectively. "Of all the crazy, crack-brained things——" I began indignantly, but he cut me short with a quick gesture.

"A light burns yonder," he whispered; "let us investigate." Fearing the rusty hinges of the gate might give warning of our entrance, we stepped across the yard's iron fence and tiptoed toward the tall windows which lighted the English basement. Shades were lowered behind the panes, but a wrinkle in the linen made a tiny opening at one side through which one might look into the room by applying his eye to the glass.

Protesting, I followed him, paused at the tiny areaway before the window and looked round guiltily while he bent forward shamelessly to spy into the house.

"Ah?" I heard him murmur. "A-a-ah? See, look, observe, Friend Trowbridge. What is it we have here?"

Reluctantly I glued my eye to the chink between the blind and window-frame and looked into the room. The contrast between the drab, down-at-the-heel exterior of the house and the apartment into which I gazed almost took my breath. A bright fire blazed behind polished brass fire-dogs in the open fireplace, an Oriental rug of good quality was on the floor, the furniture was substantial and expensive, well-rubbed mahogany, tastefully upholstered, a fine Winthrop desk, a table spread with spotless linen and glistening with silver and cut glass; most incongruous of all, a silver girandole with a bouquet of fresh-cut flowers. Half facing us, but with his odd, sad eyes stedfastly fixed on Muriel Breakstone, sat the queer, old-young man we had noticed in the

supper club the evening before. As he came into my line of vision he was in the act of pouring some colorless liquid into a small phial. His lips moved, though no sound came to us. Muriel, her pale, clear-cut face a shade paler than usual, faced him; her eyes were wide with fear, but the man's long, deeply wrinkled countenance betrayed no more emotion than if it had been graven out of stone. I turned to Jules de Grandin with a question, but the words died stillborn on my tongue, for:

"Here, here, now, what are youse two guys up to?" demanded a truculent voice as the street-lamp's rays glistened on the polished shield and buttons of a policeman.

The little Frenchman leaped back from the window as though its glass had suddenly become white-hot, then turned to the patrolman. "*Monsieur*," he began, but paused with a quick smile of recognition. "Ah, is it truly you, my friend?" he asked, advancing with extended hand.

"Why, it's Doctor de Grandin!" Officer Hornsby exclaimed with an answering grin. "I didn't recognize ye, sir. What's doin'? Can I help ye? Detective Sergeant Costello told me th' other night that if ye ever called on me for help, 'twas just th' same as if he done it hisself."

The Frenchman chuckled. "It is well to be so highly thought of by the force," he answered, then: "Advance, my friend, but cautiously, for we must not advertise our presence. Look through the gap in yonder curtain and tell me who it is you see. That man, you know him, perhaps?"

"Holy Mike, I'll say I know him!" Patrolman Hornsby ejaculated, backing away from the window and fumbling for his gun. "That's 'Poker Face Louis,' th' quickest-shootin' racketeer in th' game. He's been hidin' out these last

three weeks, 'count of a little shootin' bee he had with some state troopers. Wanted for murder, an' a few other things, that bird is. Well, well, so this is his hide-out, eh? You just wait here, sir, while I go get a couple o' more boys to help me run this baby in. Some one's goin' to get hurt before we finish th' job, but——"

"Why go for help? I am here," de Grandin answered. "Let us take him here and now, my friend. Think of the admiration you will receive for such a feat."

"We-el," obviously, Officer Hornsby wavered between desire for praise and the likelihood of coming out of the encounter with a bullet in him, "a'right, sir; I'm game if you are."

"But we saw that man last night in a supper club," I protested. "Surely, if he's been wanted by the police, he wouldn't dare——"

"You don't know 'Poker Face,' Doctor Trowbridge, sir," Hornsby interrupted. "Puttin' stockings on a eel is a cinch compared with tryin' to arrest him. Of course you seen him in a club. He's got half th' waiters in town on his payroll, an' they slip 'im through th' back doors—an' out th' same way—th' moment anything that looks like a policeman comes in sight. All ready, sir?" he asked de Grandin.

"In a moment," the other answered, stepped back to the boundary of the yard and pried a piece of paving-stone from the loose earth beneath the iron fence. A moment later he heaved it through a window letting out of the front parlor which occupied the building's first floor, and as the glass fell crashing before his missile, leaped forward with Officer Hornsby, straight at the shaded window of the room where "Poker Face Louie" and Muriel Breakstone sat.

