

# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*

THE HEART OF SIVA

*a mystery story*

By SEABURY QUINN



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# Weird Tales

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# The Heart of Siva

By SEABURY QUINN

*A startling weird mystery tale of eery murders and the gruesome fate of the dancers in the Ballet Russe—a tale of Hindoo fanaticism*

"IS THERE a doctor in the house?" Sharp-toned, almost breathless, the query cut through the sussuration of comment following the second divertissement offered by the Issataikko Ballet Russe. The gay, chattering buzz-buzz of conversation which characterizes every audience during the entr'acte was hushed to a barely audible, curious murmur which rippled from lip to lip: "What is it? What's happened? Is it a——"

"Here, *Monsieur le Directeur!*" Jules de Grandin announced, rising in his chair and seizing me by the shoulder. "Here are two of us; we come at once.

"Your pardon, *Mesdames, Messieurs,*" he added to our neighbors as, regardless of the toes he trampled and the shins he kicked, he forced his way to the aisle, dragging me behind him, and made swiftly for the passageway leading backstage from the rear of the lower tier of boxes.

"And now, *Monsieur*, what is it, if you please?" he asked as the iron-sheathed fire-door clanged shut behind us and we found ourselves in the dim-lit, mysterious space behind the wings.

"One of our girls, *Mam'selle Niki,*" the perspiring manager half gulped, half gasped, mopping a dew of glistening, oily moisture from the top of his pink and hairless head with a crumpled white-silk handkerchief. "She was due to go on in the next number—Flora, who shares her room, had already come down

and was waiting, but Niki didn't answer the bell, and when we sent for her we found she hadn't even begun to change. She's had a seizure of some sort, I'm afraid. If you'll come with me, please, gentlemen——"

He turned toward a winding spiral of iron stairs, his bald head gleaming in the subdued rays of a cage-protected electric light, the breath wheezing with oily sibilance between fat lips.

De Grandin and I followed as best we could, picking our path between masses of scenery, across coiling, serpent-like electric cables, winding our way up the twisting stairs, and finally coming to pause before a narrow metal door on which our guide knocked sharply. No answer being received, he thrust the portal open and stood aside to let us enter.

The cubicle into which we stepped was reminiscent in shape, size and general appearance of a cell in one of our more modern jails. Cement walls dressed with rough-cast plaster bore penciled sketches of girls' heads, with occasional more intimate details of anatomy, accompanied here and there by snatches of decidedly un-Tennysonian verse. A cluster of electric lights set in the ceiling gave brilliant illumination to a narrow, unpainted table with two make-up boxes on it.

Crumpled on the floor before the second make-up box lay a girl. As nearly as I could determine at first glance, she was clothed in a sleazy rayon kimono figured with atrocious caricatures of green fla-

*"Like a pouncing cat he leaped across the floor, his flashlights playing steadily upon a tiny cord-like coil."*



mingos feeding from a purple pool. For the rest, bracelets, bell-hung anklets and breast-boxes of imitation silver set with glass jewels and ear- and nose-rings of pinchbeck seemed to complete her costume. Her slim, bare body was smeared with umber grease-paint in simulation of a Hindoo woman's sunburnt skin, and a small, red caste mark set between her eyes completed the illusion, but where the coarse-haired wig of black had slipped from her forehead there showed a thin line of pallid scalp and a straying tendril of fine, light hair, proclaiming her a natural blond.

Flaccid as a cast-off rag doll she lay, one arm grotesquely doubled underneath her, the other, laden with its loops of imitation jewelry, extended toward us, slender, dark-stained fingers with straw-

berry-tinted nails clutched into a little, rounded fist on which the cheap rings glittered fulgently.

De Grandin crossed the little room in two quick strides, dropped to one knee and took the giri's thin wrist between a practised thumb and finger. A moment he knelt thus, then, putting out his hand, raised her left eyelid.

"*Ab-ba*," the nasal, non-committal ejaculation which held no hint of laughter, yet somehow conveyed an implication of grim humor that told me he had found something; something wholly unexpected.

He bent again to look at her clenched hand, gently prizing the stiff fingers open, and from his waistcoat pocket produced a small lens, fitted with a collapsible tube, like a jeweler's loop, set it in his eye and raised the little, brown-stained hand, re-

garding it intently. His elbows moved, but since his back was to me I could not tell what he was doing as he bent still closer to the inert form. At length:

"*Monsieur*, this poor one doubtless has a *doublure*—an understudy?" he asked the manager.

"Why, yes, but——"

"*Très bon*; you would be advised to call her to the stage. *Mademoiselle* will not be able to appear again tonight—or ever. *Elle est morte.*"

"You—you don't mean she's——"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur*; she is dead."

"But what are we to do?—this will ruin us!" Tears of terror and self-pity welled up in the manager's rather prominent blue eyes. "This mustn't reach the papers, sir! That threat—that note——"

"*Ab-ba*!" again that nasal, enigmatic sound, half query, half challenge. "There was a note, *hein*? What did it say?"

A look of panic swept across the manager's broad face. "Note?" he repeated. "Oh, no, Doctor, you misunderstand; I was referring to a promissory note which falls due on the first. If this death becomes public we shan't be able to meet it!"

"U'm?"

"Poor Niki," the manager hurried on, obviously intent on changing the subject as quickly as might be. "She seemed so well just a few minutes ago. She must have had a seizure of some sort."

"Seizure is the word, *Monsieur*," de Grandin agreed grimly, fixing the other with a level stare. Then:

"*Allez*; get on, begin your show. Me, I have work to do!" He fairly pushed the other from the room; then, to me:

"Phone for the coroner, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded. "Bid him come quickly for this poor one's body, if you please. Do you await him here, and ask him to withhold the autopsy until he hears from me. I shall be in the rear of

the auditorium, awaiting you when you have done with him."

"Couldn't you determine the cause of death?" I asked curiously as he turned to leave.

"Truly, my friend; only too well."

"Why, then, can't you sign the death certificate and save Mr. Martin the bother——"

"*Mais non*, the law forbids it. This so unfortunate young woman was murdered."

"Murdered?"

"*Précisément*; most foully done to death, or I misread the signs."

I FOUND him lounging at the rear of the theater, with the studied boredom of a seasoned boulevardier when, the girl's body entrusted to Coroner Martin's custody, I quit my lonely vigil with the dead.

The third presentment of the *Issatakk* Ballet was in progress, depicting one of those never-ending conflicts between gods and men with which the elder religions teem. Seated beneath the outstretched branches of a tree was a young ascetic, thighs doubled under him; feet, soles up, resting on his crossed calves. His head sunk low upon his breast, hands lying flat, palms up, upon his knees, he sat stone-still in silent contemplation whereby he sought to acquire mastery of the secrets of the universe and share the power of the gods.

Far away, faint as the whisper of a lilted summer zephyr, a wind arose, stirring the foliage of the tree under which the youthful yogi sat, scattering a gay cascade of ruby-tinted blossoms over him. The crouching figure sat immobile.

Now the wind lifted and the great trees bowed their heads in terror as the Storm King drove his chariot across the sky. Black clouds piled menacingly, bank on bank, obscuring every shaft of light which

shot down through the forest, and spears of vivid lightning stabbed the darkness while the thunder roared a fierce, continuous cannonade. Still the yogi sat in moveless contemplation.

Then suddenly a blaze of light effaced the gathering shadows and upon a dais we saw the seated form of Siva, the Destroyer. Cross-legged sat the god, feet doubled under him; the lithe body, gleaming like burnished bronze, bare from soles to brow, save where great bands of gold encircled ankles, waist and wrists, and where a heavy collar of dull gold, thick-set with carved coral, rested round the neck. Upon the head was reared a coronet of seven leaping flames, and between the eyes was set the caste-mark of the followers of Siva. Plainly, it was a girl who impersonated the dread third person of the Indian Trimutri, but by ingenious use of lights and draperies perspective was so altered that a second girl behind the first was totally invisible, save where her arms were thrust to right and left beneath the other's, giving a perfect illusion of a human form with four pectoral limbs. Each hand of the four arms was held identically, thumbs and forefingers pressed daintily together, as though about to lift a pinch of snuff. For a moment the six-limbed form sat motionless; then as the orchestra began a soft *andante*, the arms began to move, rippling bonelessly from shoulder down to wrist, supple as twining serpents, fascinating as the movements of a reptile when it would put a spell upon its prey.

Some moments this endured; then, as though summoned by the eery beckoning of those reptilian hands, a bevy of girls drew near, the light reflected from the brooding deity's throne shining on their rings and belts and tinkling silver anklets. These were, I knew, the Apsaras or Houris from the Hindoo paradise, and as they neared the throne of Siva and

groveled to the earth before the squatting god, their mission was made clear; for with a final gesture of its fourfold hands the deity commanded that they exercise their wiles upon the brooding yogi who took no note of storm or hurricane or the threatening bolts of lightning sent to drive him from his meditation.

The figure of the god dissolved in darkness, and with subdued gurgles of laughter the Houris formed themselves into a ring and danced about the seated mystic entreating him with every artifice of Eastern love to look upon their charms and forget his contemplation in the pleasures of the flesh. Still no response from the brooding, seated figure.

