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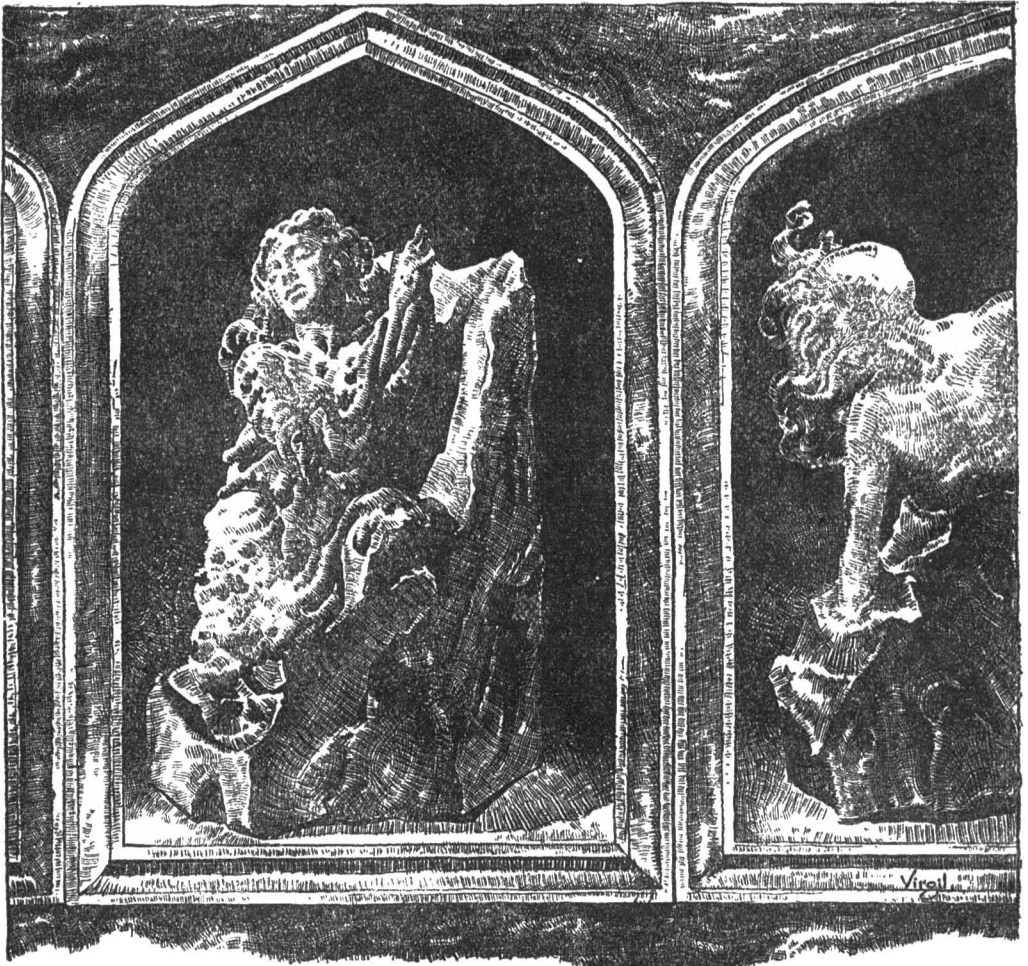
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**WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH**



"Nightmare sculpture, hewn from dreams of madness . . ."

# The House Where Time Stood Still

By SEABURY QUINN

*An utterly strange tale is this, of a brilliant surgeon gone mad, and the weird mansion where he performed his fantastic experiments on living human beings—a tale of Jules de Grandin*

THE February wind was holding carnival outside, wrenching at the window fastenings, whooping round the corners of the house, roaring bawdy chansons down the chimney flues. But we were comfortable enough, with the study curtains drawn, the lamps aglow and two

fresh oak logs upon the andirons taking up the blazing torch their dying predecessors flung them. Pleased with himself until his smugness irritated me, Jules de Grandin smiled down at the toe of his slim patent-leather pump, took a fresh sip of whisky-soda, and returned to the argument.

"But no, my friend," he told me, "medicine the art is necessarily at odds with medicine the science. As followers of Æsculapius and practitioners of the healing art we are concerned with individual cases, in alleviating suffering in the patient we attend. We regard him as a person, a complete and all-important entity. Our chief concern for the time being is to bring about his full recovery, or if that is not possible, to spare him pain as far as in our power lies, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Of course," I rejoined. "That's the function of the doctor——"

"*Mais non.* Your term is poorly chosen. That is the function of the physician, the healer, the practitioner of medicine as an art. The doctor, the learned savant, the experimenting scientist, has a larger field. He is unconcerned with man the individual, the *subspecies aeternitatis*. Him he cannot see for bones and cells and tissues where micro-organisms breed and multiply to be a menace to the species as a whole. He deals with large, great bodies like——"

"Sir Haddingway Ingraham an' Sergeant Costello, if ye plaze, sors," interrupted Nora McGinnis from the study entrance.

"Yes, *parbleu*, exactly like them!" de Grandin burst out laughing as the two six-footers hesitated at the doorway, unable to come through together, undecided which should take precedence.

"Regard, observe them, if you

please, Friend Trowbridge!" he ordered as he looked at the big visitors. "*Quel type, mais quel type; morbleu, c'est incroyable!*"

To say that the big Briton and the even bigger Celt were of a common type seemed little less than fantastic. Ingraham—Sir Haddingway Ingraham Jamison Ingraham, known to all his friends familiarly as Hiji, as was typically an Englishman of the Empire Builder sort as could be found in literature or on the stage. So big that he was almost gigantic, his face was long and narrow, high-cheeked, almost saddle-leather tanned, with little splayed-out lines of sun-wrinkles about the outer corners of his eyes. His hair was iron-gray, center-parted, smooth as only brilliantine and careful brushing could make it, and by contrast his small military mustache was as black as the straight brows that framed his deep-set penetrating hazel eyes. His dinner clothes were cut and draped with such perfection that they might as well have borne the label Saville Row in letters half a foot in height; and in his martial bearing, his age and his complexion, you could read the record of his service to his king and country as if campaign ribbons had adorned his jacket: the Aisne, Neuve Chapelle, the second Marne, and after that the jungle or the veldt of British Africa, or maybe India. He was English as roast beef or Yorkshire pudding, but not the kind of Briton who could be at home in London or the Isles, or anywhere within a thousand miles of Nelson's monument, save for fleeting visits.

