

# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*

*The* HOUSE of GOLDEN MASKS *by* SEABURY QUINN



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HUGH RANKIN

# Weird Tales

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# The House of Masks

BY SEABURY QUINN



“AN’ SO, Dr. de Grandin, sor,” Detective Sergeant Costello concluded with a pitying sidelong glance at his companion, “if there’s annything ye can do for th’ pore lad, ’tis meself that’ll be grateful to ye for doin’ it. Faith, if sumpin like this had happened to me whilst I was a-courtin’ Maggie, I’d ’a’ been a dead corpse from worry in less time than this pore felley’s been sufferin’.

“Th’ chief won’t raise his hand in th’ matter wid th’ coroner’s verdict starin’ us in th’ face, an’ much as I’d like to do sumpin for th’ boy, me hands is tied tighter’n th’ neck of a sack. But with you, now, ’tis a different matter entirely. Meself, I’m

inclined to agree with th’ chief an’ think th’ pore gur-rl’s dead as a herring, but if there’s sumpin in th’ case th’ rest of us can’t see, sure, ’tis Dr. Jools de Grandin can spot it quicker than a hungry tom-cat smells a rat!”

Jules de Grandin turned his quick, birdlike glance from the big, red-headed Irishman to the slender, white-faced young man seated beside him. “What makes you assume your beloved survives, *Monsieur*?” he asked. “If the jury of the coroner returned a verdict of suicide——”

“But, I tell you, sir, the jury didn’t know what they were talking about!”

Young Everett Wilberding rose from his chair and faced the little Frenchman, his knuckles showing



# Golden



"He strode forward, striking right and left with mailed fists, smashing jaw-bones with his iron-shod knuckles."

white with the intensity of his grip on the table edge. "My Ewell *didn't* commit suicide. She didn't kill herself, neither did Mazie. You *must* believe that, sir!"

Resuming his seat, he fought back to comparative calm as he laced his fingers together nervously. "Last Thursday night Ewell and I were going to a dance out at the country club. My friend, Bill Stimpson, was to take Mazie, Ewell's twin sister. The girls had been out visiting an aunt and uncle at Reynoldstown, and were to meet us at Monmouth Junc-

tion, then drive out to the club in Ewell's flivver.

"The girls took their party clothes out to Reynoldstown with them, and were to dress before leaving to meet us. They were due at the Junction at 9 o'clock, but Ewell was hardly ever on time, so I thought nothing of it when they failed to show up at half-past. But when 10 o'clock came, with no sign of the girls, we began to think they must have had a blow-out or engine trouble. At half-past 10 I went to the drug store and 'phoned the girls' uncle at Reynoldstown, only to

be told they had left at a quarter past 8—in plenty of time to reach the Junction by 9, even if they had bad going. When I heard that I began to worry sure enough. By 11 o'clock I was fit to be tied.

“Bill was getting worried, too, but thought that one of 'em might have been taken ill and that they'd rushed right to Harrisonville without coming through the Junction, so we 'phoned their house here. Their folks didn't know any more than we did.

“We caught the next bus to Harrisonville, and went right up to the Eatons'. When nothing was heard of the girls by 4 the next morning, Mr. Eaton notified the police.”

“U'm?” de Grandin nodded slowly. “Proceed, if you please, young *Monsieur*.”

“The searching parties didn't find a trace of the girls till next day about noon,” young Wilberding answered; “then a State Trooper came on Ewell's Ford smashed almost out of shape against a tree half a mile or more from the river, but no sign of blood anywhere around. A little later a couple of hunters found Ewell's party dress, stockings and slippers on the rocks above Shaminee Falls. Mazie——”

“They found th' pore child's body up agin th' grilles leadin' to th' turbine intakes o' Pierce's Mills next day, sor,” Costello put in softly.

“Yes, they did,” Wilberding agreed, “and Mazie was *wearing* her dance frock—what was left of it. Why didn't Ewell jump in the falls with hers on, too, if Mazie did? But *Mazie didn't!*”

Sergeant Costello shook his head sadly. “Th' coroner's jury——” he began, as though reasoning with a stubborn child, but the boy interrupted angrily:

“Oh, damn the coroner's jury! See here, sir”—he turned to de Grandin as if for confirmation—“you're a physician and know all about such

things. What d'ye say to this? Mazie's body was washed through the rapids above Shaminee Falls and was terribly mauled against the rocks as it came down, so badly disfigured that only the remnants of her clothes made identification possible. No one could say definitely whether she'd been wounded before she went into the water or not; but *she wasn't drowned!*”

“Eh, what is it you say?” de Grandin straightened in his chair, his level, unwinking stare boring into the young man's troubled eyes. “Continue, if you please, *Monsieur*; I am interested.”

“I mean just what I say,” the other returned. “They didn't find a half-teacupful of water in her lungs at the autopsy; besides, this is March, and the water's almost ice-cold—yet they found her *floating* next morning; if——”

“*Barbe d'un chauve canard, yes!*” de Grandin exclaimed. “*Tu parles, mon garçon!* In temperature such as this it would be days—weeks, perhaps—before putrefaction had advanced enough to form sufficient gas to force the body to the surface. But of course, it was the air in her lungs which buoyed her up. *Morbleu*, I think you have right, my friend; undoubtedly the poor one was dead before she touched the water!”

“Aw, Doc, ye don't mean to say *you're fallin'* for that theory?” Costello protested. “It's true she mightn't 'a' been drowned, but th' coroner said death was due to shock induced by——”

De Grandin waved him aside impatiently, keeping his gaze fixed intently on Everett. “Do you know any reason she might have had for self-destruction, *mon vieux?*” he demanded.

“No, sir—none whatever. She and Bill were secretly married at Hacketstown last Christmas Eve. They'd been keeping it dark till Bill got his promotion—it came through last week, and they were going to tell the world last Sunday. You see, they

couldn't have concealed it much longer."

"Ah?" de Grandin's narrow brows elevated slightly. "And they were happy together?"

"Yes, sir! You never saw a spooner couple in your life. Can you imagine——"

"*Tiens*, my friend," the Frenchman interrupted with one of his quick, elfish grins, "you would be surprised at that which I can imagine. Howeverly, let us consider facts, not imaginings." Rising, he began pacing the floor, ticking off his data on his fingers as he marched. "Let us make a *précis*:

"Here we have two young women, one in love, though married—the other in love and affianced. They fail to keep an appointment; it is not till the day following that their car is discovered, and it is found in such position as to indicate a wreck, yet nowhere near it is sign of injury to its passengers. *Alors*, what do we find? The frock of one of the young ladies, neatly folded beside her shoes and stockings upon a rock near the Shaminee Falls. In the river, some miles below, next day is found the floating corpse of the other girl—and the circumstances point conclusively that she did not drown. What now? The mishap to the car occurred a half-mile from the river, yet the young women were able to walk to the stream where one of them cast herself in fully clothed; the other is supposed to have disrobed before immersing herself.