Now, covered with chagrin at failing to arouse the young man's passion, the Apsaras drew off, their arms across their faces to hide the tears of shame which started to their eyes; and suddenly the music changed. No longer was it light and gay and frolicsome, a fitting tune for little, silver-bangled feet to dance to; it was a sort of sensuous *largo*, a creeping, repellant, slowly moving thing instinct with subtle menace as the sinuous turnings of a snake, redolent with the sort of awful blasphemy which might attend the unclean secret worship of some band of obscene ophiolatrists.

By a clever bit of stage mechanics a shadow-spot was thrown upon the scene. That is, as a shaft of light might strike upon a darkened stage, picking out the figure of the actor upon which it rested, there was now centered a spot of shadow in the midst of light, and in this, slowly, with a sinuousness which raised the hair upon my head with the age-old, atavistic fear of all warm-blooded creatures for the snake, there danced—or rather writhed—a figure.

She was not nude. Had she been so, the lewd obscenity of her would have been less repulsive. Instead she wore a

skin-tight costume of fine net, transparent as air across the front, save where patches of black, green, or yellow-blue sequins were sewn upon it at breast and waist and thigh. Across the back, from waist to heels, the net was set with gleaming snake-scales, and a trailing train of the material swept upon the floor behind her. Upon each great and little toe of her feet there gleamed an emerald-studded ring, so that each step she took was like the forward-darting of a green-eyed snake, while on her arms were flesh-tight sleeves of shining scales and on her hands were mittens fashioned like the wedge-shaped heads of cobras-de-capello. Upon her head, obscuring hair and face, save for her vivid, scarlet-painted mouth, was drawn a hood of flashing emerald scales.

She was the daughter of Kadru, the snake-goddess, sent from the realm of Takshaka, the serpent-king, to do the work at which the Apsaras failed.

And well she did it!

Each movement was enticement and repulsion rolled in one; the fascinating glinting of her scales was beauty wed to horrifying menace. The slow, mesmeric movement of her hands beckoned with inducement which combined the promise of god-forbidden joys with the pledge of sure destruction. I understood, as I watched breathlessly, how it was that mankind held the serpent in a detestation bordering on loathing, yet in the days before the old gods lost their right to worship, reared altars to the snake and paid him honor with blood-sacrifice.

The young ascetic raised his eyes as the serpent-daughter circled round and round his seat of meditation. At first stark horror shone upon his face; then, slowly, came a look of wondering curiosity; at length a fascinated ecstasy of longing and desire. Her scale-clad hands danced forth to touch his cheeks, her hooded head bent toward him, and

straight into his eyes she looked, red mouth provocatively parted, low laughter which was half a hiss inviting him to—  
*what?*

The strain was past endurance. With a wild cry of renunciation the youth sprang up, all thought of contemplation cast aside. He had looked into the eyes of the snake-woman, and looking, cast off his hope of Nirvana in favor of the promise she held out to him.

Her laughter, hard and clear as any note of silver clapper striking on a silver bell, sank lower, softened to a sibilating hiss; her scale-sheathed arms went round his quivering shoulders; her gleaming, supple body seemed to melt and merge with his, her hooded head sank forward; her flaming, blood-red mouth found his and sucked his soul away. He stiffened like a nerveless body shocked with electricity, held taut as a violin string stretched until the breaking-point is reached; then suddenly, as though the breath she drew forth from his lips were all that held him upright, he wilted. Like a candle in a superheated room, like a doll from which the sawdust has been let, like a toy balloon when punctured with a pin he wilted, dropping flaccid and lifeless in the serpent-witch's cruel embrace. And as she let his limp form sink down to the moss beneath the tree the daughter of the snake-king bent above him and laughed a low and hissing laugh, a laugh of sated cruelty and triumph blended into one, but a laugh which split and broke upon a sob as she gazed down on what had been a man.

Then the purple curtains clashed together and the lights went up. The final act of Issatikko's Ballet Russe was done.

FOR a long moment silence reigned within the auditorium. A program dropped, and its rustle sounded like the scuttering of frost-dried leaves across a

country churchyard in midwinter. A woman tittered half hysterically, and checked herself abruptly, as though she'd been at vespers, or at a funeral service. Then, wave on crashing wave, like breakers surging on a boulder-studded shore, applause broke forth, and for fully five minutes the theater rang with the impact of wildly clapping hands.

De Grandin struck his hands together gently, but there was no enthusiasm in his gaze as the curtains swung apart, revealing the entire Issatanko troupe lined up in acknowledgment of the ovation. Rather, it seemed to me, his eyes roved questingly about the auditorium, seeking something other than a farewell glimpse of the performers whom the audience applauded to the echo. At length:

"Do you observe them, too, my friend?" he asked, nudging me in the side with the sharp angle of a bent elbow as he nodded toward the center aisle.

I followed the direction of his nod with my glance. A party of three dark men, immaculate in faultless evening dress, correct in every detail, even to the waxen-leaved gardenias in their lapels, was walking toward the exit. The foremost man was rather under middle height and surprizingly broad across the shoulders. His arms were long, hanging nearly to his knees, and there was something simian in his rolling gait. Although his face was dark as any negro's, there was nothing negroid in his features or the straight black hair plastered smoothly to his head. Behind him walked a slightly taller man, lighter in skin, slenderer in build, and as he turned his face toward me a moment I caught a fleeting glimpse of his eyes, odd, opaque-looking eyes devoid of either luster or expression. The third man of the party was younger, thin to the point of emaciation, hairless as a mummy, despite his youth. Without

quite knowing why, I was unpleasantly impressed by them.

"Now, by the nightcaps of the seven Ephesian Sleepers, one wonders," de Grandin muttered to himself.

"Wonders what?" I asked.

"Where the fourth one went, *parbleu!*" he answered. "Five minutes—maybe six—ago, another one, almost the counterpart of that *sacré singe* who leads, left his seat and the theater. I should greatly like to know——"

"They seem men of refinement," I cut in. "Possibly they're from New York's negro colony and——"

"And perhaps they come from hell, with the taint of brimstone on their breath, which is more likely," he retorted. "Those are no negro-men, my friend; no, they are Asiatics, and Hindoos in the bargain."

"Well?" I countered, hardly knowing whether to be more exasperated than amused. "What of it?"

"Exactement—what?" he answered. "Come, let us go and see."

Instead of leaving by the front, he led me down the farther aisle, fumbled for a moment at the leaves of a fire-door, finally let us out into the alley leading to the stage entrance. Hastening down this narrow, tunnel-like passage he came to an angle of the wall, halted momentarily, then:

"*Ab-ba? Ab-ba-ba?*" he exclaimed sharply. "Behold, observe, my friend! I feared as much!"

Lying in a heap, her clothing disarranged, her straw-braid hat some distance from her, was a girl, motionless as an artist's lay-figure cast aside when its usefulness is done.

DE GRANDIN dropped beside her, pressed an ear against her breast, then rising quickly stripped off his dinner coat and folded it into a pad over which



he laid the girl face-down, the folded garment forming a pillow under the lower part of her chest. Kneeling across her, he pressed his hands firmly on each side of her back beneath the scapulae, bearing down steadily while he counted slowly: "Un—deux—trois," swinging back, releasing the pressure, then leaning forward, applying it again.

"Whatever are you doing?" I demanded. That he was applying the Schäfer method of resuscitation was obvious, but why he did it was a mystery to me. In nearly half a century of practise I had yet to see such treatment for a case of fainting.

"*Parbleu*, I build a house, I go to take a ride on horseback, I attend a dinner at the Foreign Office, what else?" he answered with elaborate sarcasm, continuing to exert alternating pressures on the prone girl's costal region.

A low moan and a gasp told us that the patient was responding to his treatment, and he leaped up nimbly, raised her to a sitting posture with her back against the wall, then bent down smiling.

"You are here, outside the theater, *Mademoiselle*," he told her, anticipating the question with which nine fainting patients out of ten announce return to consciousness. "Will you tell us, if you please, exactly what occurred to you before you swooned?"

The girl raised both hands to her neck, caressing her throat gently with her finger tips. "I—I scarcely know what happened," she replied. "I had to get home early, so I went out before the *finale*, and was dressed and ready when the curtain was rung down. Just as I left the theater something seemed to—to fall on me; it seemed as though a great, soft hand had closed around my throat and two big fingers pressed beneath my ears. Then I fainted, and——"

"*Précisément, Mademoiselle*, and can you tell us if you cried for help?"

"Why, no; you see, it took me so by surprize that I just sort of gasped and——"

"Thank you, that explains it," he broke in. "I wondered how you had survived; now I understand. When you gasped in sudden terror you filled your lungs with air. Thereafter, right away, immediately, you fainted, and the muscles of your neck were utterly relaxed. Squeeze as he would, he could not quite succeed in strangling you, for your flaccid flesh offered no resistance to the pressure of his *roomal*, and the air you had inspired was enough to aerate your blood and support life until we came upon you. But it was a near thing, *cordieu*—one little minute longer, and you would have been—*pouff!*" He put his gathered thumb and fingers to his lips, and wafted a kiss upward toward the summer sky.

"But I don't understand——"

"Nor need you, *Mademoiselle*. You were set upon, you were almost done to death; but by the mercy of a kindly heaven and the prompt advent of Jules de Grandin, you were saved. May we not have the pleasure of securing a conveyance for you?"

He bowed to her with courtly Continental grace, assisting her to rise.

"And may one ask your name?" he added as we reached the avenue and I held up my stick to hail a cruising taxicab.