COSTELLO was a perfect contrast. Fair as the other was dark, he still retained his ruddy countenance and smooth, fresh Irish skin, although his once-red hair was almost white. If Hiji

was six feet in height the sergeant topped him by a full two inches; if the Englishman weighed fourteen stone the Celt outweighed him by a good ten pounds; if Ingraham's lean, brown, well-manicured hand could strike a blow to floor an ox, Costello's big, smooth-knuckled fist could stun a charging buffalo. His clothes were good material, but lacked elegance of cut and were plainly worn more for protective than for decorative purposes. Smooth-shaved, round-cheeked, he might have been an actor or a politician or, if his collar were reversed, a very wordly, very knowing, very Godly bishop, or a parish priest with long experience of the fallibility of human nature and the infinite compassion of the Lord.

Thus their dissidence. Amazingly, there was a subtle similarity. Each moved with positively tigerish grace that spoke of controlled power and almost limitless reserves of strength, and in the eyes of each there was that quality of seeing and appraising and recording everything they looked at, and of looking at everything within their range of vision without appearing to take note of anything. As usual, de Grandin was correct.

Each bore resemblance to the other, each was the perfect type of the born man-hunter, brave, shrewd, resourceful and implacable.

"But it is good to see you, *mes amis!*" de Grandin told them as he gave a hand to each and waved them to a seat beside the fire. "On such a night your company is like a breath of spring too long delayed. Me, I am delighted!"

"Revoltin' little hypocrite, ain't he?" Hiji turned to Costello, who nodded gloomy acquiescence.

"*Comment?* A hypocrite — I?" Amazement and quick-gathering wrath puckered the small Frenchman's face

as if he tasted something unendurably sour. "How do you say——"

"Quite," Hiji cut in heavily. "Hypocrite's the word, and nothin' less. Pretendin' to be glad to see us, and not offerin' us a drink! On such a night, too. Disgustin' is the word for it."

"*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*" wailed de Grandin. "Oh, I am humiliated, I am desolated, I am——"

"Never mind expressions of embarrassment, you little devil. Pour that whisky; don't be sparin' o' your elbow!"

In a moment Scotch and soda bubbled in the glasses. Ice tinkled in Costello's. "None in mine, you blighted little thimblerrigger; d'ye want to take up space reserved for whisky?" Hiji forbade when de Grandin would have dropped an ice-cube in his glass.

Refreshed, we faced each other in that silence of comradery which only men who have shared common perils know.

"And now, what brings you out on such a night?" de Grandin asked. "Smile and grin and play the innocent as you will, I am not to be imposed upon. I know you for the sybarites you are. Neither of you would thrust his great nose out of doors tonight unless compulsion forced him. Speak, thou great ungainly ones, thou hulking oafs, thou species of a pair of elephants. I wait your babbling confidences, but I do not wait with patience. Not I. My patience is as small as my thirst is great — and may I never see tomorrow's sunrise if I see it sober!"

Hiji drained his glass and held it out to be refilled. "It's about young Southerby," he answered gloomily. "The poisonous little scorpion's managed to get himself lost. He's disappeared; vanished."

"Ah? One is desolated at the news."

De Grandin leant back in his chair and grinned at Ingraham and Costello. "I am completely ravaged at intelligence of this one's disappearance, for since I have abandoned criminal investigation in all its phases, I can look upon the case objectively, and see how seriously it affects you. May I prescribe an anodyne?" he motioned toward the syphon and decanter.

"Drop it, you little imp o' Satan!" Ingraham replied gruffly. "This is serious business. Yesterday we had a matter of the greatest importance—and secrecy—to be transmitted to the embassy in Washington. There wasn't a king's messenger available, and we did not dare trust the papers to the post; so when young Southerby—dratted little idiot!—stepped in and told the Chief he'd do his Boy Scout's good deed by runnin' the dispatches down to Washington, they took him on. He's been knocking round the consulate a year and more, gettin' into everybody's hair, and the Chief thought it would be a holiday for the staff to get him out from under foot awhile. The little blighter does know how to drive a car, I'll say that for him; and he's made the trip to Washington so often that he knows the road as well as he knows Broadway. Twelve hours ought to do the trip and leave him time for meals to spare, but the little hellion seems to have rolled right off the earth. There ain't a trace o' hide or hair of him——"

"But surely, you need not concern yourself with it," de Grandin interrupted. "This is a matter for the police; the good Costello or the state constabulary, or the Federal agents."

"And the newspapers and the wireless, not to mention the cinema," broke in Hiji with a frown. "Costello's not here officially. As my friend he's volunteered to help me out. As a policeman

he knows nothin' of the case. You'll appreciate my position when I tell you that these papers were so confidential that they're not supposed to exist at all, and we simply can't report Southerby's disappearance to the police, nor let it leak out that he's missin' or was carryin' anything to Washington. All the same, we've got to find those precious papers. The Chief made a bad blunder entrustin' 'em to such a scatterbrain, and if we don't get 'em back his head is goin' to fall. Maybe his won't be the only one——"

"You are involved, my friend?" De Grandin's small eyes widened with concern.

"In a way, yes. I should have knocked the little blighter silly the minute that he volunteered, or at least have told the Chief he wasn't to be trusted. As it was, I rather urged him to accept the offer."

"Then what do we wait for? Let us don our outdoor clothes and go to seek this missing young man. You he may elude, but I am Jules de Grandin; though he hide in the lowest workings of a mine, or scale the sky in a balloon——"

"Easy on, son," Hiji thrust a hand out to the little Frenchman. "There's nothin' much that we can do tonight."

"I've already done some gum-shoe wor-rk, sor," Costello volunteered. "We've traced 'im through th' Holland Tunnels an' through Newark an' th' Amboys and New Brunswick. Th' trail runs out just th' other side o' Cranberry. It wuz four o'clock when he left New York, an' a storm blew up about five, so he musta slowed down, for it wuz close to eight when he passed Cranberry, headed for Phillydelphia, an' "—he spread his hands—"there th' trail ends, sor, like as if he's vanished into thin air, as th' felly says."

De Grandin lit a cigarette and leant back in his chair, drumming soundlessly on the table where his glass stood, narrowing his eyes against the smoke as he stared fixedly at the farther wall.

"There was mingled rain and snow—sleet—on all the roads last night," he murmured. "The traffic is not heavy in the early evening, for pleasure cars have reached their destinations and the nightly motorcade of freight trucks does not start till sometime near eleven. He would have had a lonely, slippery, dangerous road to travel, this one. Has inquiry been made for wrecks?"

"That it has, sor. He couldn't 'a' had a blowout widout our knowin' of it. His car wuz a Renault sports model, about as inconspicuous as a ellyphunt on a Jersey road, an' that should make it a cinch to locate 'im. That's what's drivin' me nuts, too. If a young felly in a big red car can evaporate—howly Mither, I wonder now, could that have any bearin'——" He broke off suddenly, his blue eyes opened wide, a look almost of shocked amazement on his face.

"A very pleasant pastime that, my friend," de Grandin put in acidly as the big detective remained silent. "Will you not confide your cause for wonder to us? We might wish to wonder, also."