Cap pulled down, overcoat collar up

about his neck to fend off flying glass, Hornsby crashed through the window like a tank through barbed wire, Jules de Grandin at his elbow. "Poker Face" leaped from his seat with the agility of a startled cat and thrust one hand into his dinner jacket, but before he could snatch his weapon from his shoulder holster, de Grandin's deadly little automatic pistol was thrust against his temple. "Hands up—and keep them there, if you please, *petit porc*," the Frenchman ordered sharply. "Me, I do not greatly admire that face of yours; it would require small inducement for me to change its appearance with a bullet. Examine him, Friend Hornsby; unless I miss my guess, he wears an arsenal on him."

He did. Under Hornsby's expert search a revolver, two automatic pistols and a murderous, double-edged stiletto were removed from the prisoner's clothes.

"Why, you damned, dirty little Frog, you——" the captive began, but:

"Softly, my friend, there is a lady present, and your language is not suited to her ears," de Grandin admonished as Hornsby locked handcuffs on the prisoner's wrists. "*Madame*," he turned toward Muriel's chair, "I much regret our so unceremonious intrusion, but—*mon Dieu*, she is gone!"

Taking advantage of our preoccupation with her companion, Muriel Breakstone had vanished.

"After her, Friend Trowbridge!" he cried. "Hasten, rush; fly! We must overtake her before she reaches home—we must!"

"What's it all about?" I panted as we reached my car and set out in pursuit of the vanished woman. "If——"

"If we are too late I shall never cease reproaching myself," he interrupted. "Can not you see it all? *Madame Breakstone* is enamoured of this criminal. It is not the first time that gently brought-

up women have succumbed to such fascinations. No. She is tired of her good, respectable husband, and thinks only of getting rid of him. *Ha*, and that one with the unchanging face, he is not averse to helping her. That liquor we saw him give her undoubtedly was poison; could you not read fear of murder in her face as she received the bottle from him? But that will not deter her. No. Like a pantheress she is, cruel and passionate as a she-cat. Unquestionably she will administer the drug to Monsieur Idris, unless we can arrive in time to warn him, and—*Dieu de Dieu*, is Satan in league with them?"

THE warning clang-clang of a locomotive bell sounded as he spoke, and I clapped my brakes down sharply, stopping us within two feet of the lowered crossing-gate as a seventy-car freight train rumbled past. De Grandin beat his knuckles on the windshield, pulled at his mustache till I thought he would tear hair and skin away in one tremendous tug, and swore venomously in mingled French and English while the train crawled past. When the gates were finally raised we had lost the better part of fifteen minutes, and to make matters worse, a broken bottle tossed in the street by some one who had patronized a neighboring bootlegger with more generosity than wisdom cut our front tire to ribbons as I put on speed.

Taxicabs were non-existent in that poverty-stricken neighborhood, and no service station was available for half a mile. We limped along on a flopping, ruined tire, finally found a place where a new one could be had, but lost three-quarters of an hour in the search.

"It is hardly worth while hurrying now," de Grandin told me with a fatalistic shrug as we resumed our way. "However, we might as well continue;

Monsieur Martin, the coroner, will be pleased to have us sign some sort of statement, I suppose."

Lights blazed in Breakstone's house when we drew up before the door, and servants followed each other about in futile, hysterical circles.

"Oh, thank Gawd, you've come, sir!" the butler greeted us. "I telephoned you immediately it happened, but they told me you were out, and Doctor Chapman was out, too, so——"

"*Ha*, it has occurred, then?" de Grandin cut in sharply. "Where is he?"

The servant gazed at him in awe-struck wonder, but swallowed his amazement as he turned to lead us to the library.

Idris Breakstone lay supine on the leather couch, one hand trailing to the floor, the other folded peacefully across his breast. A single look confirmed our fears. No need to tell us! Death's trade mark can not be counterfeited, and physicians recognize it all too well. His eyes were partly closed and brilliant with a set, fixed, glassy stare, his lips were slightly parted, and light flecks of whitish foam were at the corners of his mouth.