She turned a long, appraising look on us, taking careful stock of my bald pate fringed with whitening hair, my professional beard and conservatively cut dinner clothes, then, with brightening eyes, took in de Grandin's English-tailored suit, his trimly waxed wheat-blond mustache and sleek blond hair. With a smile which answered that which the little Frenchman turned toward her she an-

spered, "Certainly, I'm billed as Mam'selle Toni on the program, but my real name's Helen Fisk."

"Now what?" I asked as the taxi drove away.

"First of all to see *Monsieur le Directeur*; perhaps to pull his nose; at any rate to talk to him like an uncle freshly come from Holland," he returned, leading the way back to the theater.

Monsieur Serge Orloff, managing director of Issatko's Ballet Russe, whose real name must have been quite different from the one he bore in public, sat in sweaty and uncomfortable loneliness in the little cubicle which served him for an office. "Ah, gentlemen," he greeted as we entered, "I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you for what you did this evening. I suppose there'll be some charge for your—ah—professional assistance?" He drew a Russia leather wallet from the inside pocket of his evening coat and fingered it suggestively.

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin told him bluntly, "I think you are a liar."

"Wha—*what*?" the other stammered. "What's that?"

"Precisely, exactly; quite so," the Frenchman answered. "That note of which you spoke when first we met. It was no note of promise, and you know it very well; you also know we know it. It was a threat—a warning of some kind, and you must let us see it. Right away, at once."

"But my dear sir—"

"To blazing hell with your dear sirs—the note, *Monsieur*." He thrust his hand out truculently.

Orloff looked at him consideringly a moment, then with a racial shrug opened his wallet and gave the Frenchman a slip of folded paper.

"Um?" de Grandin scanned the mis-

sive rapidly while I looked across his shoulder:

Manager, Issatko Ballet:

Impious man, be warned that your speech, *La Mort d'un Yogi*, is an insult to the gods it parodies. If you would save the sacrilegious women who take part in it, and yourself, from the vengeance of the Great Destroyer, you will discontinue it at once. Death, sure and inescapable, shall be the lot of all who further this vile insult to divinity. Be warned in time and do not further brave the vengeance of the gods of India.

(Signed) THE SLAVES OF SIVA.

"What does it mean, 'the Great Destroyer'?" I asked.

"Siva," he replied, almost petulantly. "He is the third person of the Hindoo triad. Brahma, the Creator, is the first, Vishnu, the Preserver, second, and Siva, the Destroyer, the last and greatest of them all." Then, to the manager:

"This thing, when did you get it, if you please, *Monsieur*?"

"About a month ago, sir. We opened in Bridgeport, Connecticut, you know; and this note was slipped under my office door the morning following the first try-out performance."

"Um? And has any effort been made to enforce the threat—before tonight?"

"Tonight? You don't mean Niki was a victim of—"

"Niki and Toni, too, *Monsieur*. The first was killed outright by a very clever piece of villainy; the second would have died by the strangling-handkerchief—the *roomal* of the *ibags*—had I not smelt the fish and hastened to her aid, before I surely knew that she had been attacked."

"Oh, this is terrible!" Orloff fairly wailed. "I dare not let this news leak out. Oh, what *shall* I do?"

"First, *Monsieur*, you would be advised to secure police protection for your troupe. Have them—and yourself as well, well guarded while entering, leaving or within the theater—"

"But I can't do that. That would involve publicity, and—"

"Very well," the Frenchman bowed with frigid politeness. "Do as you please, *Monsieur*. I leave to hold a session at the city mortuary and"—there was no humor in the smile he turned upon the manager—"unless you act on my advice, I greatly fear that I shall see you there ere long."

"COLORED men, Why, yes, sir: there's been one of 'em buying tickets to every performance since we opened," the ticket-seller, who boasted the proud title of assistant treasurer of the Issatakkko Ballet, told de Grandin as we stopped before his wicket in the lobby. "Funny thing, too; one of 'em, not always the same feller, stops here every afternoon and buys four tickets for the evening show. I don't know who he gets 'em for, but he's here each afternoon, as regular as clockwork. Always gets the best seats in the house, too."

Nodding courteous acknowledgment of the information, de Grandin sought the ticket-taker. It appeared, from what the latter had to say, that "four dinges come every evenin', an' one of 'em always runs out sort o' early, with th' other three leavin' when the show lets out."

"*Eh bien*, my friend," de Grandin told me as we set out for the city morgue, "it would seem there is a definite connection between the advent of those dark-skinned gentlemen, the note of warning which so disturbed Monsieur Crloff, and the death of that unfortunate young woman in her dressing-room tonight. *N'est-ce-pas?*"

CORONER MARTIN greeted us cordially as we entered his funera! home, which also housed the city's autopsy room. "No, there's been no post-mortem yet," he answered de Grandin's anxious question. "Fact is, Doctor Parnell, the coroner's physician, is out of town on

six weeks' vacation, and as he has no official substitute, I——"

"Ah, *parbleu*, our problem then is solved!" the Frenchman broke in delightedly. "Appoint me in his place, *Monsieur*, and I shall perform the autopsy at once, immediately. Yes; of course."

The coroner regarded him thoughtfully. They were firm friends, the tall, gray-haired mortician and the dapper little Frenchman, and each held the other's professional attainments in high regard. "By George, I'll do it!" Mr. Martin agreed. "It's a bit irregular, for I suppose you're not strictly 'a physician and surgeon regularly resident in the county,' but I think my authority permits me to make such interim appointments as I choose. Have you any theory of the death?"

"Decidedly, *Monsieur*. This so unfortunate young woman was murdered."

"Murdered? Why, there's no trace of violence, or——"

"That is where you do mistake; observe, if you please." Crossing the brightly lighted, white-tiled room, de Grandin moved the sheet shrouding the still form upon the operating-table and pointed to the inner corner of the left eye. "You see?" he asked.

Bending forward, we descried the tiniest spot of black. It might have been a bead of mascara displaced from her elaborately made-up lashes; perhaps an accumulation of dirt.

"Blood," de Grandin told us solemnly. "I noticed it when first I viewed the body, and I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, why is it that this poor one bleeds from the eye? Has she fallen, sustained a fracture of the skull, with consequent concussion of the brain?'"

"'It are not likely,' I reply to me, 'for had she done so she would have bled also from the nose; perhaps the ear, as well.'"

"Then I remember of a body which I once examined in France. A very cunning murder had been done that time, but physicians of the Ministry of Justice discovered him. Yes, of course. This is how it had been done:

"Above the eye there is a little cul-de-sac, a pouch, roofed off by the so thin bone of the supraorbital plate, upon which rests the brain. A long, thin instrument of steel, like, by example, the pins with which the pretty ladies used to fasten on their hats, could be thrust in there, curved above the eye, and easily pierce the thin bone of the supraorbital plate. *Voilà*, the instrument punctures the frontal lobe, a hemorrhage results, and a synthetic apoplexy takes place. Death follows. You see? *Mais, c'est très simple.*

"And, my friends"—he turned his level, unwinking cat-stare on each of us in turn—"the murderer in that other case was an Asiatic—a Hindoo. The technique in that case was like that in the case before us; I damn suspect the nationality of the murderers is similar, too. Come, let us see if Jules de Grandin is mistaken."

With the uncanny speed and certainty which characterized all his surgery he set to work with bistoury and saw and chisel, laid the scalp and lifted off the skull-vault. "Observe him, gentlemen," he ordered, pointing with his knife-blade to the dissected frontal lobe. "Here is the blood-clot which caused death, and here"—he directed our attention to the neatly sawed skull—"you will observe the small hole in the roof of the orbit, the hole by which the instrument of death penetrated the brain. Is it not all plain?"

I had to look a second time before I could discern the hole, but at length I saw it. There was no doubt of it, the roof of the supraorbital plate had been

pierced, and death had followed the resultant brain-hemorrhage.

"Good heavens, this is fiendish!" exclaimed the coroner.

"Perfectly," agreed de Grandin placidly.

"And you suspect the murderer?"

"I am certain that he is one of four whom I did see tonight, but which one I can not surely say. Moreover, *bélas*, knowing and proving are two very different things. Our next task is to match our knowledge with our evidence, and——"

The buzzer of the operating-room telephone broke through his words, and with a murmured apology Mr. Martin crossed the room and took up the receiver.

"What, at the Hotel Winfield?" he demanded sharply. "Yes, I have it—O-r-l-o-f-f. Right. Send Jack and Tommy over with the ambulance."

"What is it, Monsieur Martin?" de Grandin asked, and as the coroner turned from the 'phone I felt my pulses beating faster.

"Oh," answered Mr. Martin wearily, "it's another case for us. Mr. Orloff, the manager of the Issatanko Ballet, has just been found dead in his room at the Hotel Winfield."

"*Nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un nom!* So soon?" cried Jules de Grandin. "I warned the silly, avaricious fool of his danger, but he valued gold above life and would not have police protection, and——"

"Quick, *Monsieur*," he besought Martin, "bid them hold the ambulance. Friend Trowbridge and I must accompany them; we must see that body—observe the way it lies and all surrounding circumstances—before it has been moved."

Stripping off rubber gloves and apron he thrust his arms into his dinner jacket, seized me by the elbow and fairly dragged me up the stairs to the garage where the ambulance was waiting, engine purring.

"You're sure one of those men we saw in the theater tonight killed that girl?" I asked as we dashed through the quiet midnight street, our howling siren sounding strident warning.