"Eh? O' course, sor." Costello shook his shoulders with a motion reminiscent of a dog emerging from the water "I wuz just wonderin'——"

"We gathered as much——"

"If sumpin else that's happened, recently, could have a bearin' on this case. Th' Missin' Persons Bureau has had lookouts posted several times widin th' past three months fer persons last seen just th' other side o' Cranberry—on th' Phillydelphia side, that is. O' course, you know how so many o' these

disappearances is. Mostly they disappear because they wants to. But these wuz not th' sort o' cases ye'd think that of. A truck driver wuz th' first, a fine young felly wid a wife an' two kids; then a coupla college boys, an' a young gur-rl from New York named Perinchief. Th' divil a one of 'em had a reason for vamoosin', but they all did. Just got in their cars an' drove along th' road till they almost reached Cranberry, then—bingo! no one ever heard o' one of 'em again. It don't seem natural-like. Th' state police an' th' Middlesex authorities has searched for 'em, but th' devil a trace has been turned up. Nayther they nor their cars have been seen or heard from. D'ye think that mebbe there is sumpin more than coincidence here?"

"It may not be probable, but it is highly possible," de Grandin nodded. "As you say, when people disappear, it is often by their own volition, and that several persons should be missed in a short period may quite easily be coincidental. But when several people disappear in a particular locality, that is something else again."

"Is there not something we can do tonight?" he turned to Ingraham.

"No," the Englishman replied, "I don't believe there is. It's blacker than the inside of a cow out there, and we can't afford to attract attention lookin' for the little blighter with flashlights. Suppose we do a move tomorrow before dawn and see what we can pick up in the neighborhood where Southerby was last reported."

**D**AWN, a raw, cold February dawn well nigh as colorless and uninviting as a spoiled oyster, was seeping through the lowering storm clouds as we drove across the bridge at Perth Amboy and headed south toward Cran-

berry. Hiji and Costello occupied the rear seat; de Grandin rode beside me, chin buried in his greatcoat collar, hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"See here," I asked him as an idea struck me, "d'ye suppose this lad has skipped? You heard Hiji say how valuable the papers he was carrying are, and apparently he begged to be allowed to carry them. These youngsters in the consular and diplomatic service usually live beyond their means, and sometimes they do queer things if they're tempted by a large amount of cash."

"I wish I could believe that," he returned, cowering lower in his seat. "It would have saved me the discomfort of emerging from a warm bed into a chill morning. But I know *les anglais*, my friend. They are often stupid, generally dull; socially they are insufferable in many cases, but when it comes to loyalty Gibraltar is less firm. Your English gentleman would as soon consider eating breakfast without marmalade as selling out his honor or running from an enemy or doing anything original. Yes."

A little light, but no sunshine, had strengthened in the sky when we drew up beside the roadway a half-mile beyond Cranberry. "All right," Hiji called as he dismounted; "we might as well start here and comb the terrain. We have a fairly good line on our bird up to this point, and—hullo, there's a prospect!"

He nodded toward a corduroyed Italian, obviously a laborer, who was trudging slowly up the road walking to the left and facing traffic, as pedestrians who hope to survive have to do on country highways.

"*Com' esta?*" de Grandin called. "You live near here?"

The young man drew his chin up from his tightly buttoned reefer and

flashed a smile at him. "*Si, signor,*" he returned courteously, and raised a finger to his cap. "I live just there, me."

With a mittened hand he waved vaguely toward a patch of bottom land whence rose a cumulus of early-morning smoke.

"And you work long hours, one surmises?"

Again the young man smiled. "*Si,* all day I worka; mornin', night, all time——"

"So you walk home in darkness?"

A smile and nod confirmed his surmise.

"Sometimes the motors cause you trouble, make you jump back from the road, *hein?*"

"Not moch," the young Italian grinned. "In mornin' when I come to work they not yet come. At night when I come back they all 'ave gone away. But sometimes I 'ave to jomp queek. Las' night I 'ave to jomp away from a beega rad car——"

"I think we are upon the scent, my friends!" de Grandin whispered. Aloud: "How was that? Could he not see you?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "I theenk 'e craz'," he answered. "Always I walka dees side a road, so I can see car come, but dees a one 'e come from other side, an' I almost bang me down. Come ver' fast, too, not look where he go. Down there"—again he waved a vague hand down the road—" 'e run into da woods. I theenk 'e get hurt, maybe, bot I not go see. I ver' tired, me, and want for to get 'ome."

De Grandin pursed his lips and rummaged in his pocket for a coin. "You say the young man left the road and ran into the woods? Did you see his car?"

"*Si, signor.* Heef I don' see heem I not be 'ere now. Eet was a beega rad

car, lika dose we see in old contry, not small like dose we see 'ere."

"And where did this one leave the road?"

"You see dose talla tree down by de 'ill op dere?"

"Perfectly."

"'E go off road about a honnerd meters farther on."

"Thank you, my peerless one," the Frenchman smiled, as he handed the young man a half-dollar. "You have been most helpful." To us: "I think that we are on the trail at last."

"But I can't think that Southerby would have stopped to take a drink, much less get drunk," objected Ingraham, as we hastened toward the point the young Italian indicated. "He knew how devilishly important those things were——"

"Perhaps he was not drunk," the Frenchman cut in cryptically as we walked toward the little copse of evergreens which lay back from the road.

**A**N EARTH cart-track, deeply rutted with the winter rains, ran through the unkempt field which fringed the road and wound into the heart of the small wood lot, stopping at the edge of a creek which ran clattering between abrupt banks of yellow clay.

"Be gob," Costello looked down at the swirling ochre water, "if yer little friend ran inter this, he shure got one good duckin', Hiji."

"*Eh bien*, someone has run into it, and not so long ago," de Grandin answered, pointing to a double row of tire tracks. "Observe them, if you will. They run right down the bank, and there is nothing showing that the car was stopped or that its occupant alighted."

"By Jove, you're right, Frenchy," Ingraham admitted "See here"—he

indicated a pair of notches in the bank—"here's where he went down. Last night's storm has almost washed 'em away, but there the tracks are. The blighted little fool! Wonder how deep it is?"

"That is easily determined," de Grandin drew his knife and began hacking down a sapling growing at the water's edge. "Now"—he probed experimentally—"one may surmise that—*morbleu!*"

"What is it?" we exclaimed in chorus.

"The depth, my friends. See, I have thrust this stick six feet beneath the surface, but I have not yet felt bottom. Let us see how it is here." He poked his staff into the stream some ten feet beyond his original soundings and began to switch it tentatively back and forth. "Ah, here the bottom is, I think—*non*, it is a log or—*mon Dieu*, attend me, *mes amis!*"

We clustered around him as he probed the turbulent yellow water. Slowly he angled with his pole, swishing it back and forth, now with, now against the rushing current, then twirled it between his hands as if to entangle something in the protruding stubs of the roughly hacked-off boughs.