The Frenchman turned from the body almost indifferently, took up the empty glass upon the table, and held it to his nose, sniffing lightly once or twice, then passed it to me with a shrug. Faint, but still perceptible, the odor of peach-kernels hung about the goblet's rim. "Hydrocyanic acid," he pronounced. "Less than one grain is fatal, and death is almost instantaneous. They were stupid, those two, for all their fancied cleverness. A child could not be deceived by this, and——"

"But see here," I remonstrated. "You're set on the theory of murder, I know, but there's a slim chance this might be suicide, de Grandin. We know Idris was—well, talking strangely, to say the least, last night, and we know he was a bro-

ken-spirited, disillusioned man. He might have done this thing himself. Plain justice demands we take that into consideration. It's true we saw that queer-faced man give Muriel something in a bottle, but we didn't hear what they said and we don't really know it was poison, so——"

"*Précisément*," he nodded grimly. "You have right, my friend. We do not yet *know* it was poison he gave her, or that she administered it, so we shall interview Madame Breakstone and hear the truth from her lovely, guilty lips. Come; we are not men dealing with a woman, now, but agents of justice with a criminal." He strode to the door, flung it open and beckoned to the butler. "Your mistress," he ordered curtly. "Take us to her."

"Ye-es, sir. She's upstairs, sir. I thought you'd like to see her as soon as you were through with the master. Will you come this way, sir?"

"Assuredly," the Frenchman agreed, and fell into step beside the servant. "No noise," he warned in a threatening whisper. "If you advise her of our coming——"

"Sir?" the other interrupted with a shocked expression.

"Exactly, precisely, quite so; I have said it," de Grandin returned sharply. "Your hearing is of the best, my friend. Proceed."

THE sound of a woman sobbing softly came to us as we approached Muriel's bedroom door. "*Tiens, Madame*, tears will avail you nothing," the Frenchman muttered. "Justice knows neither sex nor gallantry; neither does Jules de Grandin in such a case as this." He rapped sharply on the white-enameled panels, then, as the door swung back:

"*Grand Dieu*—what is this?" he asked in blank amazement.

Upon the bed lay Muriel Breakstone, a coverlet drawn over her, leaving only her quiet face exposed. A maid, red-eyed with weeping, rose from her chair and motioned us toward the still form. "You're the doctors?" she queried between sobs. "It's awful, gentlemen. I was down th' hall by Master Bobby's door when I heard Mrs. Breakstone come running upstairs and into her room as if some one was after her. She screamed once, and I came as quickly as I could, but when I got here she was—oh, I was so scared, I didn't know what to do—I couldn't even scream, for a minute! I got her to the bed and drew the cover over her, then got her smelling-salts, but——"

"*Précisément*, it was useless; I perceive," de Grandin interrupted. "You did your best, *Mademoiselle*, and as your nerves have had a shock, I suggest you go below stairs and give yourself a cup of tea. You will find it restful." He motioned toward the door, and as the trembling girl crept out he turned down the coverlet and stared intently in the dead woman's face.

"And what do you make of this, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked, tapping Muriel's throat with the tip of a well-manicured forefinger. Upon the right side of the smooth, white neck was already forming an elongated patch of discoloration, while the left side showed four long, parallel, reddish lines reaching toward the back from a point midway between the tip and angle of the jaw.

"Why—er——" I began, but he waved me to silence, took my hand in his and pressed my first two fingers against the neck in the receding angle below the chin. Only soft flesh opposed the pressure.

"You see?" he remarked. "The right horn of the hyoid bone is fractured. It is often so in cases of strangulation—throttling by the hand. Yes; of course; I

have seen it more than once in the Paris morgue."

"But who did it—who *could* have done it?" I stammered. "D'ye suppose Idris could have been seized with a fit of homicidal madness, strangled Muriel, then, returning to sanity and realizing what he'd done, committed suicide——"

"Zut!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Your question slanders the helpless dead, my friend. That poor one downstairs was murdered, foully murdered. As to who performed the deed for this one—one wonders." But from the expression on his face I knew he had arrived at a decision.

He was strangely silent on the homeward drive, nor would he respond to any of my attempts at conversation.

THEY buried Idris and Muriel Breakstone on New Year's Eve. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind in Idris' case, and of murder by throttling at the hands of some person or persons unknown in the case of Muriel. At de Grandin's request Coroner Martin, in his private and unofficial capacity of funeral director, saw that the little, plain-gold ring with "*Forever*" engraved on its inner surface was slipped on the third finger of Idris' hand before the body was placed in the casket. The tall, gray-haired mortician and the little Frenchman were fast friends, and though the coroner asked no questions, he nodded sympathetically when de Grandin gave him the ring and asked that he see it was put on the body.

Darkness had fallen and the old year was dying in a flurry of light, feathery snow when Jules de Grandin and I stopped at Breakstone's house, the Frenchman with a great bundle of toys and a gigantic box of chocolates under his arm.