"*Non, non*, my friends, the facts, they do not make sense. Women kill themselves for good reasons, for bad reasons, and for no reasons at all, but they do it characteristically. Me, I have seen ropes wherewith despondent females have strangled themselves, and they have wrapped silken scarves about the rough hemp that it might not bruise their tender necks. *Tiens*, would a delicately nurtured girl strip herself to the rude March

winds before plunging into the water? I think not."

"So do I," rumbled Costello's heavy voice in agreement. "Th' way you put it, Dr. de Grandin, sor, makes th' case crazier than ever. Faith, there's no sense to it from beginnin' to end. I think we'd better be callin' it a day an' acceptin' th' coroner's decision."

"*Zut!*" de Grandin returned with a smile. "Are you then so poor a poker player, *mon sergent*? Have you not learned the game is never over until the play is done? Me, I shall give this matter my personal attention. I am interested, I am fascinated, I am intrigued.

"To your home, Monsieur Wilberding," he ordered. "When I have some word for you, you will hear from me. Meantime do not despair."

"**T**ROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*," de Grandin greeted next morning when I joined him in the dining-room, "I am perplexed; but yes, I am greatly puzzled; I am mystified. Something has occurred since last night which may put a different face upon all. Consider, if you please: Half an hour ago I received a telephone call from the good Costello. He tells me three more young women have disappeared in a manner so similar to that of Monsieur Wilberding's sweetheart as to make it more than mere coincident. At the residence of one Monsieur Mason, who resides in West Fells, there was held a meeting of the sorority to which his daughter belongs. Many young women attended. Three, Mesdemoiselles Weaver, Damroche and Hornbury, drove out in the car of Mademoiselle Weaver. They left the Mason house sometime after midnight. At 6 o'clock this morning they had not returned home. Their alarmed parents notified the police, and"—he paused in his restless pacing, halting directly before me as he continued—"a state dragoon discovered the motor in which they rode

lying on its side, mired in the swamps beside the Albemarle Road, but of the young women no trace could be found. Figure to yourself, my friend. What do you make of it?"

"Why——" I began, but the shrill stutter of the office 'phone cut my reply in two.

"*Allo?*" de Grandin called into the transmitter. "Yes, Sergeant, it is I—*grand Diable!* Another? You do not tell me so!"

To me he almost shouted as he slammed the receiver back into its hook: "Do you hear, my friend? It is another! Sarah Thompford, an employée of Braunstein frères' department store, left her work at half-past 5 last evening, and has been seen no more. But her hat and cloak were found upon the piers at the waterfront ten little minutes ago. *Nom d'un chou-fleur*, I am vexed! These disappearances are becoming epidemic. Either the young women of this city have developed a sudden mania for doing away with themselves or some evil person attempts to make a monkey of Jules de Grandin. In either case, my friend, I am aroused. *Mordieu*, we shall see who shall laugh in whose face before this business of the fool is concluded!"

"What are you going to do?" I asked, striving to keep a straight face.

"Do?" he echoed. "Do? *Parbleu*, I shall investigate, I shall examine every clue, I shall leave no stone unturned, but"—he sobered into sudden practicality as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, entered the dining-room with a tray of golden-brown waffles—"first I shall eat breakfast. One can accomplish little on an empty stomach."

A WIDESPREAD, though fortunately mild, epidemic of influenza kept me busy in office and on my rounds all day. Rainy, fog-bound darkness was approaching as I turned toward home and dinner with a profound sigh of thankfulness that the day's

work was done, only to encounter fresh disappointment.

"Trowbridge, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," an excited voice hailed as I was waiting for the crosstown traffic lights to change and let me pursue my homeward way, "draw to the curb; come with me—I have important matters to communicate!" Swathed from knees to neck in a waterproof leather jacket, his Homburg hat pulled rakishly down over his right eye and a cigarette glowing between his lips, Jules de Grandin stood at the curb, his little blue eyes dancing with excited elation.

"Name of a little blue man!" he swore delightedly as I parked my motor and joined him on the sidewalk; "it is a fortunate chance, this meeting; I was about to telephone the office in hopes you had returned. Attend me, my friend, I have twisted my hand in the tail of something of importance!"

Seizing my elbow with a proprietary grip, he guided me toward the illuminated entrance of a café noted for the excellence of its food and its contempt of the XVIIIth Amendment, chuckling with suppressed delight at every step.

"The young Monsieur Wilberding was undoubtedly right in his surmises," he confided as we found places at one of the small tables and he gave an order to the waiter. "*Parbleu*, what he lacked in opportunity of observation he made up by the prescience of affection," he continued, "for there can be no doubt that Madame Mazie was the victim of murder. *Regardez-vous*: At the police laboratories, kindly placed at my disposal through the offices of the excellent Sergeant Costello, I examined the tattered remnants of the frock they took from the poor girl's body when they fished her from the river, and I did discover what the coroner, cocksure of his suicide theory, had completely overlooked—a small, so tiny stain. Hardly darker than the original

pink of the fabric it was, but sufficient to rouse my suspicions. *Alors*, I proceeded to shred the chiffon and make the benzidine test. You know it? No?

"Very good. A few threads from the stained area of the dress I placed upon a piece of white filter paper; thereafter I compounded a ten per cent. solution of benzidine in glacial acetic acid and mixed one part of this with ten parts of hydrogen peroxide. Next, with a pipette I proceeded to apply one little, so tiny drop of the solution to the threads of silk, and behold! a faint blue color manifested itself in the stained color silken threads and spread out on the white filter paper. *Voilà*, that the stain of my suspicion had been caused by blood was no longer to be doubted!"

"But mightn't this bloodstain have been caused by an injury to Mazie's body as it washed over the falls?" I objected.

"*Ah bah*," he returned. "You ask that, Friend Trowbridge? *Pardieu*, I had looked for better sense in your head. Consider the facts: Should you cut your finger, then immediately submerge it in a basin of water, would any trace of blood adhere to it? But no. Conversely, should you incise the skin and permit even one little drop of blood to gather at the wound and to dry there to any extent, the subsequent immersion of the finger in water would not suffice to remove the partly clotted blood altogether. Is it not so?"