"*Ha!*" he heaved quickly upward, and as the stick came clear we saw some dark, sodden object clinging to its tip, rising sluggishly to the surface for a moment, then breaking free and sinking slowly back again.

"You saw it?" he demanded.

"Yes," I answered, and despite myself I felt my breath come quicker. "It looked like a coat or something."

"Indubitably it was something," he agreed. "But what?"

"An old overcoat?" I hazarded, leaning over his shoulder to watch.

"Or undercoat," he replied, panting



with exertion as he fished and fished again for the elusive object. "Me, I think it was an—ah, here it is!" With a quick tug he brought up a large oblong length of checkered cloth and dragged it out upon the bank.

"Look at him, my Hiji," he commanded. "Do you recognize him?"

"I think I do," the Englishman responded gravely. "It's the tartan of the clan MacFergis. Southerby had some Scottish blood and claimed alliance with the clan. He used that tartan for a motor rug——"

"*Exactement.* Nor is that all, my friend. The minute I began exploring with this stick I knew it was not bottom that I touched. I could feel the outlines of some object, and feel something roll and give beneath my pressure every now and then. I am certain that a motor car lies hidden in this stream. What else is there we cannot surely say, but——"

"Why not make sure, sor?" Costello broke in. "We've found th' car, an' if young Mither Southerby is drowned there's nothin' to be hid. Why not git a tow-line an' drag whatever's in there out?"

"Your advice is excellent," de Grandin nodded. "Do you stay here and watch the spot, my sergeant. Hiji and I will go out to the road and see if we can hail a passing truck to drag whatever lies beneath that water out. Trowbridge, my friend, will you be kind enough to go to yonder house"—he pointed to a big building set among a knot of pines that crowned a hill which swept up from the road—"and ask them if they have a car and tow-line we may borrow?"

**T**HE storm which had been threatening for hours burst with berserk fury as I plodded up the unkempt,

winding road that scaled the hill on which the old house stood enshrouded in a knot of black-boughed pine trees writhing in the wind. The nearer I drew to the place the less inviting it appeared. At the turning of the driveway from which almost all the gravel had been washed long since, a giant evergreen bent wrestling with the gale, its great arms creaking, groaning, shaken but invincible against the storm. Rain lashed against the walls of weathered brick; heavy shutters swung and banged and crashed, wrenched loose from their turn-buckles by the fury of the wind; the blast tore at the vines that masked the house-front till they writhed and shuddered as in torment; even the shadowy glimmer of dim light glowing through the transom set above the door seemed less an invitation than a portent, as if warning me that something dark and stealthy moved behind the panels. I pulled my hat down farther on my brow and pushed the collar of my greatcoat higher up around my ears.

"Someone's up and stirring," I told myself aloud as I glanced up at the feeble glow above the door. "They can't very well refuse to help us." Thus for the bolstering of my morale. Actually, I was almost shaking with a sort of evil prescience, and wanted more than anything to turn and run until I reached the roadway where my friends were waiting.

"Come, man, don't be a blithering fool!" I bade myself, and seized the rusty iron knocker stapled to the weather-blasted door.

There was something reassuring in the shock of iron upon iron. Here was reality; just a commonplace old farmhouse, run down and ruinous, but natural and earthy. I struck the knocker twice more, making it sound sharply through the moaning wind and hissing

rain, waited for a moment, then struck again.

What sort of response I'd expected I had no accurate idea. From the ruinous appearance of the place I had surmised it had been used as a multiple dwelling, housing several families of day-laborers, perhaps a little colony of squatters washed up by the rising tide of unemployment which engulfed our centers of industry. Perhaps a family of discouraged farmer folk used a portion of it and closed off the rest. Had a Negro or Italian answered my impatient knock I should not have been startled, but when the door swung open and a tall man in semi-military uniform looked at me with polite inquiry I was fairly breathless with surprise. A liveried chauffeur opening the door of the old ruin seemed somehow as utterly incongruous as a Zulu chieftain donning dinner-clothes for tribal ceremonies.

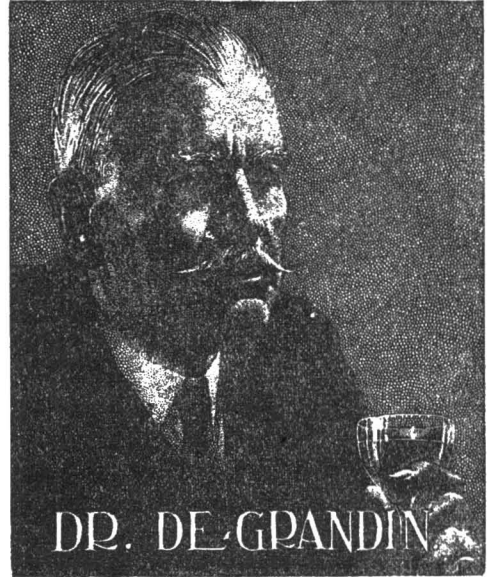
His expression of inquiry deepened as I told my errand. It was not until I had exhausted five minutes in futile repetitions that I realized he understood no word I spoke.

"See here," I finally exclaimed, "if you don't understand English, is there anybody here who does? I'm in a hurry, and——"

"In-gliss?" he repeated, shaking his head doubtfully. "No In-gliss 'ere."

"No," I responded tartly, "and I don't suppose you've any Eskimos or Sioux here, either. I don't want an Englishman. I have one already, and a Frenchman and an Irishman, to boot. What I want is someone who can help me haul a motor car out of the brook. Understand? Motor car—sunk—brook—pull out!" I went through an elaborate pantomime of raising a submerged vehicle from the muddy little stream.

His sallow, rat-like countenance lit



up with a sudden gleam as I completed my dumb-show, and he motioned me to enter.

The door had seemed so old and weather-weakened that I'd feared my knocking might shake loose a panel, but it swung behind me with a solid bang, and the clicking of the lock that sounded as the portal closed struck a highly modern and efficient note.

Barely over the threshold, I came to a full stop. Something faintly irritating, like a swarm of small black ants, seemed crawling up my neck and on my scalp. Instinct, untrammelled and un-verbalized, was giving warning: "Here is peril!" But reason scoffed at instinct: "What peril can there be in an old farmhouse burdened with decrepitude, almost on the verge of falling in upon itself?"

But as I stared about me I realized the look of desolation and decay was but a shell of camouflage about a wholly different condition. New the place might not have been, but its interior repair was perfect. The air was heavy, scented like the atmosphere that

permeates cathedrals after celebration of the Mass—the sharp and sweet, yet heavy, scent of incense borne from censers swung by priests.