"I bring them for *petit* Monsieur

Bobby—*le pauvre enfant!*" he told the child's grandmother, who, with her husband, had agreed to occupy the house until Idris' estate could be settled and permanent arrangements made for the little boy.

"Your daughter, Monsieur Breakstone's first wife, she would have wished that you take charge of her little one in such circumstances," de Grandin whispered as he ascended the stairs to the nursery. "It is well that you are here.

"We shall not waken him if he is sleeping," he added as we halted before the nursery door, "but I should like to look at him, if I may, and leave these gifts where he can find them when he rises in the morning. However, if you think——"

He broke off abruptly, while he and Mr. Denham and I stared at each other in blank amazement. From the darkened nursery there came to us distinctly the sound of voices—happy voices!—of a child's light laughter, the deeper laugh of a man and the soft, lilting laughter of a woman. Then: "Good night, little son, happy dreams; sleep tight!" a woman said, and, "Good night!" a childish treble answered.

Mr. Denham pushed back the door and stared about the room. Save for the little boy, snugly cuddled in his crib, the nursery was empty. "Why"—the grandfather began—"I thought——"

"Hello, Grandpa," the youngster greeted sleepily, smiling at the old gentleman, "Mother's been here, and Daddy, too. They told me good-night just a moment——"

"Why, Bobby, that can't be!" his grandfather cut in. "Your Mother and Daddy are——"

"Say it, *Monsieur*," de Grandin challenged fiercely, his little, round blue eyes glazing as they rested on the older man,

"say it, and, *parbleu*, I shall pull your nose!"

To Bobby he announced: "Of course they were here, *mon petit*, and they shall come to you many, many more times in future, and he who says otherwise is a foul, depraved liar. Moreover, he must fight with Jules de Grandin who would tell you they may not come. Yes; I have said it." He bent and kissed the youngster on the brow, then laid his gifts upon the table. "They are for you, my little cabbage," he said. "Tomorrow, when you rise, you shall have them all, and—my love to your dear parents when next they come to you, my little one!"

"I WONDER what it was we heard in there?" I asked as we drove home from the theater some hours later. "I could have sworn we heard a man's voice—and a woman's, too—but that's impossible——"

"You *could* have sworn!" he interrupted, something like incredulity in his tone. "*Pardieu*, I shall swear it; I have sworn it; upon a pile of Holy Scriptures high as that Monsieur Woolworth's so beautiful tower I will affirm it before all the world. 'Whom did we hear?' you ask. *Barbe d'un chou-fleur*, who should be in the little man's nursery at sleepy-time but those who loved him in life; who but she who summoned us to witness the perfidy of the false wife and her paramour, and to learn the truth about the poison which took Monsieur Breakstone's life? Who but the one who wreaked swift vengeance on the false-hearted murderess even as she gloated over her success? Who, indeed, *parbleu*?"

"Death is strong, but love is stronger, my friend, and woman fights for the man

she loves. The false one had but short time to enjoy her triumph, while as for her lover—*ha*, did not the spirit of dear Madame Marjorie, which led us to that house in Leight Street, indirectly cause his apprehension, and must he not now answer for his misdeeds before the bar of justice? But certainly.

"Attend me, my friend: Women, children and dogs know their friends instinctively. So, it would seem, do disembodied spirits. When Madame Marjorie sought one on this earthly plane to help her in her work, whom should she choose but Jules de Grandin? In times gone past he has been known as a ghost-breaker. These last few nights, I damn think, he has essayed a new rôle, that of ghost-helper. Yes, *par la barbe d'un taureau*, and it is a rôle he has liked exceedingly well!"

"But see here," I expostulated, "you don't seriously believe that Marjorie's spirit was responsible for all this?"

Across the city, down by the water works, a whistle hooted hoarsely, another took up the cry, in a moment the night was full of shrieking, cheering whistles and clamoring bells. The carillon in St. Chrysostom's belfry began to sing a joyous peal:

"Ring out the false, ring in the true,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow . . ."

Jules de Grandin removed the white-silk handkerchief from the left cuff of his dinner jacket and wiped his eyes upon it, unashamed. "My friend," he assured me solemnly, "I do believe it; I believe it with all my heart. Come, let us hurry."

"Why, what's the hurry now?"

"The Old Year dies. I would greet the New Year fittingly—with a drink" he answered.