"But certainly," he answered. "We have the similarity of technique in the stabbing through the eye, we have the threatening note to Monsieur Orloff, we have the circumstance of attempted garroting of Mademoiselle Hélène, last of all—this." From an envelope he produced a strand of crisp, black hair. "I found it bedded under the fingernail of the dead girl when I examined her remains in the theater," he explained. "She put up some resistance, but her assailant was too powerful."

"But this is curly hair," I objected. "Those men all had perfectly straight hair, and—"

"On their heads, yes," he conceded. "But this is hair from a beard, my friend. What then? The fourth man, the one who left the theater before the others, wore a beard. That it was he who attempted to garrote Mademoiselle Hélène in the alley I am certain; that he also killed poor Mademoiselle Niki in her dressing-room I am convinced, but—"

"How can you prove it?"

"Ha, there is the pinch of the too-tight shoe!" he agreed ruefully. "*Tout la même*, if it can be proved, Jules de Grandin is the man to do it. He is one devilish clever fellow, that de Grandin."

SPRAWLED supinely across his bed, eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling, mouth slightly agape, tongue protruding, lay the little, fat manager of the Issatako Ballet. It needed no second glance to tell that he was dead, and it required only a second look to tell the manner of his dying; for round his throat, just above the line of his stiffly starched dress collar, was a livid, anemic depression no

wider than a lead pencil, but so deep it almost pierced the skin. Habituated to viewing both the processes and results of violent death, de Grandin crossed the room with a rapid stride, took the dead man's head between his palms and slowly raised it. It was as though the head were joined to the body by a cord rather than a column of bone and muscle; for there was no resistance to the little Frenchman's slender hands as the dead chin nodded upward.

"*Parbleu*, again?" de Grandin muttered.

"What?" I asked.

"It is the strangler's mark, my friend," he answered, fingering the dead man's broken neck with delicately probing fingers. "Nothing but a *thag's* garrote leaves a mark like this and breaks the neck in this manner. One trained in the murder-school of Kalika has done this thing, and—ah? *A-a-ah? Que diable?*"

Bending forward suddenly he raised the manager's clenched hand. Protruding from between the first and second finger was a wisp of black, curling hair.

"*Parbleu*, he sheds his hair as an old hen drops feathers at the moulting-season, that one," the Frenchman muttered grimly. "And, *sang du diable*, I shall drag him to his death by those selfsame hairs, or may I eat fried turnips for my Christmas dinner!"

"Whatever are you vamping about?" I demanded.

"This, *mordieu!*" he answered sharply. "Even as the poor young Mademoiselle Niki, this unfortunate man grappled unavailingly with his assailant. In his case, as in hers, the murderer leant close to do his work, and in each instance his victim grasped him by the beard, yet could not hold him. But they managed to pluck away a hair and hold it in their hands as death came to them. The inference is

clear, unmistakable. The same man did both murderers."

"Well?"

"By damn it, no! It is not well at all, my friend. It is quite entirely otherwise. Attend me: This *sacré* killer, this strangler, this stabber-in-the eye, he is emboldened by success. He thinks because he has been able to do these things that he can continue on his road of wickedness. These crimes I make are unexplained," he says to him. "These Western fools are frightened, but they know not what it is they fear. *Voilà*, I continue in the future as in the past, killing when and where I please, and no one shall suspect me or call me to account."

"Say you so, *Monsieur l'Assassin*? Be happy while you may; Jules de Grandin has his nose upon your trail!"

"**B**UT no, *Monsieur*, not by no means; there it is you make the grand mistake!" de Grandin assured Mr. Masakowski, the new manager of the Issatakkko Ballet, next morning. "Your decision to abandon this enterprise will prove financially disastrous; it will stamp you as a weakling; it will also greatly inconvenience me."

Masakowski, a lean, hawk-nosed man with the earmarks of Southeastern Europe written large upon him, regarded the little Frenchman with a look in which fear and cupidity were almost evenly blended. "I'd like to carry on the show," he admitted. "The house is a sell-out and we're turning 'em away for the next three nights, but—well, you know what happened last night. Orloff's dead; murdered, I've heard it said, and Niki died mighty strangely in her dressing-room, too. Now Julia and Riccarda are reported absent. I called their house when they were half an hour late, and the landlady said they didn't even come home last night. Something darn funny about that." He broke

off, drumming on the cigarette-burned edge of his desk with long, nervous fingers.

De Grandin tweaked the needle-ends of his tiny, blond mustache. "You tell me two young ladies of the chorus are missing?" he asked.

"Not from the chorus; they were principals," Masakowski returned. "You remember the last episode, 'The Death of a Yogi'? Where, after thunder and lightning and tempest fail to rouse the ascetic from his contemplation Siva appears and summons the snake-queen to put her spell on him? Julia and Riccarda take the part of Siva. It's no cinch for two people to be as perfectly synchronized in movement as those girls are—the illusion they give of a single body with four arms is perfect, and took a lot of rehearsing. With them out of the show we'll have a tough time getting on, and we can't cut out that number—it's the hit of the piece."

"And have you no understudies for them?"

Masakowski ran a thin, artistically long hand through thick, artistically long hair. "That's just the trouble," he almost wailed. "Toni's understudied Julia, and we've another girl who can fill in with the second pair of arms—but they won't act. They say there's a jinx on the part and absolutely refuse to go on. And I can't rehearse another pair of girls in time for the evening show, so—"

"Mademoiselle Toni?" de Grandin interrupted. "She is here, perhaps?"

"Yes, she's here, all right, but—"

"*Très bon*. Me, I shall see her, talk with her, persuade her. I have the influence with that young lady."

"Yeah?" The manager was unimpressed. "Get her to take that part to-night and I'll give you and your friend season passes to any seats in the house."

"Agreed, by blue!" the little Frenchman answered with a smile, and led the

way backstage where electricians, performers and stage hands discussed the tragedy of the preceding night in the quaint jargon of their kind.

"*HOLA, Mademoiselle; comment allez-vous?*" de Grandin hailed Miss Fisk with a smile.

"Oh, good morning," the girl returned. "Awful about Monsoor Orloff, ain't it?"

"Deplorable," agreed the Frenchman, "but if the so superb performance should cease on that account, the calamity would be complete. It rests entirely on your charming shoulders, *Mademoiselle*."

"Hub?" She eyed him with quick suspicion; then, satisfied that he was serious: "How d'ye mean?"

He motioned her away from her companions before replying, then whispered, "*Monsieur* the Manager tells me you will not consent to do the dance of Siva——"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world I won't!" she broke in vehemently. "Some one's hung the Indian sign on that job, and I ain't askin' for nothin' bul-lieve you me. First Félicie and Daphné take a powder on us; then this morning, right after Monsoor Orloff dies, Ricarda and Juia turn up missing. Now they want me to take it on. Not much!"

"*Mille pardons, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin answered in bewilderment, "what is it that you say concerning Mesdemoiselles Daphné and Félicie? They took a remedy? No, I do not comprehend."

A little, gurgling laugh forced itself between the girl's pretty, brightly painted lips. Then, with sudden seriousness, she explained: "A month ago, when the show was having its tryout up in Bridgeport, Old Orloff got some sort o' note that scared him speechless. None of us knew just what it was, but he was like a feller with the finger on him—tore his hair—or went through the motions, rath-

er, seeing he was bald as a skinned onion, and swore some enemy was out to wreck the show.

"Well, anyhow, he was more scared than a cat at a dog show for the next four days; then, when nothin' happened, he kind o' cooled down. But you should 'a' seen him when Daphné and Félicie quit us without notice. You'd 'a' thought——"

"Quit? How?" he cut in.

"How? Just quit, that's all. They left the theater Sat'day night and never showed up again. None o' us have heard a word from either of 'em. Unless"——she halted, and a shiver, as though from sudden chill, ran through her scantily clad, exquisite form—"unless that statue——" Again that odd, half-frightened halt in speech, again a shudder of repulsion.

"The statue, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin prompted as she made no move to finish.

"Sure, that's another dam' funny thing about this business, Doctor. We'd just struck this burg——city, I mean——when an express van backs up to the theater with that statue all crated up, and addressed to Monsoor Orloff. There was an anomonous note with it, too."

"An anomonous——" de Grandin began questioningly, then: "Ah, *mais oui*, one apprehends. And this 'anomonous' message, *Mademoiselle*; it said what, if you remember?"

"It sounded kind o' nutty to me; sumpin about some sculptor havin' seen the show in Bridgeport and fallen ravishin'ly in love with the Dance o' Siva, or some such nonsense, and how he'd set up day and night chiselin' out a representation o' the divine pantomime, or sumpin, and wouldn't Monsoor Orloff please accept this token of an anomonous admirer and well-wisher, or sumpin like that.

"Old Orloff——Monsoor Orloff, I mean——was pleased as Punch with it and had it

set up in the lobby. It's out there now, I guess, but I don't know. The thing always gave me the creeps—it looks so much like Daphné, and every time I went past it, it seemed like she was somewhere tryin' to tell me sumpin, and couldn't; so I just quit lookin' at it.

"Now Julia and Riccarda have vanished into thin air, as the feller says, just like Daphné and Félicie, and I should take Daphné's place? I—guess—not! My mother didn't raise any half-wit children."