The floor was brightly waxed and polished, the walls encrusted with a terra-cotta colored lacquer and, as church walls are embossed with stations of the Cross, were pitted with two rows of little niches framed in polished black wood. Before each framed recess there burned a little lamp, something like a sanctus light, which shed a wavering fulgent spot upon the image nested in the cavity. Each statuette was wrought in gleaming white stone, and though each differed from the others, all had one thing in common: they were uncompleted. Scarcely human, yet not exactly bestial, were the beings portrayed. Here a creature which seemed part ape, part man, was struggling with strained muscles to emerge from the rough ashlar from which the sculptor had but partly hewn it; there a female figure, perfect as to head and throat, seemed melting at the shoulders into a vague amorphousness as misshapen and unsymmetrical as the bloated body of an octopus shorn of tentacles, and hid her grief and horror-stricken face behind an arm clipped off at the elbow. Here was a head as bald of crown as any shaven-pated mediæval monk, but with a face obscured by long and matted hair, waving wildly as a harpy's tresses whipped by tempest-winds. Beyond it was a niche in which a scarcely-started group of statuary rested. Vague and almost formless as a wisp of shifting cloud, it still showed outlines of a pair of figures, obviously masculine and feminine, as far as faces were concerned, but with bodies bulbous as the barrel of a squid, staring at each other with a look of surprised consternation, of terror mixed with loathing, as if each saw in the

other a mirroring of his deformity, and abhorred his vis-à-vis as a reminder of his hideousness.

"Nightmare sculpture, hewn from dreams of madness . . ." the quotation flashed across my mind as I followed the tall man in livery down the hallway.

MY GUIDE rapped at a door set at the rear of the corridor, waited for a moment, then stood aside to let me enter. Facing me across a flat-topped desk sat a small, stoop-shouldered man, reading from a large book through a pair of Crookes'-lens spectacles.

"Doctor," my conductor introduced in perfect English, "this gentleman came knocking at our door a few moments ago, going through some most extraordinary antics and mumbling something about a motor car sunk in our brook."

I looked from one of them to the other in utter, stupefied amazement, but my astonishment increased tenfold at the seated man's reply. "Stravinsky," he said sternly, looking at me through the purplish-black of his thick glasses, "how dare you leave your quarters without permission? Go upstairs with Mishkin at once."

"I beg your pardon," I stammered, "my name's not Stravinsky. I'm Doctor Samuel Trowbridge of Harrisonville, and some friends of mine and I need help in raising a sunken motor car from the brook that runs between the highway and your place. If you'll be kind enough to tell your chauffeur to——"

"That will do," he broke in sharply. "We've heard all that before. Go to your room at once, or I shall have to order you into a strait-waistcoat again."

"See here," I began in a rage, "I don't know what this nonsense means, but if you think for one moment——"

My protest died half uttered. A pair of sinewy hands seized me by the elbows, drawing my arms sharply to my sides, a wide strap of woven webbing was thrown about my body like a lasso, pinioning both elbows, drawn tightly through a buckle and snapped into position. I was securely bound and helpless as ever captive was.

"Confound you!" I cried. "Take this devilish harness off me! What d'y'e mean——"

Something smooth and soft and smothering, like a piece of wadded silk, was thrust against my face, shutting out the light, covering mouth and nose; a sickly-sweet, pungent odor assailed my nostrils, the floor seemed suddenly to heave and billow like a sea lashed by the wind, and I felt my knees give way beneath me slowly.

**F**EELING better, now, Stravinsky " the suave, low voice of the round-shouldered man woke me from a troubled sleep.

I sat up, staring round me stupidly. I lay upon a narrow iron cot of the sort used in the free wards of hospitals, uncovered except for a thin cotton blanket. The bed stood in a little cubby-hole not more than six feet square, and was the only article of furniture in the apartment. A small window, heavily barred, let in a little light and a great quantity of cold air together with occasional spatterings of rain. Directly facing me was a stout wooden door made without panels but fitted with a barred wicket through which my captor looked at me with a rather gentle, pitying smile. Close behind him, grinning with what seemed to be sadistic malice, was the liveried man who'd let me in.

"You'll be sorry for this!" I threatened, leaping from the cot. "I don't know who you are, but you'll know who

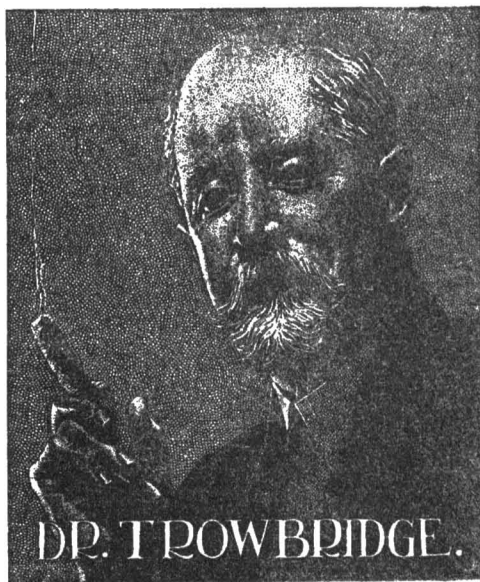
I am before you're done with me——"

"Oh, yes, I know perfectly who you are," he corrected in a gentle, soothing voice. "You are Abraham Stravinsky, sixty-five years old, once in business as a cotton converter but adjudged a lunatic by the orphans' court three weeks ago and placed in my care by your relatives. Poor fellow"—he turned sorrowfully to his companion—"he still thinks he's a physician, Mishkin. Sad case, isn't it?"

He regarded me again, and I thought I saw a glimmer of amusement in his solicitous expression as he asked: "Wouldn't you like some breakfast? You've been sleeping here since we had to use harsh measures day before yesterday. You must be hungry, now. A little toast, some eggs, a cup of coffee——"

"I'm not hungry," I cut in, "and you know I'm not Stravinsky. Let me out of here at once, or——"

"Now, isn't that too bad?" he asked, again addressing his companion. "He doesn't want his breakfast. Never mind, he will, in time." To me:



"The treatment we pursue in cases such as yours is an unique one, Stravinsky. It inhibits the administration of food, or even water, for considerable periods of time. Indeed, I often find it necessary to withhold nourishment indefinitely. Sometimes the patient succumbs under treatment, to be sure; but then his insanity is cured, and we can't have everything, can we? After all, Stravinsky, the mission of the sanitarium is to cure the disease from which the patient suffers, isn't it, Stravinsky?"

"Make yourself comfortable, Stravinsky. Your trouble will be over in a little while. If it were only food you are required to forgo your period of waiting might be longer, but prohibition of water shortens it materially—Stravinsky."