"*Très bon*. Had a sharp stone cut poor Madame Mazie, it would undoubtedly have done so after she was dead, in which case there would have been no resultant hemorrhage; but even if a wound had been inflicted while she lived, bethink you of her position—in the rushing water, whirled round and round and over and over, any blood which flowed would instantly have been washed away, leaving no slightest stain on her dress. *Non*, my friend, there is but

one explanation, and I have found it. Her gown was stained by blood before she was cast into the river. Recall: Did not poor young Monsieur Wilberding inform us the car in which she rode was found a half-mile or more from the river? But certainly. Suppose, then, these girls were waylaid at or near the spot where their car was found, and one or both were done to death. Suppose, again, Madame Mazie's life-blood flowed from her wound and stained her dress while she was in transit toward the river. In that case her dress would have been so stained that even though the foul miscreants who slew her cast her poor, broken body into the water, there would remain stains for Jules de Grandin to find today. Yes, it is so.

"But wait, my friend, there is more to come. Me, I have been most busy this day. I have run up and down and hither and yon like Satan seeking for lost souls. Out on the Albemarle Road, where the unfortunate Mademoiselle Weaver's car was discovered this morning, I repaired when I had completed my researches in the city. Many feet had trampled the earth into the semblance of a pig-coop's floor before I arrived, but *grâce à Dieu*, there still remained that which confirmed my worst suspicions.

"Finding nothing near the spot where the mired car lay, I examined the earth on the other side of the road. There I discovered that which made my hair to rise on end. *Pardieu*, my friend, there is the business of the Fiend himself being done here!

"Leading from the road were three distinct sets of footprints—girl's footprints, made by small, high-heeled shoes. Far apart they were, showing they had been made by running feet, and all stopped abruptly at the same place.

"Back from the roadway, as you doubtless remember, stands a line of trees. It was at these the foot-tracks halted, in each instance ending in two



little pointed depressions, set quite close together. They were the marks of girls' slippers, my friend, and appeared to have been made as the young women stood on tiptoe.

"'Now,' I ask me, 'why should three young women leave the motor in which they ride, run from the road, halt on their toes beneath these trees, and leave no footprints thereafter?'"

"'It seems they must have been driven from the road like game in a European preserve at hunting-time, then seized by those lying in wait for them among the tree-boughs as they passed beneath,' I reply. 'And you are undoubtedly correct,' I answer me.

"Nevertheless, to make my assurance sure, I examined all those trees and all the surrounding land with great injury to my dignity and clothing, but my search was not fruitless; for clinging to a tree-bough above one of the girls' toe-prints I did find this." From his pocket he produced a tiny skein of light-brown fiber and passed it across the table to me.

"U'm?" I commented as I examined his find. "What is it?"

"Burlap," he returned. "You look puzzled, my friend. So did I when first I found it, but subsequent discoveries explained it—explained it all too well. As I have said, there were no footprints to be found around the trees, save those made by the fleeing girls, but, after much examination on my knees, I found three strange trails leading toward the road, away from those trees. Most carefully, with my nose fairly buried in the earth, I did examine those so queer depressions in the moist ground. Too large for human feet they were, yet not deep enough for an animal large enough to make them. At last I was rewarded by finding a bit of cloth-weave pattern in one of them, and then I knew. They were made by men whose feet had been wrapped in many thicknesses of burlap, like the feet of

choleric old gentlemen suffering from gout.

"*Nom d'un renard*, but it was clever, almost clever enough to fool Jules de Grandin, but not quite.

"Feet so wrapped make no sound; they leave little or no track, and what track they do leave is not easily recognized as of human origin by the average Western policeman; furthermore, they leave no scent which may be followed by hounds. Howeverly, the miscreants failed in one respect: They forgot Jules de Grandin has traveled the world over on the trail of wickedness, and knows the ways of the East no less than those of the West. In India I have seen such trails left by robbers; today, in this so peaceful State of New Jersey, I recognized the spoor when I saw it. Friend Trowbridge, we are upon the path of villains, assassins, *apaches* who steal women for profit. Yes"—he nodded solemnly—"it is undoubtedly so."

"But how——" I began, when his suddenly upraised hand cut me short.

Seated in the next booth to that we occupied was a pair of young men who had dined with greater liberality than wisdom. As I started to speak they were joined by a third, scarcely more temperate, who began descanting on the sensational features of a current burlesque show.

"Aw, shut up, how d'ye get that way?" one of the youths demanded scornfully. "Boy, till you've been where Harry and I were last night you ain't been nowhere and you ain't seen nothin'. Say, d'je ever see the *chonkina*?"

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" de Grandin murmured excitedly even as the other young man replied:

"*Chonkina*? What d'ye mean, *chonkina*?"

"You'd be surprized," his friend assured him. "There's a place out in the country—mighty exclusive place, too—where they'll let you see some-

thing to write home about—if you're willing to pay the price."

"I'm game," the other replied. "What say we go there tonight? If they can show me something I never saw before, I'll blow the crowd to the best dinner in town."

"You're on," his companions accepted with a laugh, but:

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered, "do you go straightway to the desk and settle our bill. I follow."

In a moment we stood before the cashier's desk, and as I tendered the young woman a bill, the Frenchman suddenly reeled as though in the last stages of drunkenness and began staggering across the room toward the booth where the three sportively inclined youths sat. As he drew abreast of them he gave a drunken lurch and half fell across their table, regaining his balance with the greatest difficulty and pouring forth a flood of profuse apologies.

A few moments later he joined me on the street, all traces of intoxication vanished, but feverish excitement shining in his small blue eyes.

"*C'est glorieux!*" he assured me with a chuckle. "Those three empty-headed young rakes will lead us to our quarry, or I am more mistaken than I think. In my pretended drunkenness, I fell among them and took time to memorize their faces. Also, I heard them make a definite appointment for their trip tonight. Trowbridge, my friend, we shall be there. Do you return home with all speed, bring the pistols, the flashlight and the horn-handled knife which you will find in my dressing-case, and meet me at police headquarters at precisely a quarter of midnight. I should be glad to accompany you, but there is a very great much for me to accomplish between now and then, and I fear there will be little sleep for Jules de Grandin this night. *Allez*, my friend, we have no time to waste!"

DE GRANDIN had evidently perfected his arrangements by the time I reached headquarters; for a police car was waiting, and we drove in silence, with dimmed lights, through the chill March rain to a lonely point not far from the country club's golf links, where, at a signal from the little Frenchman, we came to a halt.

"Now, Friend Trowbridge," he admonished, "we must trust to our own heels, for I have no desire to let our quarry know we approach. Softly, if you please, and say anything you have to say in the lowest of whispers."