De Grandin gave his small mustache a soft, affectionate pat, then twisted its twin needle-points with such sudden savagery that I feared he'd tear them loose from his face. "*Mademoiselle*," he asked abruptly, "you are Irish, are you not?"

"Yes, of course; but what's that got to do with it?"

"Much; everything, perhaps. Your people see much farther through the mysteries of life—and death—than most. Will you await us here? We would examine this statue which affects you so unpleasantly."

THE statue of Siva stood upon a three-foot onyx pedestal in the theater's main lobby, and represented a slender, graceful four-armed female figure seated cross-legged, feet drawn up so far that they rested instep-down upon the bent thighs, soles upward. A pair of arms which grew naturally from the shoulders were bent at obtuse angles, thumbs and fingers daintily joined, as though holding a pinch of powder. Immediately below these arms there sprang from the axillæ a second pair of limbs, which extended outward to right and left, the right hand clasping what appeared to be a wand tipped by an acorn, the left hand cupped, a twisting flame of fire rising from its hollowed palm. Upon its head was set

a seven-spindled crown. The head was slightly bent, eyes closed, a look of brooding calm upon the small, regular features. The whole thing was executed in some smooth, black, gleaming substance—whether lacquered bronze, ebony or stained and varnished plaster I could not say—and the workmanship was exquisitely fine, even the tiny lines in the palms of the hands and soles of the feet and the scarcely perceptible serrations in the lips being represented with a faithfulness exactly reproducing nature. Save for a gem-studded collar, armlets, bracelets and anklets, the form was nude, but the gently swelling breasts were so slim and youth-like as almost to suggest a being of a neuter gender, a form endowed with grace, charm and beauty, yet sexless as an angel of the Apocalypse.

De Grandin walked slowly round the sculptured figure, examining it critically. "By blue," he murmured, "he was no jerry-workman, the one who made this thing. But no, his technique, it is—*cordieu*, my friend, I think it too perfect!"

Vaguely, I understood his criticism. No connoisseur of art, I was yet aware of some subtle difference between the life-sized effigy before us and other works of sculpture. Other statues I had seen suggested life, action or emotion, expressing their themes through representation rather than through reproduction. This thing was no simulacrum of humanity, it was humanity's own self, complete to the tiniest, faintest anatomical detail, and differed from other statuary as a bald and literal photograph differs from a portrait done in oils. Something not to be defined, something which impressed no physical sense, yet which impressed me sharply, repulsed me as I looked upon the statue.

"*Morbleu!*" the little Frenchman's sharp ejaculation brought me back from the thoughtful mood into which I'd



lapsed. "*Les mouches*, my friend, do you see them?"

"Eh?" I asked. "*Mouches*—flies? Where?"

"There, *cordieu!*" he answered in a low, hard whisper. "See, regard, observe them, if you will." His slender, well-manicured forefinger pointed dramatically to several tiny inert forms lying on the polished plinth on which the statue sat. They were a half-dozen common house-flies, still and dead, some turned back-down, some lying on their sides.

"Well?" I asked wonderingly.

"Well be baked and roasted on the grates of hell!" he answered shortly. "Your nose, my friend, can you use it? What is it that you smell?" Seizing me by the neck he thrust my face forward so violently that I thought he'd bruise my nose against the statue's polished, ebon surface. "Smell, smell—smell it, *mordieu!*" he commanded angrily.

Obediently I contracted my nostrils in a sniff, then wrenched loose from his grip. "Why, it smells like—like formalin," I muttered.

"Smells like formalin?" he mimicked. "*Grand Dieu des porcs*, it is formalin, great stupid-head! What does it here?"

"Why——" I began, but:

"*Parbleu*, yes; you have said it—why?" he interrupted. "Why and double why, my friend. That is the problem we are set to solve."

Drawing a letter from his jacket he emptied the envelope, swept the defunct insects into it and placed it tenderly in his waistcoat pocket. "Now for *Mademoiselle Hélène*," he announced, leading the way backstage once more.

"*Mademoiselle*," he whispered when the girl, obedient to his beckoning finger, joined us in a secluded corner, "you must go on tonight. You and *Mademoiselle Dorothée* must impersonate the

Great God Siva at tonight's performance. I——"

"Says you," the girl broke in. "Listen, I'm not takin' any chances with that part. Last night some darn fool was whistlin' in his dressing-room, and you know how unlucky for the show that is—I know it; didn't I like to get choked to death as I was leavin' the theater? This morning, on my way here, I ran head-on into a cross-eyed man, and a black cat an' two kittens crossed my path just as I turned into the alley to the stage door. Think I'm goin' to take on that hoodoo part with all them signs against me? Not much! Four girls who did that Siva dance before have disappeared. How do I know what's happened to 'em? Who knows——"

"I do!" de Grandin's interruption was sharp as cutting steel. "I can say what their fate was—they were murdered!"

"My Gawd!" Amazement, incredulity, but, strangely, little fear, showed in the girl's startled face.

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle*. *Mademoiselle Niki* and *Monsieur Orloff*, they were murdered too, if not by the same hand, undoubtedly by the same gang.

"Attend me——" His voice was low, scarcely above a whisper, but freighted with such authority that the girl forbore to interrupt, though we saw curiosity pressing at her lips like water at a straining dam when the freshets swell the streams in springtime. "I have every reason to believe these deaths and disappearances were due to a campaign of murder and intimidation subtly planned and craftily carried out by a quartet of the shrewdest criminals which the world has ever seen," he continued. "I tell you this because I think you can be trusted.

"Furthermore, *Mademoiselle*, because I think you have the courage of your splendid Irish race I ask that you will do this dance tonight; perhaps tomorrow

night, and several nights thereafter. The miscreants who murdered Mesdemoiselles Niki, Félicie and Daphné, who killed Monsieur Orloff and also doubtless did away with Julia and Riccarda, will unquestionably attempt your life if you perform this dance. For your protection you have only Jules de Grandin and *le bon Dieu*; yet it is only by luring them to attack you that we may hope to apprehend them and make them pay the penalty for their misdeeds. I do not minimize the danger, though Heaven, especially when it has Jules de Grandin as ally, is mighty to protect the innocent. Will you accept the risk? Will you help us in our aim to fulfil justice?"

For a long moment Helen Fisk looked at him as though he were a total stranger. Then, gradually, a look of hard determination came into her face, a stiffening in her softly molded chin, a hardening in her eyes of Irish blue. "I'll do it," she agreed. "Gawd knows my teeth'll be chatterin' so's I can't say my Hail Marys, but I'll take it on. If it's the only way to get the scum that did in Félicie and Daphné, I'm game to try, but I'll be so scared——"

"Not you; I know your kind; you will laugh at danger——" de Grandin told her but:

"Yeh, I'll laugh at it, all right—from the teeth out!" Miss Fisk cut in.

"*N'importe*; that you do laugh at all is all that matters," he assured her. "*Mademoiselle, je vous salue!*" He bent his sleek, blond head, and a quick flush mounted Helen Fisk's cheeks as for the first time in her life she felt a man's lips on her fingers.

HE WAS busy in the laboratory most of the afternoon, and when he finally emerged he wore a faintly puzzled look upon his face. "It was formalin,

beyond a doubt," he announced, "but why? It are most puzzling."

"What is?" I asked.

"The manner of those flies' demise. I have examined their so small corpses, and all are filled with formaldehyde. Something lured them to that *sacré* effigy of Siva, and there they met their death—died before one could pronounce the so droll name of that Monsieur Jacques Robinson—and died by formalin poisoning. The statue, too, as you can testify, gave off the perfume of formaldehyde, but why should it be so?"

"Hanged if I know," I answered. "It's really a most remarkable piece of work, that statue. Some one with an uncanny gift for sculpture must have seen that dance and have been so inspired by it that he made the thing and gave it to poor Orloff, but——"

"Quite yes, that is the story we have heard," he acquiesced, "but has it not the smell of fish upon it? Artists, I know, are not wont to hide their light beneath a bushel-basket. But no. Rather, they will seek for recognition till it wears you. Why, then, should a man with talent such as this one had seek anonymity? Such modesty rings counterfeit, my friend."

"Well," I temporized, "vanity takes strange forms, you know, sometimes——"

"Vanity, ha! *Tu parles, mon ami!*" With a sudden dramatic gesture he struck both hands against his temples. "Oh, Jules de Grandin, thou great stupid-head, how near they came to giving you the little fish of April, even as they did to poor, dead Orloff! But no, you are astute, shrewd, clever, *mon brave*, they shall not make the monkey out of you!

"*Au 'voir*, my friend," he flung across his shoulder as he hurried from the room, "I have important duties to perform. Be sure you're at the theater on time. A

spectacle not upon the program will be shown tonight, unless I greatly miss my guess!"

TRYING to look as unself-conscious as possible—and succeeding very poorly—Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello, star sleuth of the Harrisonville police force and bosom friend of Jules de Grandin, strolled back and forth across the theater lobby, his obviously seldom-used dinner clothes occasioning him more than a little embarrassment. Here and there amid the fashionable audience hurrying toward the ticket-taker's gate I descried other plain-clothes men, all equally uncomfortable in formal clothes, but all alert, keen-eyed, watchful of every face among the crowd. The effigy of Siva, I noted, had been taken from the lobby.