The constant repetition of the name he'd forced upon me was like caustic rubbed in a raw wound. "Damn you," I screamed, as I dashed myself against the door, "my name's not Stravinsky, and you know it! You know it—you *know it!*"

"Dear, dear, Stravinsky," he reproved, smiling gently at my futile rage. "You mustn't overtax yourself. You can't last long if you permit yourself to fly into such frenzies. Of course, your name's Stravinsky. Isn't it, Mishkin?" He turned for confirmation to the other.

"Of course," his partner echoed. "Shall we look in on the others?"

They turned away, chuckling delightedly, and I heard their footsteps clatter down the bare floor toward the other end of the corridor on which my room faced.

In a few minutes I heard voices raised in heated argument, seemingly from a room almost directly underneath my cell. Then a door slammed and there came the sound of dully,

rhythmically repeated blows, as if a strap were being struck across a bed's footboard. Finally, a wail, hopeless and agonized as if wrung from tortured flesh against the protest of an undefeated spirit: "Yes, yes, anything—*anything!*"

The commotion ceased abruptly, and in a little while I heard the clack of boot heels as they went upon their rounds.

THE hours passed like eons clipped from hell's eternity. There was absolutely no way to amuse myself, for the room—cell would be a better term for it—contained no furniture except the bed. The window, unglazed, small and high-set, faced an L of the house; so there was neither sky nor scenery to be looked at, and the February wind drove gusts of gelid rain into the place until I cowered in the corner to escape its chilling wetness as though it were a live, malignant thing. I had been stripped to shirt and trousers, even shoes and stockings taken from me, and in a little while my teeth were chattering with cold. The anesthetic they had used to render me unconscious still stung the mucous membranes of my mouth and nose, and my tongue was roughened by a searing thirst. I wrenched a metal button from my trousers, thrust it in my mouth and sucked at it, gaining some slight measure of relief, and so, huddled in the sleazy blanket, shivering with cold and almost mad with thirst, I huddled on the bed for hour after endless hour till I finally fell into a doze.

How long I crouched there trembling I have no idea, nor could I guess how long I'd slept when a hand fell on my shoulder and a light flashed blindingly into my face.

"Get up!" I recognized the voice

as coming from the man called Mishkin, and as I struggled to a sitting posture, still blinking from the powerful flashlight's glare, I felt a broad web strap, similar to the one with which I had at first been pinioned, dropped deftly on my arms and drawn taut with a jerk.

"Come," my jailer seized the loose end of my bond and half dragged, half led me from my cell, down the stairs and through a lower hall until we paused before a door which had been lacquered brilliant red. He thrust the panels back with one hand, seized me by the shoulder with the other, and shoved me through the opening so violently that, bound as I was, I almost sprawled upon my face.

The apartment into which I stumbled was in strong contrast to the cell in which I'd lain. It was a large room, dimly lighted and luxurious. The walls were gumwood, unvarnished but rubbed down with oil until their surface gleamed like satin. The floor of polished yellow pine was scattered with bright Cossack rugs, barbarian with primary colors. A sofa and deep easy-chairs were done in brick-red crushed leather. A log fire blazed and hissed beneath the gumwood over-mantel and the blood-orange of its light washed out across the varnished floor and ebbed and flowed like rising and receding wavelets on the dark-red walls. A parchment-shaded lamp was on the table at the center of the room, making it a sort of island in the shadows, and by its light I looked into the face of the presiding genius of this house of mystery.

He had taken off his dark-lensed glasses, and I saw his eyes full on me. As I met their level, changeless stare I felt as if the last attachments of my viscera had broken. Everything inside

me had come loose, and I was weak to sickness with swift-flooding, nameless terror.

In a lifetime's practise as physician one sees many kinds of eyes, eyes of health and eyes diseased, the heaven-lighted eyes of the young mother with her first-born at her breast, the vacant eye of fever, the stricken eye of one with sure foreknowledge of impending death upon him, the criminal's eye, the idiot's lack-luster eye, the blazing eye of madness. But never had I seen a pair of eyes like these in a human face. Beast's eyes they were, unwinking, topaz, gleaming, the kind of eye you see in a house cat's round, smug face, or staring at you speculatively through the bars that barricade the carnivores' dens at the zoo. As I looked, fascinated, in these bestial eyes set so incongruously in a human countenance, I felt—I knew—that there was nothing this man would not do if he were minded to it. There was nothing in those yellow, ebony-pupiled eyes to which one could appeal; no plea addressed to pity, decency or morals would affect the owner of these eyes; he was as callous to such things as is the cat that plays so cunningly and gently with a ball one moment, and pounces on a hapless bird or mouse so savagely the next. Feline ferocity, and feline fickleness, looked at me from those round, bright, yellow eyes.

"Forgive the lack of light, please, Doctor Trowbridge," he begged in his soft, almost purring voice. "The fact is I am sensitive to it, highly photophobic. That has its compensations, though," he added with a smile. "I am also noctiloptic and have a supernatural acuity of vision in darkness, like a cat—or a tiger."

As he spoke he snapped the switch of the desk lamp, plunging the apart-

ment into shadow relieved only by the variable fire-glow. Abruptly as a pair of miniature motor lights switched on, the twin disks of his eyes glowed at me through the dimness with a shining phosphorescent gleam of green.

"That is why I wear the Crookes' lensed glasses in the daytime," he added with an almost soundless laugh. "You won't mind if we continue in the darkness for a little while." The vivid glow of his eyes seemed to brighten as he spoke, and I felt fresh chills of horror ripple up my spine.

SILENCE fell, and lengthened. Somewhere in the darkness at my back a clock ticked slowly, measuring off the seconds, minutes. . . . I caught myself remembering a passage from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*:

*"O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!"*

The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,  
 . . . and Faustus must be damn'd!"

The shadowed room seemed full to overflowing with manifested, personalized evil as the magician's cell had been that night so long ago in Wurtemberg when Mephistopheles appeared to drag his screaming soul to everlasting torment. Had the floor opened at my feet and the red reflection of the infernal pit shone on us, I do not think I should have been surprised.

I almost screamed when he spoke. "Do you remember—have you heard of—Friedrich Friedrichsohn, Doctor Trowbridge?"

The name evoked no memories. "No," I answered.

"You lie. Everyone—even you half-trained American physicians—knows of the great Friedrichsohn!"

His taunt stung a mnemonic chord. Dimly, but with increasing clarity, recollection came. Friedrich Friedrich-

sohn, brilliant anatomist, authority on organic evolution . . . colonel-surgeon in the army which Franz Josef sent to meet its doom on the Piave . . . shell-shocked . . . invalidated home to take charge of a hospital at Innsbruck—now memory came in a swift gush. The doctors in Vienna didn't talk about it, only whispered rumors went the rounds of schools and clinics, but the fragmentary stories told about the work they'd found him at, matching bits of shattered bodies, grafting amputated limbs from some to others' blood-fresh amputation-wounds, making monsters hideous as Hindoo idols or the dreadful thing that Frankenstein concocted out of sweepings from dissecting-rooms. . . . "He died in an insane asylum at Korneusburg," I replied.