Quietly as an Indian stalking a deer he led the way across the rolling turf of the links, pausing now and again to listen attentively, at length bringing up under a clump of mournful weeping willows bordering the Albemarle Road. "Here we rest till they arrive," he announced softly, seating himself on the comparatively dry ground beneath a tree and leaning his back against its trunk. "Name of a name, but I should enjoy a cigarette; but"—he raised a shoulder in a resigned shrug—"we must have the self-restraint, even as in the days when we faced the *sale boche* in the trenches. Yes."

Time passed slowly while we maintained our silent vigil, and I was on the point of open rebellion when a warning ejaculation in my ear and the quick clasp of de Grandin's hand on my elbow told me something was toward.

Looking through the branches of our shelter, I beheld a long, black motor slipping noiselessly as a shadow down the road, saw it come to a momentary halt beside a copse of laurels some twenty yards away, saw three stealthy figures emerge from the bushes and parley a moment with the chauffeur, then enter the tonneau.

"Ha, they are cautious, these birds of evil," the Frenchman muttered as he leaped from the shadows of the willows and raised an imperative hand beckoningly.

It was with difficulty I repressed an exclamation of surprise and dismay as a dozen shadowy figures emerged, phantomlike, from the shrubbery bordering the highway.

"Are you there, *mon lieutenant*?" de Grandin called, and I was relieved as an answering hail responded and I realized we were surrounded by a cordon of State Troopers in command of a young but exceedingly business-like-looking lieutenant.

Motorcycles—two of them equipped with sidecars—were wheeled from their covert in the bushes, and in another moment we were proceeding swiftly and silently in the wake of the vanishing limousine, de Grandin and I occupying the none too commodious "bathtubs" attached to the troopers' cycles.

It was a long chase our quarry led us, and had our machines been less powerful and less expertly managed we should have been distanced more than once, but the automobile which can throw dust in the faces of the racing-cycles on which New Jersey mounts its highway patrols has not been built, and we were within easy hail of our game as they drew up before the gateway of a high-walled, deserted-looking country estate.

"Now, my lieutenant," de Grandin asked, "you thoroughly understand the plans?"

"I think so, sir," the young officer returned as he gathered his force about him with a wave of his hand.

Briefly, as the Frenchman checked off our proposed campaign, the lieutenant outlined the work to his men. "Surround the place," he ordered, "and lie low. Don't let anyone see you, and don't challenge any one going in, but—nobody comes out without permission. Get me?"

As the troopers assented, he asked, "All set?"

There was a rattle of locks as the constables swung their vicious little carbines up to "speciation arms," and

each man felt the butt of the service revolver and the riot stick swinging at his belt.

"All right, take cover. If you get a signal from the house, rush it. If no signal comes, close in anyhow at the end of two hours. I've got a search warrant here"—he patted his blouse pocket—"and we won't stand any monkey business from the folks inside. Dr. de Grandin's going in to reconnoiter; he'll give the signal to charge with his flashlight, or by firing his pistol when he's ready, but——"

"But you will advance, even though my signal fails," de Grandin interrupted grimly.

"Right-o," the other agreed. "Two hours from now—3 o'clock—is zero. Here, men, compare your watches with mine; we don't want to go into action in ragged formation."

Two husky young troopers bent their backs and boosted de Grandin and me to the rim of the eight-foot brick wall surrounding the grounds. In a moment we had dropped silently to the yard beyond and de Grandin sent back a whispered signal.

Flattening ourselves to the ground we proceeded on hands and knees toward the house, taking advantage of every shrub and bush dotting the grounds, stealing forward in little rushes, then pausing beneath some friendly evergreen to glance cautiously about, listening for any sign or sound of activity from the big, darkened huse.

"I'm afraid you've brought us out on a fool's errand, old chap," I whispered. "If we find anything more heinous than bootlegging here I'll be surprized, but——"

"*S-s-sh!*" his hissing admonition silenced me. "To the right, my friend, look to the right and tell me what it is you see."

Obediently, I glanced away from the house, searching the deserted park for some sign of life. There, close to the ground, shone a faint glimmer of light. The glow was stationary, for

we watched it for upward of ten minutes before the Frenchman ordered, "Let us investigate, Friend Trowbridge. It may betoken something we should know."

Swerving our course toward the dim beacon, we moved cautiously forward, and as we approached it I grew more and more puzzled. The illumination appeared to rise from the ground, and, as we drew near, it was intercepted for an instant by something which passed between it and us. Again and yet again the glow was obscured with methodical regularity. For a moment I thought it might be some signal system warning the inmates of the house of our approach, but as we crawled still nearer my

heart began to beat more rapidly, for I realized the light shone from an old-fashioned oil lantern standing on the ground and the momentary interruptions were due to shovelfuls of earth being thrown up from a fairly deep excavation. Presently there was a pause in the digging operations and two objects appeared above the surface about three feet apart—the hands of a man in the act of stretching himself. Assuming he were of average height, the trench in which he stood would be some five feet deep, judging by the distance his hands protruded above its lip.

Circling warily about the workman and his work we were able to get a fairly clear view. The hole was some



"Hoi!"

two feet wide by six feet long, and, as I had already estimated, something like five feet deep.

"What sort of trench usually has those dimensions?" The question crashed through my mind like an unexpected bolt of thunder, and the answer sent tiny ripples of chills through my cheeks and up my arms.

De Grandin's thought had paralyzed mine, for he whispered, "It seems, Friend Trowbridge, that they prepare sepulture for someone. For us, by example? *Cordieu*, if it be so, I can promise them we shall go to it like kings of old, with more than one of them to bear us company in the land of shadows!"

Our course brought the grave-digger into view as we crept about him, and a fiercer, more bloodthirsty scoundrel I had never before had the misfortune to encounter. Taller than the average man by several inches he was, with enormously wide shoulders and long, dangling arms like those of a gorilla. His face was almost black, though plainly not that of a negro, and his cheeks and chin were adorned by a bristling black beard which glistened in the lantern light with some sort of greasy dressing. Upon his head was a turban of tightly twisted woolen cloth.

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured quizzically. "A Patan, by the looks of him, Friend Trowbridge, and I think no more of him for it. In upper India they have a saying, 'Trust a serpent or a tiger, but trust a Patan never,' and the maxim is approved by centuries of unfortunate experience with gentlemen like the one we see yonder.

"Come, let us make haste for the house. It may be we shall arrive in time to cheat this almost-finished grave of its intended tenant."

Wriggling snakelike through the rain-drenched grounds, our progress rendered silent by the soft turf, we

made a wide detour round the dark-faced grave-digger and approached the big, forbidding mansion through whose close-barred windows no ray of light appeared.