Backstage, uniformed men mounted guard at every vantage-point. It would have been impossible for any one not known to have gone ten feet toward dressing-rooms or wings without being challenged. Outside in the alley by the stage door a patrolman supplemented the guardianship of the regular watchman, and a limousine was parked across the alleyway, a uniformed policeman in the tonneau, another perched alertly in the cab beside the chauffeur.

The show began as usual, spectacle followed spectacle, each in turn being hailed with tumultuous applause. When "The Death of a Yogi" was presented we watched breathless as Helen Fisk and her partner did the sitting dance of Siva and the daughter of Kadru lured the young ascetic's soul from out his body with her venomous Judas-kiss.

"Well, so far everything's all right," I congratulated as the purple curtains drew together before the stage, but de Grandin cut my optimistic statement short.

"Will you observe them, my friend?" he whispered jubilantly, driving his sharp

elbow into my ribs. "*Parbleu*, do they not look as sad as the stones in the road?"

Up the center aisle, with anger, something like *chagrin* upon their swarthy faces, came the same trio we had noted on the previous occasion. With them, whispering excitedly to the slender, light-hued man, was a short, thick-set, bearded ruffian, impeccable in evening dress, but plainly out of place in Occidental clothes. He was black as any negro out of Africa, but his straight, black hair and curling beard, parted in the center, and the wild, fanatic rolling of his bloodshot eyes labeled him an Asiatic, and one habituated to the use of opium or hashish, I guessed.

"A little while ago he rose and left the others," de Grandin whispered with a chuckle. "When he went out he looked for all the world like Madame Puss intent on dining on canary-bird; when he returned, *parbleu*, he made me think of a small dog who creeps back to his master with his tail between his legs. The *gendarmes* we had set on watch had spoiled his fun completely!"

CONVOYED by policemen, the members of the Issatanko troupe left the theater, their guardians staying with them till their doors were safely locked. "Now, I'm after thinkin' we can go to bed, sors?" Costello asked as he reported all the actors had been safely taken home.

"There is a guard at Mademoiselle Hélène's house?" de Grandin asked.

"There is that, sor," the sergeant answered. "I've got a felly on patrol in th' street, an' another in th' alley at th' back. I'm thinkin' it'll be a dam' smart man as gits into that young lady's house to-night widout a invitation."

The little Frenchman nodded thoughtfully; then: "Suppose we go and see that all is well before we take a good-night drink," he suggested. "It was I who urged her to perform that dance tonight;

I would not have my conscience tell me I had failed to give protection to her in case she suffered injury."

The street in which Helen Fisk lodged was flanked by double rows of narrow, tall brick houses, flat-fronted, monotonous, uniform as a company of grenadiers. As I drew my car to a halt beneath the lamp post which stood before the lodging-house, a uniformed policeman suddenly materialized from the darkness, glanced inquiringly at de Grandin and me, then saluted smartly as he recognized Costello.

"Everything O. K., O'Donnell?" the sergeant asked.

"Yes, sir; quiet as a graveyard at midnight, so far," the officer replied. "I ain't even seen a——"

A sudden burst of light, dazzling as a Very flare, followed by the sharp, staccato *rat-tat-tat* of machine-gun fire cut short his words.

"Glory be to God!" Costello cried. "What th' hell——"

Dragging at the pistol in his shoulder-holster, he hastened down the street toward the intersecting roadway whence the disturbance came, followed full-tilt by Officer O'Donnell. A moment later another form emerged from the shadow of the house and the street lamp glittered momentarily on brass buttons and silver shield as the patrolman who had mounted guard at the rear hurried past to join Costello and O'Donnell in the chase.

"*Par la barbe d'un poisson vert,*" began de Grandin; then:

"Up, my friend; up quickly; I fear it is a ruse to draw away the guards; we must act quickly!" Fairly dragging me by a reluctant elbow, he rushed up the short flight of brownstone steps leading to the rooming-house door, pressed upon the panels with an impatient hand and

stepped quickly into the dimly lighted hall.

"You see?" he asked in a fierce whisper. "The door is unlocked—open! How comes it?" For a brief instant he bent to examine the fastenings; then:

"Observe him, my friend," he commanded. Looking where he pointed I descried a thin wedge of wood, like a match-stick sharpened to a point, thrust into the Yale lock, making it impossible for the latch to fly into position when the catch had been released. "*Diablerie!*" he muttered. "Costello and the others, they have gone in chase of the wild goose. Come, we must find Mademoiselle Hélène right away, at once."

"I heard her say she lived on the third floor," I whispered, "but whether front or back I don't——"

"No matter," he cut in. "We shall find her—*prie Dieu* we find her first! Up, my friend; mount the front stairs, while I go up the back. We shall meet at the top floor, and should you see another coming down, detain him at all costs. We can not take the chances, now."

He scuttled down the hall and let himself through the swing-door which communicated with the kitchen, waving encouragement and haste to me as he disappeared.

Walking as softly as I could, I crept up the stairs leading to the second floor, began ascending the narrow, spiral flight which gave access to the top story, at last, rather out of breath, paused at the entrance to the long and narrow hallway which bisected the third floor of the house.

Although there were two fixtures set into the wall, only a single electric bulb was burning, and by its rather feeble glow I discerned narrow, white-enameled doors opening to right and left upon the corridor, like staterooms on the passage in a steamship cabin. The place was ut-

terly untenanted, not even a mouse disputing my possession. A moment I paused, waiting for de Grandin; then, as no sign of him appeared, I took a tentative step or two toward the rear of the house, ears attuned for his step upon the stairs.

A FAINT, light *click*, like the slipping of a well-oiled lock, sounded at my back, and as I turned something whistled past my face, a sharp *pop!* sounded, and the electric bulb burst with a little spurt of fire. Next moment the hallway was drowned in devastating, smothering darkness.

Half terrified, I paused a moment in my tracks; then, fumbling for my match-case, I struck a light and held the little torch above my head.

"Oh!" I exclaimed involuntarily, shrinking back a step. Creeping stealthily on hands and knees, like an obscene and monstrously overgrown spider, was a man, a small, scrawny, dark-visaged man, silent as a snake in his sinister progress. As the matchlight shone momentarily on him it glinted eerily on the blade of a short, curved dagger clenched between his teeth. Brief as my inspection was, I recognized him as one of the quartet of Hindoos we had seen in the theater.

For a moment I stood frozen, aghast; then, marshaling my courage, I challenged sharply: "Halt—stand where you are, or I'll shoot!" Reaching in my waistcoat pocket, I clicked the cover of my glasses-case, hoping desperately that it simulated the sound of a revolver being cocked.

A low, soft laugh, sinister as the hissing of a serpent, answered me, and the fellow rose to his feet, raising his hands level with his ears and grinning at me maliciously. "Will the *sahib* shoot me, then?" he asked, letting the knife fall from between his teeth. "Is there no

mercy in your heart for me, *bazur?*" The words were humble, abject, but the tone was gravid with biting irony.

"Turn around," I ordered gruffly. "Now, march, and no tricks, or—*ugh!*"

So near my ears I heard its whistling descent, so close to my face I felt its rough, hairy strands brush my nose-tip, something whirled snake-like through the darkness, looped about my neck and jerked sharply back, squeezing the life-breath from my throat, forcing my tongue and eyes forward with the sudden ferocity of its strangling grip. The throttling knot drew tight and tighter round my trachea; bone-hard, merciless knuckles kneaded swiftly, savagely at my spine where it joined the skull, seeking to break my neck. I tried to cry for help, but nothing but a stifled gurgle sounded from my swelling lips. Burned out, the match fell from my numbing fingers, and darkness blotted out the sneering face in front of me. Tiny sparks danced and flashed before my eyes; a roaring like the down-pour of a dozen Niagaras pounded in my ears. "This is how poor Orloff died!" I thought, fighting vainly to escape the strangling coil about my neck.

A sudden shaft of sharp, white light stabbed through the darkness, illuminating the Hindoo's face before me for a fleeting moment. In the flash I saw the grinning mouth square open like an old Greek horror-mask, saw the swift shadow of a slim, white hand—and something else!—pass like a darting ray of light across the dusky throat an inch or so below the chin, saw the welling spate of blood which gushed across the writhing tongue and gleaming teeth. Then came a horrid, choking gurgle, as of something drowning, and the light blinked out. But:

"Spawn of the sewer—species of a stinking camel—take that to hell, and say I gave it to you!" de Grandin's whisper sounded in my ear, and the strang-

ling-cord loosed its biting grip as the man behind me gave a grunt of surprized pain and fell forward, almost oversetting me.

I turned about, clutching at the wall for support, and beheld my late assailant rolling on the floor, mouthing and slabbering horribly as he hugged both hands to his abdomen. "*Ai-i-i!*" his scream of mortal agony no thicker than the squeaking of a frightened mouse, and even that died in an anguished wheeze. From crotch to sternum he was slit as cleanly as a butcher slits a slaughtered hog for gutting.

I leaned against the wall, weak with retching nausea at the spectacle de Grandin's pocket torch disclosed.

"It is a good cut, that," the little Frenchman announced softly as he tip-toed across the hall, fumbled a moment and switched on the electric light. "Me, I rather favor it for autopsy work, although the general preference is for the vertical incision beginning at the——"

"Oh—*don't!*" I pleaded, near to swooning at the sight the lighted hall-lamp brought to view. Face downward on the floor lay the fellow I had apprehended, the ever-widening pool of blood which soaked into the carpet telling of his severed throat. Only the tremulous, spasmodic twitching of his clawing fingers told me that he still retained some little spark of life. Hunched on one shoulder, the cord with which he sought to strangle me still gripped in his hand, lay the other Hindoo, blood gushing from the foot-long incision which ran vertically up his abdomen. Jules de Grandin stood at ease, regarding his handiwork with every evidence of scientific satisfaction, a long, curved-bladed kurkri knife, whetted to a razor-edge, dangling by a thong from his right hand.