"Wrong! Wrong as your diagnoses are in most instances, *mein lieber Doktor*. I am Friedrich Friedrichsohn, and I am very far from dead. They had many things to think of when the empire fell to pieces, and they forgot me. I did not find it difficult to leave the prison where they'd penned me like a beast, nor have I found it difficult to impose on your credulous authorities. I am duly licensed by your state board as a doctor. A few forged documents were all I needed to secure my permit. I am also the proprietor of a duly licensed sanitarium for the treatment of the insane. I have even taken a few patients. Abraham Stravinsky, suffering from dementia præcox is—was—one of them. He died shortly after you arrived, but his family have not yet been notified. They will be in due course, and you—but let us save that for a later time.

"The work in which I was engaged when I was interrupted was most fascinating, Doctor. Until you try it you cannot imagine how many utterly de-

lightful and surprising combinations can be made from the comparatively few parts offered by the human body. I have continued my researches here, and while some of my experiments have unfortunately failed, I have succeeded almost past my expectations in some others. I should like to show you them before—I'm sure you'll find them interesting, Doctor."

"You're mad!" I gasped, struggling at the strap that bound my arms.

I could feel him smiling at me through the dark. "So I have been told. I'm not mad, really, but the general belief in my insanity has its compensations. For example, if through some deplorable occurrence now unforeseen I should be interrupted at my work here, your ignorant police might not feel I was justified in all I've done. The fact that certain subjects have unfortunately expired in the process of being remodeled by me might be considered grounds for prosecuting me for murder. That is where the entirely erroneous belief that I am mad would have advantages. Restrained I might be, but in a hospital, not a tomb. I have never found it difficult to escape from hospitals. After a few months' rest I should escape again if I were ever apprehended. Is not that an advantage? How many so-called sane men have *carte blanche* to do exactly as they please, to kill as many people as they choose, and in such manner as seems most amusing, knowing all the while they are immune to the electric chair or the gallows? I am literally above the law, *mein lieber kollege*."

"Mishkin," he ordered the attendant who stood at my elbow, "go tell Pedro we should like some music while we make our tour of inspection."

"Mishkin was confined with me at Korneusburg," he explained, as the

clatter of the other's boot heels died away beyond the door. "When I left there I brought him with me. They said he was a homicidal maniac, but I have cured his mania—as much as I desired. He is a faithful servant and quite an efficient helper, Doctor Trowbridge. In other circumstances I might find it difficult to handle him, but his work with me provides sufficient outlets for his—shall we call it eccentricity? Between experiments he is as tractable as a well-trained beast. Of course, he has to be reminded that the whip is always handy—but that is the technique of good beast-training, *nicht wahr?*"

"Ah, our accompaniment has commenced. Shall we go?"

Seizing the end of my tether, he assisted me to rise, held the door for me, and led me out into the hall.

SOMEWHERE upstairs a violin was playing softly, *Di Provenza il Mar*, from *Traviata*. Its plaintive notes were fairly liquid with nostalgic longing:

From land and wave of dear Provence  
What hath caused thy heart to roam?  
From the love that met thee there,  
From thy father and thy home? . . .

"He plays well, *nicht wahr?*" Friedrichsohn's soft voice whispered. "Music must have been instinctive with him, otherwise he would not remember—but I forget, you do not know about him, do you?" In the darkness of the corridor his glowing eyes burned into mine.

"Do you remember Viki Boehm, *Herr Doktor?*"

"The Viennese coloratura? Yes. She and her husband Pedro Attavanta were lost when the *Oro Castle* burned——"

His almost silent laughter stopped me. "Lost, *lieber kollege*, but not as you suppose. They are both here be-



neath this roof, guests of their loving *landsmann*. Oh, they are both well, I assure you; you need have no fears on that score. All my skill and science are completely at their service, night and day. I would not have one of them die for anything!"

We had halted at a narrow lacquered door with a small design like a coronet stenciled on it. In the dim light of a small lamp set high against the wall I saw his face, studious, arrogant, unsmiling. Then a frigid grimace, the mere parody of a smile, congealed upon his lips.

"When I was at the university before the war"—his voice had the hard brittleness of an icicle—"I did Viki Boehm the honor to fall in love with her. I, the foremost scientist of my time, greater in my day than Darwin and Galileo in theirs, offered her my hand and name; she might have shared some measure of my fame. But she refused. Can you imagine it? She rebuffed my condescension! When I told her of the things I had accomplished, using animals for subjects, and of what I knew I could do later when the war put human subjects in my hands, she shrank from me in horror. She had no scientific vision. She was so naïve she thought the only office of the doctor was to treat the sick and heal the injured. She could not vision the long vistas of pure science, learning and experimenting for their own sakes. For all her winsomeness and beauty she was nothing but a woman. *Pfui!*" He spat the exclamation of contempt at me. Then:

"Ah, but she was beautiful! As lovely as the sunrise after rain, sweet as springtime in the Tyrol, fragile as a——"

"I have seen her," I cut in. "I heard her sing."

"So? You shall see her once again, *Herr Doktor*. You shall look at her and hear her voice. You recall her fragile loveliness, the contours of her arms, her slender waist, her perfect bosom—see!"

He snatched the handle of the door and wrenched it open. Behind the first door was a second, formed of upright bars like those of a jail cell, and behind that was a little cubicle not more than six feet square. A light flashed on as he shoved back the door, and by its glow I saw the place was lined with mirrors, looking-glasses on the walls and ceiling, bright-lacquered composition on the floor; so that from every angle shone reflections, multiplied in endless vistas, of the monstrous thing that squatted in the center of the cell.

In general outline it was like one of those child's toys called a humpty-dumpty, a weighted pear-shaped figure which no matter how it may be laid springs upright automatically. It was some three feet high and more than that in girth, wrinkled, edematous, knobbed and bloated like a toad, with a hide like that of a rhinoceros. If it had feet or legs they were invisible; near its upper end two arm-like stubs extended, but they bore no resemblance to human pectoral limbs. Of human contours it had no trace; rather, it was like a toad enlarged five hundred times, denuded of its rear limbs and—fitted with a human face!

Above the pachydermous mass of shapelessness there poised a visage, a human countenance, a woman's features, finely chiseled, delicate, exquisite in every line and contour with a loveliness so ethereal and unearthly that she seemed more like a fairy being than a woman made of flesh and blood and bone. The cheeks were delicately petal-like, the lips were full and sensitive,

the eyes deep blue, the long, fair hair which swept down in a cloven tide of brightness rippled with a charming natural wave. Matched by a body of ethereal charm the face would have been lovely as a poet's dream; attached to that huge tumorous mass of bloated horror it was a thousand times more shocking than if it too had been deformed past resemblance to humanity.