THE place seemed in condition to defy a siege as we circled it warily, vainly seeking some means of ingress. At length, when we were on the point of owning defeat and rejoining the troopers, de Grandin came to a halt before an unbarred window letting into a cellar. Unbuttoning his leather topcoat, he produced a folded sheet of flypaper and applied the sticky stuff to the grimy window-pane, smoothed it flat, then struck sharply with his elbow. The window shattered beneath the impact, but the adhesive paper held the pieces firm, and there was no telltale clatter of broken glass as the pane smashed. "One learns more tricks than one when he associates with *les apaches*," he explained with a grin as he withdrew the flypaper and glass together, laid them on the grass and inserted his hand through the opening, undoing the window-catch. A moment later we had dropped to the cellar and de Grandin was flashing his electric torch inquiringly about.

It was a sort of lumber room into which he had dropped. Bits of discarded furniture, an old rug or two and a pile of miscellaneous junk occupied the place. The stout door at the farther end was secured by an old-fashioned lock, and the first twist of de Grandin's skeleton key sprung the bolt.

Beyond lay a long, dusty corridor from which a number of doors opened, but from which no stairway ascended. "U'm?" muttered the Frenchman. "There seems no way of telling where the stairs lie save by looking for them, Friend Trowbridge." Advancing at random, he inserted his key in the nearest lock and, after a moment's tentative twisting, was re-



warded by the sound of a sharp click as the keeper shot back.

No ray of moonlight filtered through the windows, for they were stopped with heavy wooden shutters. As we paused irresolute, wondering if we had walked into a *cul-de-sac*, a faint, whimpering cry attracted our attention. "*Un petit chat!*" de Grandin exclaimed softly. "A poor little pussy-cat; he has been locked in by mistake, no doubt, and ha! *Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu; regardez, mon ami!* Do you, too, behold it?"

The beam of his questing flashlight swept through the darkness, searching for the feline, but it was no cat the ray flashed on. It was a girl.

She lay on a rough, bedlike contrivance with a net of heavily knotted, coarse rope stretched across its frame where the mattress should have been, and was drawn to fullest compass in the form of a St. Andrew's cross; for leathern thongs knotted to each finger and toe strained tautly, holding hands and feet immovably toward the posts which stood at the four corners of the bed of torment. The knots were cruelly drawn, and even in the momentary flash of the light we saw the thongs were of rawhide, tied and stretched wet, but now dry and pulling the tortured girl's toes and fingers with a fury like that of a rack. Already the flesh about fingers and toe-nails was puffy and impurpled with engorged blood cut off by the vicious cinctures of the tightening strings.

The torment of the constantly shortening thongs and the cruel pressure of the rope-knots on which she lay were enough to drive the girl to madness, but an ultimate refinement had been added to her agony; for the bed on which she stretched was a full eight inches shorter than her height, so that her head hung over the end without support, and she was obliged to hold it up by continued flexion of the neck muscles or let it hang downward, either posture being unendur-

able for more than a fraction of a minute.

"O Lord," she moaned weakly between swollen lips which had been gashed and bitten till the blood showed on them in ruddy froth, "O dear Lord, take me—take me quickly—I can't stand this; I can't—oh, oh, —o-o-oh!" The prayerful exclamation ended in a half-whispered sob and her anguished head fell limply back and swung pendulously from side to side as consciousness left her.

"*Ohé, la pauvre créature!*" De Grandin leaped forward, unsheathing his knife as he sprang. Thrusting the flashlight into my hand, he slashed the cords from her hands and feet, cutting through each group of five strings with a single slash of his razor-sharp knife, and the thongs hummed and sang like broken banjo strings as they came apart beneath his steel.

As de Grandin worked I took note of the swooning girl. She was slight, almost to the point of emaciation, her ribs and the processes of her wrists and ankles showing whitely against the flesh. For costume she wore a wisp of printed cotton twisted bandeauwise about her bosom, a pair of soiled and torn white-cotton bloomers which terminated in tattered ruffles at her ankles and were held in place at the waist by a gayly dyed cotton scarf secured by a sort of four-in-hand knot in front. A close-wrapped bandanna kerchief swathed her head from brow to nape, covering hair and ears alike, and from the handkerchief's rim almost to the pink of her upper lip a gilded metal mask obscured her features, leaving only mouth, nose-tip and chin visible.

As de Grandin lifted her from the bed-frame and rested her lolling head against his shoulder, he tugged at the mask, but so firmly was it bound that it resisted his effort.

Again he pulled, more sharply this time, and, as he did so, we ne-

ticed a movement at the side of her head beneath the handkerchief-turban. Snatching off the headgear, the Frenchman fumbled for the mask cords, then started back with a low cry of horror and dismay. The mask was not tied, but *wired to her flesh*, two punctures having been made in each ear, one in the lobe, the other in the pinna, and through the raw wounds fine golden wires had been thrust and twisted into loops, so that removal of the mask would necessitate clipping the wire or tearing the tender, doubly pierced ears.

"Oh, the villains, the assassins, the ninety-thousand-times-damned beasts!" de Grandin gritted through his teeth, desisting in his effort to take off the metallic mask. "If ever Satan walked the earth in human guise, I think he lodges within this accursed kennel of hell-hounds, Friend Trowbridge, and, *cordieu*, though the monster have as many gullets as the fabled hydra, I shall slit them all for this night's business!"

What more he would have said I do not know, for the fainting girl rolled her head and moaned feebly as she lay in his arms, and he was instantly all solicitude. "Drink this, *ma pauvre*," he commanded, drawing a silver flask from his pocket and pressing it to her pale lips.

She swallowed a bit of the fiery brandy, choked and gasped a little, then lay back against his arm with a weak sigh.

Again he applied the restorative; then: "Who are you, *ma petite*?" he asked gently. "Speak bravely; we are friends."

She shuddered convulsively and whimpered weakly again; then, so faint we could scarcely catch the syllables, "Ewell Eaton," she whispered.

"*Cordieu*, I did know it!" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "*Gloire à Dieu*, we have found you, *ma petite*!"

"The door, Friend Trowbridge—do you stand guard at the portal lest

we be surprized. Here!"—he snatched a pistol from his pocket and thrust it into my hand—"hesitate not to use it, should occasion arise!"

I took station at the entrance of the torture chamber while de Grandin set about making the half-conscious girl as comfortable as possible. I could hear the murmur of their voices in soft conversation as he worked frantically at her swollen feet and hands, rubbing them with brandy from his flask and massaging her wrists and ankles in an effort to restore circulation, but what they said I could not understand.