"*Eh bien, mon vieux*, you look as *triste* as hell upon a rainy Sunday afternoon!"

he told me. "Is it that you have never seen the cover stripped from off the human entrails—you, a medical practitioner, a surgeon, an anatomist? *Ah bah*, for shame, my friend; you stand there quaking like a student making his first trip to the dissecting-room!"

"But," I gasped, still faint with stomach-sickness, "this is too——"

"Wrong again, my old one," he corrected with a grin. "Not two, but three. When I left you down below I crept all softly up the stairs until I reached the turn between this story and the one beneath. *Ah ba*, and what did I see there? What but a *sacré* son of Mother India going on all fours like a sly-boots up the stairs ahead of me! Oh, very silently he went; so silently he made no sound at all. He had to be seen to be believed, that one!

"What to do? I had my pistol, and I had my very useful knife, as well. Should I shoot I could not miss him, but what if there were others? The noise would surely put them on their guard, and I desired to surprize them. Accordingly, I chose the knife. I crept a little faster and reached my silent friend before he guessed that I was there at all. Then, very gently, I inserted my knife-tip between his second and third cervical vertebræ. *Voilà*. He died with exemplary expedition and with no unnecessary noise. Very good, I tell me. So far, so perfect.

"Then, still silently, I continued on my upward way. I came into the hall, and what did I behold? I ask to know. You, *cordieu*, standing at the stairhead, as innocent as any unborn lamb, while, crouched behind an angle of the wall, immediately in front of me, a thief-faced rascal was watching you. But ah—even as I saw this, I saw another thing. A door opened very softly in the hall behind you, a bearded ruffian—the same one we had seen in the theater—peered forth,

raised up a little stick of wood and flung it quickly at the light. He broke the bulb, and you were left in darkness!

"I heard you stumble in the dark, I saw you light a match, and by its light I saw you parley with the miscreant with the knife. *Tiens*, I also saw the other one advance upon you from the rear, drop his strangling-cord about your throat and begin the pleasant process of choking you to death. 'This thing has ceased to be a joke,' I tell me; 'it are time that Jules de Grandin put a stop to it!'"

"You saved my life; no doubt of it," I told him. "I'm very grateful——"

"*Chut*, it was a pleasure," he cut in, looking complacently at the stiffening bodies on the floor before us.

"Come," he commanded. "We must find *Mademoiselle Hélène*. She was not in the room from which the bearded man attacked you, for that-door had not been forced, and I particularly warned her to bar her door tonight. These other doors have not been opened, for the two who came before me up the stairs had no chance to get in mischief ere I found them. Therefore, it follows that—*ah, que diable?*"

HE BROKE off, pointing to the lower margin of the door beside which we stood. Where the door and sill came together a tiny hole, scarcely large enough to let a man insert his finger, had been gouged, and a little pile of fresh sawdust lay about the hole.

"Well——" I began, but:

"Not at all; by no means, it is very dam' unwell, I suspect!" he interrupted. "One does not surely know, of course, but——"

He rose and beat upon the panels. "*Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle Hélène?*" he called softly. "Are you there? Answer, if you are, but on no account get off the bed."

"Who is it?" Helen Fisk's voice responded. "Doctor de Grandin? Is anything wrong?"

"We hope not, but we fear the worst," he answered. "Stay where you are, for your life, *Mademoiselle*, and do not be alarmed when we break in the door——"

"I'll let you in," the girl replied, and we heard a rustling of the bed-linen. And:

"No! *Pour l'amour de Dieu*, do not set foot to floor, I beg!" he shouted. "We come!"

Retreating to the far side of the hall he charged full-tilt against the bedroom door, driving his shoulder against the white-enameled panels, bursting the flimsy lock and half running, half stumbling into the pitch-dark room.

"Stand back, Friend Trowbridge—remain upon your bed, *Mademoiselle!*" he warned, pausing at the threshold and darting his flashlight quickly about the apartment. "Death lies in wait upon the floor, and—*ah?* So!"

Like a pouncing cat he leaped across the cheap rag rug with which the room was carpeted, his searchlight playing steadily upon a tiny, cord-like black coil beneath a chintz-upholstered chair. With a slanting, chopping motion he brought his big, curved knife-blade down once, twice, and yet again, dividing the tiny snake into half a dozen fragments with the slicing blows. "*Ha*, little brother to the Devil, you are quick, but I am quicker; you are venomous, but so am I, *pardieu!*" he cried. "Go back to hell, from whence you came, and tell those other snakes I sent you there to keep them company—they, too, have felt this knife tonight!"

"What is it?" cried Miss Fisk and I in chorus.

He danced across the room, turned on the light; then, with the air of a gallant assisting a fine lady from her coach, put

out his hand and helped the girl down from the bed.

"Do not approach too near, my beautiful," he warned. "Those tiny, tender feet of yours might take a wound from him, dead though he be."

"What is it?" Straight and slim as a boy in her close-cropped hair and Shantung silk pajamas, Helen Fisk looked with more curiosity than fear at the dismembered little serpent underneath the chair.

"A karait, *parbleu*," he answered. "*Bungarus coeruleus*, the zoölogists call him, and he is not a customer to trifle with, by any means. Nor, *cordieu*, had you stepped from off your bed and had he sunk those little, so small fangs into your foot or ankle, *Dirige, Domine in conspectu tuo viam meum*' the good priests would have sung for you, *ma chère*, for death follows his bite in from six to eight minutes. Little cousin to the cobra that he is, his bite is far more deadly than that of his disreputable big kinsman."

"Gawd, you took a chance with it!" the girl exclaimed admiringly.

"Not very much," he admitted, stroking his mustache complacently. "He can strike only his own length, and my knife was a good two inches longer than his body."

"But how'd he come to get in my room?" she asked, bewildered. "D'ye s'pose there's any more of 'em here?"

"No to your second question, *Mademoiselle*—through a hole bored in your door to your first," he answered, smiling. "Those sons of sin cut a little, so small opening in the door, sent their silent messenger of death into your room, and were about to decamp when—we detained them, Friend Trowbridge and I." To me he added:

"That accounts for that fellow's knife, *mon ami*; it was with that he bored the

hole in *Mademoiselle Hélène's* door, and he was doubtless about to take departure when your step upon the stair arrested him and he remained to assist his partner of the strangling-cord in finishing you, if help were needed."

"What's that?" the girl demanded. "You mean the guy who almost killed me at the theater was *here*, and attacked Doctor Trowbridge?"

"Was here is correct, *Mademoiselle*."

"Where's he at now?"

"*Eh bien*, who can say? I do not think the life he led was very good; his chances of salvation, I should say, were of the slimmest."

"You—you mean you *kilt* him?"

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle*. Both him and his two assistants."

"Gee, but you're *wonderful*!" Before we realized what she was about, Helen Fisk had laid a hand upon each of his cheeks, drawn his face close to hers and kissed him on the mouth."

"*Pardieu*, my lovely one," de Grandin chuckled, "you do greatly tempt me to make murder my vocation. For a reward 'such as that——'"

THE thumping thunder of heavy boots upon the stairs cut short his speech.

"Doctor de Grandin; Doctor de Grandin, are ye there, sor?" demanded Sergeant Jeremiah Costello as, one of the policemen in his wake, he dashed headlong up the stairs.

"Yes, *morbleu*, here am I," de Grandin answered tartly, "and never was I less entranced at sight of your so ugly *tête de roux*, thou breaker-up of romance! What is it now?"

"Some one's been givin' us th' run-around," the sergeant panted. "Some son-of-a-gun—howly Mither, are they dead, sor?" he broke off as he saw the corpses on the floor.

"Like a herring," de Grandin returned



nonchalantly. "You were saying——?"

"Well, sor, it looks like some one stood us up. When we seen that there now flash o' light an' heard th' shots a-poppin', we made sure it wuz a gang war broke out agin; so down to th' corner we hotfooted it, like three dam' fools, an' what d'ye think we found?"

The little Frenchman grinned, a thought maliciously. "*Pétards*—how do you call him?—firecrackers?" he replied.

"Good Lord, how'd ye guess it, sor?"

"*Ab bab*, the trick is ancient, *mon vieux*; so old and threadbare that even you should be immune to it. However, it worked, and if I and Doctor Trowbridge had not been on hand to circumvent their wickedness our poor young lady here would now have been a lovely corpse, and, what is more, I should have missed an evening's pleasure. As it is——"

"What's goin' on here, I'd like to know?" an irate landlady, mountainous in righteous wrath and a canton flannel nightrobe, mounted the third-floor stairs. "What's th' meanin' o' this breakin' in a decent woman's house at midnight, an'——"

"Arrah, woman, hold your whist!" Costello interrupted. "'Tis meself an' Doctor de Grandin an' Doctor Trowbridge yonder as kilt them three murtherin' hay-thins that come into yer place to stab ye all whilst ye wuz sleepin'—an' ye've got th' brassbound nerve to ask us what we're doin' here!"