I was on the point of leaving my post to join them, for the likelihood of our being interrupted seemed remote, when it happened. Without so much as a warning creak from without, the door smashed suddenly back on its hinges, flooring me as the kick of a mule might have done, and three men rushed pell-mell into the room. I saw de Grandin snatch frantically at his pistol, heard Ewell Eaton scream despairingly, and half rose to my feet, weak and giddy with the devastating blow I had received, but determined to use my pistol to best advantage. One of the intruders turned savagely on me, brought the staff of a long, spearlike weapon he carried down upon my head, and caught me a smashing kick on the side of the head as I fell.

"TROWBRIDGE, my friend, are you living—do you survive?" Jules de Grandin's anxious whisper cut through the darkness surrounding me.

I was lying on my back, wrists and ankles firmly bound, a bump like a goose-egg on my head where the spear-butt had hit me. Through the grimy window of our cellar prison a star or two winked mockingly; otherwise the place was dark as a cave. How long we had lain there I had no way of telling. For all I knew the troopers might have raided the place,

arrested the inmates and gone, leaving us in our dungeon. A dozen questions blazed through my mind like lightning-flashes across a summer night as I strove to roll over and ease the pressure of the knots on my crossed wrists.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, do you live, are you awake, can you hear?" the Frenchman's murmured query came through the darkness again.

"De Grandin—where are you?" I asked, raising my head, the better to locate his voice.

"*Parbleu*, here I lie, trussed like a capon ready for the spit!" he returned. "They are prodigal with their rope, those assassins. Nevertheless, I think we shall make apes of them all. Roll toward me if you can, my friend, and lie with your hands toward me. *Grâce à Dieu*, neither age nor overeating has dulled my teeth. Come, make haste!"

Followed a slow, dragging sound, punctuated with muttered profanities in mingled French and English as he hitched himself laboriously across the rough cement floor in my direction.

In a few moments I felt the stiffly waxed hairs of his mustache against my wrists and the tightening of my bonds as his small, sharp teeth sank into the cords, severing strand after strand.

Sooner than I had hoped, my hands were free, and after a few seconds, during which I wrung my fingers to restore circulation, I unfastened the ropes binding my feet, then released de Grandin.

"*Morbleu*, at any rate we can move about, even if those *sacré* rogues deprived us of our weapons," the Frenchman muttered as he strode up and down our prison. "At least one thing is accomplished—Mademoiselle Ewell is relieved of her torture. Before they beat me unconscious I heard her told tomorrow she would be strangled, but as the Spaniards so sagely remark, tomorrow is another

day, and I trust we shall have increased hell's population by that time.

"Have you a match, by any kind of chance?" he added, turning to me.

Searching my pockets, I found a packet of paper matches and passed them over. Striking one, he held it torchwise above his head, surveying our prison. It was a small, cement-floored room, its single window heavily barred and its only article of furniture a large, sheet-iron-sheathed furnace, evidently the building's auxiliary heating-plant. The door was of stout pine planks, nailed and doweled together so strongly as to defy anything less than a battering-ram, and secured with a modern burglar-proof lock. Plainly, there was no chance of escape that way.

"U'm?" murmured de Grandin, surveying the old hot-air furnace speculatively. "U'm-m-m? It may be we shall find use for this, if my boyhood's agility has not failed me, Friend Trowbridge."

"Use for that furnace?" I asked incredulously.

"*Mais oui*, why not?" he returned. "Let us see."

He jerked the heater's cast-iron door open, thrusting a match inside and looking carefully up the wide, galvanized flues leading to the upper floors. "It is a chance," he announced, "but the good God knows we take an equal one waiting here. *Au revoir*, my friend, either I return to liberate us or we say good morning in heaven."

Next instant he had turned his back to the furnace, grasped the iron door-frame at each side, thrust his head and shoulders through the opening and begun worming himself upward toward the flue-mouth.

A faint scraping sounded inside the heater's interior, then silence broken only by the occasional soft thud of a bit of dislodged soot.

I paced the dungeon in a perfect fever of apprehension. Though de

Grandin was slight as a giri, and almost as supple as an eel, I was certain I had seen the last of him, for he would surely be hopelessly caught in the great, dusty pipes, or, if not that, discovered by some of the villainous inmates of the place when he attempted to force himself through a register. His plan of escape was suicide, nothing less.

*Click!* The strong, jimmy-proof lock snapped back. I braced myself for the reappearance of our jailers, but the Frenchman's delighted chuckle reassured me.

"*Mordieu*, it was not even so difficult as I had feared," he announced. "The pipes were large enough to permit my passage without great trouble, and the registers—God be thanked!—were not screwed to the floor. I had but to lift the first I came to from its frame and emerge like a jack-in-the-box from his case. Yes. Come, let us ascend. There is rheumatism, and other unpleasant things, to be contracted in this cursed cellar."

Stepping as softly as possible, we traversed a long, unlighted corridor, ascended two flights of winding stairs and came to an upper hallway letting into a large room furnished in a garish East Indian manner and decorated with a number of mediæval sets of mail and a stand of antique arms.

The Frenchman looked about, seeking covert, but there was nothing behind which an underfed cat could hide, much less a man. Finally: "I have it!" he declared. "*Parbleu, c'est joli!*"

Striding across the room he examined the nearest suit of armor and turned to me with a chuckle. "Into it, *mon ami*," he commanded. "Quick!"

With de Grandin's help I donned the beavered helmet and adjusted the gorget, cuirass, brassards, cuisses and jамbs, finding them a rather snug fit. In five minutes I was completely garbed, and the Frenchman, laughing

softly and cursing delightedly, was clambering into another set of mail. When we stood erect against the wall no one who had not seen us put on the armor could have told us from the empty suits of mail which stood at regular intervals about the wall.

From the stand of arms de Grandin selected a keen, long-bladed misericorde, and gazed upon it lovingly. Nor had he armed himself a moment too soon, for even as he straightened back against the wall and lowered the visor of his helmet there came the scuffle of feet from the corridor outside and a bearded, muscular man in Oriental garb dragged a half-fainting girl into the room. She was scantily clad in a Hindoo version of a Parisian night club costume.

"By Vishnu, you shall!" the man snarled, grasping the girl's slender throat between his blunt fingers and squeezing until she gasped for breath. "Dance you must and dance you shall—as the Master has ordered—or I choke the breath from your nostrils! Shame? What have *you* to do with shame, O creature? Daughter of a thousand iniquities, tomorrow there shall be *two* stretched upon the 'bed of roses' in the cellar!"

"*Eh bien*, my friend, you may be right," de Grandin remarked, "but I damn think you shall not be present to see it."

The fellow toppled over without so much as a groan as the Frenchman, with the precise skill of a practised surgeon, drove his dagger home where skull and spine met.

"Silence, little orange-pip!" the Frenchman ordered as the girl opened her lips to scream. "Go below to your appointed place and do as you are bidden. The time comes quickly when you shall be liberated and we shall drag such of these sow-suckled sons of pigs as remain alive to prison. Quick, none must suspect that help approaches!"

The girl ran quickly from the room, her soft, bare feet making no sound on the thick carpets of the hall, and de Grandin walked slowly to the door. In a moment he returned, lugging a suit of armor in his arms. Standing it in the place against the wall he had vacated, he repeated the trip, filling my space with a second empty suit, then motioning me to follow.

"Those sets of mail I did bring were from the balcony at the stair-head," he explained softly. "In their places we shall stand and see what passes below. Perhaps it is that we shall have occasion to take parts in the play before all is done."

STIFF and still as the lifeless ornaments we impersonated, we stood at attention at the stairway's top. Below us lay the main drawing-room of the house, a sort of low stage or dais erected at its farther end, a crescent formation of folding-chairs, each occupied by a man in evening clothes, standing in the main body of the room.

"Ah, it seems all is ready for the play," the Frenchman murmured softly through the visor-bars of his helmet. "Did you overhear the tale the little Mademoiselle Ewell told me in the torture chamber, my friend?"

"No."

"*Mordieu*, it was a story to make a man's hair erect itself! This is a house of evil, the abode of *esclavage*, no less, Friend Trowbridge. Here stolen girls are brought and broken for a life of degradation, even as wild animals from the jungle are trained for a career in the arena. The master of this odious cesspool is a Hindoo, as are his ten retainers, and well they know their beastly trade, for he was a dealer in women in India before the British *Raj* put him in prison, and his underlings have all been *corah-bundars*—punishment-servants—in Indian harems before he hired them for this service. *Parbleu*,

from what we saw of the poor one in the cellars, I should say their technique has improved since they left their native land!

"The headquarters of this organization is in Spain—I have heard of it before—but there are branches in almost every country. These evil ones work on commission, and when the girls they steal have been sufficiently broken in spirit they are delivered, like so many cattle, and their price paid by dive-keepers in South America, Africa or China—wherever women command high prices and no questions are asked.

"Hitherto the slavers have taken their victims where they found them—poor shop-girls, friendless waifs, or those already on the road to living death. This is a new scheme. Only well-favored girls of good breeding are stolen and brought here for breaking, and every luckless victim is cruelly beaten, stripped and reclothed in the degrading uniform of the place within half an hour of her arrival.

"*Mordieu*, but their tactics are clever! All faces obscured by masks which can not be removed, all hair covered by exactly similar turbans, all clothing exactly alike—twin sisters might be here together, yet never recognize each other, for the poor ones are forbidden to address so much as a word to each other—Mademoiselle Ewell was stretched on the bed of torture for no greater fault than breaking this rule."

"But this is horrible!" I interrupted. "This is unbelievable——"

"Who says it?" he demanded fiercely. "Have we not seen with our own eyes? Have we not Mademoiselle Ewell's story for testimony? Do I not know how her sister, poor Madame Mazie, came in the river? Assuredly: Attend me: The fiends who took her prisoner quickly discovered the poor child's condition, and they thereupon deliberately beat out her brains and cast her murdered body into the



water, thinking the river would wash away the evidence of their crime.

"Did not that execrable slave-master whom I slew command the other girl to dance—what did it mean?" He paused a moment, then continued in a sibilant whisper:

"This, *pardieu!* Even as we send the young conscripts to Algeria to toughen them for military service, so these poor ones are given their baptism into a life of infamy by being forced to dance before half-drunken brutes to the music of the whip's crack. *Non d'une pipe*, I damn think we shall see some dancing of the sort they little suspect before we are done—no more, the master comes!"

As de Grandin broke off, I noticed a sudden focusing of attention by the company below.

Stepping daintily as a tango dancer, a man emerged through the arch behind the dais at the drawing-room's farther end. He was in full Indian court dress, a purple satin tunic, high at the neck and reaching half-way to his knees, fastened at the front with a row of sapphire buttons and heavily fringed with silver at the bottom; trousers of white satin, baggy at the knee, skin-tight at the ankle, slippers of red Morocco on his feet. An enormous turban of peach-bloom silk, studded with brilliants and surmounted by a vivid green aigrette was on his head, while round his neck dangled a triple row of pearls, its lowest loop hanging almost to the bright yellow sash which bound his waist as tightly as a corset. One long, brown hand toyed negligently with the necklace, while the other stroked his black, sweeping mustache caressingly.

"Gentlemen," he announced in a languid Oxonian drawl, "if you are ready, we shall proceed to make whoopee, as you so quaintly express it in your vernacular." He turned and beckoned through the archway, and as the light struck his profile I recognized him as the leader of the

party which had surprized us in the torture chamber.

De Grandin identified him at the same time, for I heard him muttering through the bars of his visor: "Ha, toad, viper, worm! Strut while you may; comes soon the time when Jules de Grandin shall show you the posture you will not change in a hurry!"

Through the archway stepped a tall, angular woman, her face masked by a black cloth domino, a small round samisen, or Japanese banjo, in her hand. Saluting the company with a profound obeisance, she dropped to her knees and picked a short, jerky note or two on her crude instrument.

The master of ceremonies clapped his hands sharply, and four girls came running out on the stage. They wore brilliant kimonos, red and blue and white, beautifully embroidered with birds and flowers, and on their feet were white-cotton *tabi* or foot-mittens with a separate "thumb" to accommodate the great toe, and *zori*, or light straw sandals. Golden masks covered the upper part of their faces, and their hair was hidden by voluminous glossy-black wigs arranged in elaborate Japanese coiffures and thickly studded with ornamental hairpins. On their brightly rouged lips were fixed, unnatural smiles.

Running to the very edge of the platform, with exaggeratedly short steps, they slipped their sandals off and dropped to their knees, lowering their foreheads to the floor in greeting to the guests; then, rising, drew up in rank before the musician, tittering with a loud, forced affectation of coy gayety and hiding their faces behind the flowing sleeves of their kimonos, as though in mock-modesty.

Again the master clapped his hands, the musician began a titillating tune on her banjo, and the dance was on. More like a series of postures than a dance it was, ritualistically

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## The House of Golden Masks

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slow and accompanied by much waving of hands and fluttering of fans.

The master of ceremonies began crooning a low, singsong tune in time with the plink-plink of the banjo. "*Chonkina—chonkina.*" he chanted: then with a slapping clap of his hands:

"*Hoi!*"

Dance and music came to a frozen stop. The four girls held the posture they had when the call came, assuming the strained, unreal appearance of a motion picture when the film catches in the projecting reel.