"Ye mean ye *kilt* somebody in my house—in *my* house, givin' th' place a bad name an' ruinin' me business?" the landlady demanded shrilly. "I'll have th' law on ye fer this, so help me——"

"Ye'll be feelin' me take me hand off'n th' side o' yer face if ye don't shut up an' quit interferin' wid a officer o' th' law in th' performance o' his dooty!"

Costello told her sharply. "Go on, now; go lay down somewheres an' give yer tongue a rest till we've finished wid this business. We need no wimmin to tell us how to do our wor-rk, so we don't."

The majesty of the law being vindicated and the landlady effectually squelched, the sergeant turned once more to de Grandin. "We seen a felly runnin' down th' street when we got to th' corner, sor," he reported, "an' whilst we didn't have nothin' agin him, exactly, I thought it best to run 'im in on general principles. Fellies runnin' loose at midnight when some one's made a monkey out o' th' police force will bear investigatin', I'm afther thinkin', sor."

"*Exactement*," the Frenchman nodded in agreement. "What sort of person is your prisoner?"

"Why, I should say he's kin to them—to these pore fellies that ye kilt," Costello answered. "Dark like them, he is, an' kind o' slim, an' snooty as a sparry full o' worms; talkin' about his rights, an' how he'll have me broke, an' bein' sarcastical as th' very divil an' all."

"*Comment*? I know his kind. What answer did you give to his abuse?" The anticipatory gleam kindling in the little Frenchman's small, blue eyes burst into sudden flame of merriment as Costello answered simply:

"Bedad, I sloughed 'im in th' jaw, sor!"

**N**EITHER of us was much surprized to recognize Costello's prisoner as the slender, patrician Hindoo we had seen in the theater in company with the men de Grandin had disposed of. With a badly swelling eye, dress clothes sadly disarranged and a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, the fellow was put to it to maintain his air of lofty hauteur, but sustain it he did, glancing now and again at Costello with venomous hatred min-

gled with fear, at de Grandin and me with unaffected scorn.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked in faultless, Oxonian English. "I refuse to answer questions or to go with you until I see my lawyer."

"Easy on, laddie buck," Costello cautioned. "Ye'll go where we bid ye, an' no questions asked, or I'll know th' reason why. As for answerin' what we ask, I'm afther thinkin' ye'll talk a-plenty, an' be glad to. Come on!"

THE light burned brightly in Coroner Martin's operating-room, casting back dazzling reflections from the white-tiled walls, the terrazzo floor and the gleaming porcelain of the embalming-tables. Surrounded with a sheet, a bulky object occupied the center of the room, and toward it de Grandin walked like a demonstrator of anatomy about to address his class.

"Messieurs," he began, "I have here Exhibit A, as they say in the courtroom—the statue of the Great God Siva, taken from the lobby of the Issatakko theater this afternoon.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, you will recall the deceased flies we found upon that statue's pedestal? *Bon*. Me, I have analyzed their corpses and found them dead from formaldehyde poisoning. Very good.

"Doctor Trowbridge," again he turned to me, for all the world like counsel examining a witness, "can you recall an odor which we descried about that statue when we looked at it?"

"Why, yes," I answered. "It was formalin. I thought it odd, but——"

"We have no great concern with buts," he cut in quickly. "Behold——"

With a sweep of his hand he tore the sheet from the statue and pointed dramatically to the glistening, dark-hued com-

position of which the thing was made. "A month or so ago two young women of the Issatakko Ballet Russe disappeared," he told us. "They impersonated the god Siva in the spectacle of the Yogi's Death. No one has seen them since; no one knows where they are gone, or where they are at present.

"*Ha*, is it so? No, *tête-bleu*, it is not! They are here, my friends—behold them!"

Snatching up a heavy wooden maul he dealt the statue a sudden vicious blow, repeated it; rained stroke on stroke upon it.

"Look out, you'll break it, man!" I cried, shocked by his act of vandalism.

"*Bon Dieu*, but I intend to!" he panted, striking savagely again at the image's arm. A black, shining flake, four inches long by two in width, detached itself from the bent arm of Siva, fell to the hard-tiled floor with a tinkling, metallic sound, and in the opening thus made there showed, dull, livid, but glistening strangely in the strong light of the operating-room, an arm of *human flesh!*

The gruesome work went on. Flake after flake of shining, black veneer was chipped away and slowly, horribly, there came to view the naked body of a woman.

"Behold, my friends," de Grandin ordered, his voice a sibilant, knife-sharp whisper, "behold the core—the heart of Siva!"

As disclosure followed on disclosure I felt a tightening in my throat, an odd, cold, prickling sensation in my scalp and at the back of my neck. A four-inch-long incision had been made in the girl's thigh, thus opening the great femoral artery. The hemorrhage must have been terrific, death following almost instantly. Thereafter the body was seated with folded legs in the attitude assumed by Siva in the ballet, fine steel wires were wound

about the limbs to hold them in position where necessary, and the body pumped full of dilute formaldehyde, thus preserving it and imparting a lasting rigidity. A second pair of arms, severed from their owner's body close to the trunk, had been similarly embalmed and sewn into the armpits of the seated girl, thus supplying the four pectoral limbs required for the sitting dance, and, the monstrous effigy finally molded out of human flesh, the whole was coated with a shell of quick-hardening varnish composed of silicate and gypsum, colored black with bitumen.

"Had not the varnish cracked a little and some of the formalin which was lodged between it and the flesh leaked out, we never should have known," de Grandin told us as he finished peeling off the coating from the statue's "heart" of human flesh. "But so intent on lasting preservation was the miscreant that he oversaturated the tissues with the formalin. *Alors*, a little of it found its way through the little, so small crack in the plaster coating, the busybody little flies must come exploring, must stick their noses into it—must die.

"I see them lying dead. 'Have not they chosen a most queer place to die?' I ask me. 'Other flies buzz at will about this theater lobby, other little flies walk with impunity upon the statue's head, its hands, its feet; but those who settle here upon its base, *parbleu*, they die all suddenly.'

"And then I smell the odor of formaldehyde. '*Que diable?*' I ask me. 'Formaldehyde, what is it doing here? In the medical dissecting-room, yes; in the preparation room of embalmers, again yes; in the lobby of a theater, in the statue of the Great God Siva—*mille nons*, it is not right or proper!'

"I look upon this statue. It are too perfect. It are not a work of art, it are,

rather, an exact copy—no, a counterfeit—of life. 'Business of the monkey has been made by some one, I damn think,' I tell me. But yet I am not sure. And so I take those most unfortunate flies' small corpses and subject them to analysis. All are dead of formalin. Now I am nearly, almost certain.

"And so I go to make examination of that statue once again. I take with me a little hammer and a chisel. While no one looks, I chip a bit of it away. *Ha*, what is it that I see? Flesh, *cordieu*; woman's flesh—dead woman's flesh!

"*Ab ba, ab-ba-ba*, I apprehend it all, now. I know where those two missing girls have gone—one is the body, one is the missing arms of Siva!

"I lay my trap tonight. Once more the dance of Siva is performed, but now the police are on guard; the dancers cannot be molested. Nevertheless, I know in my own head that an attempt will be made to do them harm, and so I go to watch.

"It are even as I think. This man here draws the red herring across the trail; he fools Costello and the others to run down to the corner while his powder-squibs go *pop-pop-pop!* While they are there his helpers find an entrance to Mademoiselle Hélène's house and would have slain her with a snake if Doctor Trowbridge and I had not been there.

"*Ha*, but we are there, and I kill them all, I kill their snake, I kick their so carefully laid plans upside down, as the cow knocks over the filled milk-bucket. Yes, certainly. Their plans are nicely made but in them they have overlooked one thing.

"That thing is Jules de Grandin!"

"You lie!" the prisoner cried, almost in a scream. "You didn't kill them; you're lying!"

"You say so?" de Grandin asked sar-

castically. "Monsieur Martin, will you kindly have your young men bring what waits without to us?"

Coroner Martin stepped to the door and beckoned silently.

Without a word three of his assistants came single-file through the door, each trundling a wheeled bier freighted with a sheeted form. As they passed him, de Grandin snatched the sheets away, disclosing the bodies of the Hindoos he had killed in the rooming-house.

"And now, *Monsieur*," he asked in a gentle voice, bowing with mock courtesy to the prisoner, "do you still have doubts of my veracity?"

The fellow stared at the three corpses in horror. His eyes seemed starting from his head as, in a choking voice, he croaked:

"Yes, yes, I did it; I killed them as you said, the wantons, defilers of the gods. I executed them for blasphemy, and I'd have killed that other pale-faced harlot, too, if you had not been here, you——"

he glared insanely at de Grandin for a moment, then raised his manacled hands to his face.

"*Sang de Dieu*, but I say you shall not!" the little Frenchman shouted, leaping on the man as a cat might pounce upon a mouse, wrestling with him violently a moment, then springing back triumphantly, a little, jet-black pill displayed between his thumb and fingertip.

"Could he have swallowed this he would have died at once," he told us. "As it is, we shall have the pleasure of seeing him decently and legally put to death for the vile, unconscionable murderer of women that he is.

"Meantime——" His little, round blue eyes swept us one by one, finally came to rest upon Costello. "*Mon sergent*, I am most vilely and unsupportably dry," he complained. "You are well acquainted with the best speakeasies which the city boasts. Will not you, of your charity, take me where I can relieve this torment of a thirst?"