For a moment there was a breathless silence, then a delighted roar from the audience; for the fourth girl, caught with one foot and hand upraised, could not maintain the pose. Vainly she strove to remain stone-still, but despite her efforts her lifted foot descended ever so slightly.

A guttural command from the show-master, and she paid the forfeit, unfastening her girdle and dropping it to the floor.

A wave of red mantled her throat and face to the very rim of her golden mask as she submitted, but the forced, unnatural smile never left her painted lips as the music and dance began afresh at the master's signal.

"*Hoi!*" Again the strident call, again the frozen dance, again a girl lost and discarded a garment.

On and on the bestial performance went, interminably, it seemed to me, but actually only a few minutes were required for the poor, bewildered girls, half fainting with shame and fear of torture, to lose call after call until at last they danced only in their cotton *tabi*, and even these were discarded before the audience would cry enough and the master release them from their ordeal.

Gathering up their fallen clothes,

sobbing through lips which still fought valiantly to retain their constrained smiles, the poor creatures advanced once more to the platform's edge, once more knelt and touched their brows to the floor, then ran from the stage, only the fear of punishment holding their little baked feet to the short, sliding steps of their artificial run rather than a mad dash for sanctuary from the burning gaze and obscene calls of the onlookers.

"*Dieu de Dieu,*" de Grandin fumed, "will not the troopers ever come? Must more of this shameless business go on?"

A MOMENT later the showman was speaking again: "Let us now give undivided attention to the next number of our program," he was announcing suavely.

Something white hurtled through the archway behind him, and a girl clothed only in strings of glittering rhinestones about throat, wrists, waist and ankles was fairly flung out upon the stage, where she cowered in a perfect palsy of terror. Her hands were fettered behind her by a six-inch chain attached to heavy golden bracelets, and an odd contrivance, something like a bit, was fastened between her lips by a harness fitted over her head, making articulate outcry impossible. Behind her, strutting with all the majesty of a turkey-cock, came a man in the costume of a South American *vaquero*—loose, baggy trousers, wide, nail-studded belt, patent leather boots and broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat of black felt. In his hand was a coiled whip of woven leather thongs—the bull-whip of the Argentine pampas.

"God and the devil!" swore de Grandin, his teeth fairly chattering in rage. "I know it; it is the whipping dance—he will beat her to insensibility—I have seen such shows in Buenos Aires, Friend Trowbridge, but may Satan toast me in his fires if

I witness it again. Come, my friend, it is time we taught these swine a lesson. Do you stand firm and beat back any who attempt to pass. Me, I go into action!"

Like some ponderous engine of olden times he strode forward, the joints of his armor creaking with unwonted use.

For a moment guests and servants were demoralized by the apparition descending the stairs, for it was as if a chair or sofa had suddenly come to life and taken the field against them.

"Here, wash all thish, wash all thish?" demanded a maudlin young man with drunken truculence as he swaggered forward to bar the Frenchman's way, reaching for his hip pocket as he spoke.

De Grandin drew back his left arm, doubled his iron-clad fingers into a ball and dashed his mailed fist into the fellow's face.

The drunken rake went down with a scream, spewing blood and teeth from his crushed mouth.

"*Awai, a bhut\*!*" cried one of the servants in terror, and another took up the cry: "*A bhut! a bhut!*"

Two of the men seized long-shafted halberds from an ornamental stand of arms and advanced on the little Frenchman, one on each side.

*Clang!* The iron points of their weapons rang against his visor-bars, but the fine-tempered, hand-wrought steel that had withstood thrust of lance and glaive and flying cloth-yard arrow when Henry of England led his hosts to victory at Agincourt held firm, and de Grandin hardly wavered in his stride.

Then, with halberd and knife and wicked, razor-edged simitar, they were on him like a pack of hounds seeking to drag down a stag.

De Grandin strode forward, striking left and right with mailed fists, crushing a nose here, battering a mouth

\*Demon.

there, or smashing jaw-bones with the iron-shod knuckles of his flailing hands.

My breath came fast and faster as I watched the struggle, but suddenly I gave a shout of warning. Two of the Hindoos had snatched a silken curtain from a doorway and rushed de Grandin from behind. In an instant the fluttering drapery fell over his head, shutting out sight and cumbering his arms in its clinging folds. In another moment he lay on his back, half a dozen screaming Indians pinioning his arms and legs.

I rushed forward to his rescue, but my movement was a moment too late. From the front door and the back there came a sudden, mighty clamor. The thud of gun-butts and riot sticks on the panels and hoarse commands to open in the law's name announced the troopers had arrived at last.

*Crash!* The front door splintered inward and four determined men in the livery of the State Constabulary rushed into the hall.

A moment the Hindoos stood at bay; then, with waving swords and brandishing pikes they charged the officers.

They were ten to four, but odds were not with numbers, for even as they sprang to the attack there sounded the murderous *r-r-r-rat-tat-tat* of an automatic rifle, and the rank of yelling savages wavered like growing wheat before a gust of summer wind, then went down screaming, while the acrid, bitter fumes of smokeless powder stung our nostrils.

**N***OM d'un porc, mon lieutenant,* you came not a moment too soon to complete a perfect night's work," de Grandin complimented as we prepared to set out for home. "Ten tiny seconds more and you should have found nothing but the deceased corpse of Jules de Grandin to rescue, I fear."

From the secret closets of the house the girls' clothing had been rescued,

wire-clippers in willing hands had cut away the degrading golden masks from the captives' faces, and Ewell Eaton, the three sorority sisters and the poor little shop-girl whose disappearances had caused such consternation to their families were ready to ride back to Harrisonville, two in the troopers' side-cars, the rest in hastily improvised saddles behind the constables on their motoreycles.

"We did make monkeys out of 'em, at that," the young officer grinned. "It was worth the price of admission to see those guys in their dress suits trying to bluff us off, then whining like spanked kids when I told 'em it would be six months in the work-house for theirs. Gosh, won't the papers make hash of *their* reputations before this business is over?"

"Undoubtlessly," de Grandin assented. "It is to be deplored that we may not lawfully make hash of their so foul bodies, as well. Me, I should enormously enjoy dissecting them without previous anesthesia. However, in the meantime——"

He drew the young officer aside with a confidential hand upon his elbow, and a brief, whispered colloquy followed. Two minutes later he rejoined me, a satisfied twinkle in his eye, the scent of raw, new whisky on his breath.

"*Barbe d'un chamcau*, he is a most discerning young man, that one," he confided, as he wiped his lips with lavender-bordered silk handkerchief.

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*Watch for further ecry adventures of Jules de Grandin in this magazine. Shortly to appear will be three of his most spectacular exploits: "The Corpse-Master," "Trespassing Souls," and "The Silver Countess."*