The creature seemed incapable of voluntary locomotion, but it was faced toward us, and as we looked at it, it threw its lovely head back with a sort of slow contortion such as might be made by a half-frozen snake. There was neither horror nor hatred, not even reproach, in the deep-blue eyes that looked at Friedrichsohn. There was instead, it seemed to me, a look of awful resignation, of sorrow which had burned itself to ashes and now could burn no more, of patience which endures past all endurance and now waits calmly for whatever is to be, knowing that the worst is past and nothing which can come can match that which is already accomplished.

"Her case was relatively simple," I heard Friedrichsohn whisper. "Mishkin and I were cruising in a motorboat offshore when the *Oro Casile* burned. We picked her and her husband up, gave them a little drink which rendered them unconscious and brought them here. She gave us very little trouble. First we immobilized her by amputating both legs at the hip; then, in order to make sure that she would not destroy herself or mar her beauty, I took off both arms midway between shoulder and elbow. That left a lovely torso and an even lovelier face to work with.

"YOU'RE wondering about her beautifully swollen trunk? Nothing could be simpler, *herr kollege*. Artifi-

cially induced elephantiasis resulted in enormous hypertrophy of the derma and subcutaneous tissue, and we infected and reinfected her until we had succeeded in producing the highly interesting result you observe. It was a little difficult to prevent the hypertrophy spreading to her neck and face, but I am not the greatest doctor in the world for nothing. She suffers nothing now, for the progress of her condition has brought a permanent insensitiveness, but there were several times during the progress of our work when we had to keep her drugged. Elephantiasis begins as an erysipelatus inflammation, you know, and the accompanying lymphangitis and fever are uncomfortable.

"Internally she's quite healthy, and Mishkin makes her face up every day with loving care—too loving, sometimes. I caught him kissing her one day and beat him for an hour with the knout.

"That put a chill upon her ardor. I do not let him feed her. That is my own delightful duty. She bit me once—the lovely little vixen!—but that was long ago. Now she's as tame and gentle as a kitten.

"Ingenious, having her room lined with mirrors, isn't it? No matter which way she may look—up, down or sideways—she cannot fail to contemplate herself, and compare her present state of loveliness with what she once possessed.

"Viki!" he rattled the bars of her cage. "Sing for our guest, Viki!"

She regarded him a moment with incurious, thoughtful eyes, but there was no recognition in her glance, no sign that she had heard his command.

"Viki!" Again he spoke sharply. "Will you sing, or must we get the branding-iron out?"

I saw a spasm of quick pain and ap-

prehension flash across her face, and: "That is always effective," he told me, with another soft laugh. "You see, we altered Pedro Attavanti, too. Not very much. We only blinded him and moved his scalp down to his face—a very simple little grafting operation—but he went mad while we were working on him. Unfortunately, we were short of anesthetics, and non-Aryans lack the fortitude of the superior races. Once a day we let him have his violin, and he seems quite happy while he plays. When Viki is intractable we have an excellent use for him. She can't bear to see him suffer; so when we bring him to her door and let her watch us burn him with hot irons she does whatever we ask her.

"Shall we get the irons, Viki," he turned to the monstrous woman-headed thing in the cell, "or will you sing?"

The hideous creature threw its lovely head back, breathing deeply. I could see the wattled skin beneath the throat swell like a puffing toad as it filled its lungs with breath; then, clear and sweet and true as ever Viki Boehm had sung upon the concert stage, I heard her voice raised in the final aria of *Faust*:

"Holy angels, in heaven blest,  
My spirit longs with thee to rest . . ."

Surely, the ecstatic melody of that prison scene was never more appropriately sung than by that toad-thing with a lovely woman's head.

The song still mounted poignantly with an almost piercing clarity as Friedrichsohn slammed the door and with a jerk that almost pulled me off my feet dragged me down the hall.

"YOU'LL be interested in my heart experiment, *Herr Doktor*," he assured me. "This is a more ambitious

scheme, a far more complicated——"

I jerked against the harness that confined me. "Stop it!" I demanded. "I don't want to see your fiend's work, you sadistic devil. Why don't you kill me and have done with——"

"Kill you?" The mild, surprised reproach in his voice was almost pathetic. "Why, Doctor Trowbridge, I would not kill anyone, intentionally. Sometimes my patients die, unfortunately, but, believe me, I feel worse about it than they do. It's terribly annoying, really, to carry an experiment almost to completion, then have your work entirely nullified by the patient's inconsiderate death. I assure you it upsets me dreadfully. A little while ago I had almost finished grafting arms and legs and half the pelt from a gorilla to an almost perfect human specimen, a truck driver whose capture caused me no end of trouble, and would you believe it, the inconsiderate fellow died and robbed me of a major triumph. That sort of thing is very disconcerting. Shall we proceed?"

"No, damn you!" I blazed back. "I'll see myself in hell before——"

"Surely, you're not serious, Doctor?" He dropped his hand upon my shoulder, feeling with quick-kneading fingers for the middle cervical ganglion. "You really mean you will not come with me?" With a finger hard and pitiless as a steel bolt he thrust downward on my spine, and everything went red before me in a sudden blaze of torment. It was as if my head and neck and throat were an enormous exposed nerve on which he bore with fiendish pressure. I felt myself reel drunkenly, heard myself groan piteously.

"You will come with me now, won't you, *lieber kollege*?" he asked as he released the pressure momentarily,

then bore down on my spine again until it seemed to me my heart had quite stopped beating, then started up again with a cold, nauseating lurch. I could see his eyes blaze at me through the dark, feel his fingers fumbling at my skull-base.

"Don't—don't!" I panted, sick with pain. "I'll——"

"*Ist gut.* Of course you will. I knew that you would not be stubborn. As I was saying, this next experiment I propose making is more ambitious than any I have tried before. It involves the psyche quite as much as the body. Tell me, Doctor, is it your opinion that the physical attraction we call love springs more from contemplation of the loved one's face or figure?"

He tapped me on the shoulder with a rigid forefinger, and I shrank from the contact as from a heated iron. Sick revulsion flooded through me. What atrocity was hatching in the diseased mind of this completely irresponsible mad genius?

"Why—I—what do you mean?" I stammered stupidly. My head and neck still pained me so that I could hardly think.

"Precisely what I say, *mein lieber kollege,*" he snapped back acidly. "Every day we see cases which make us wonder. Men love and marry women with faces which might put Medusa to shame, but with bodies which might make a Venus jealous. Or, by contrast, they fall in love with pretty faces set on bodies which lack every element of beauty, or which may even be deformed. Women marry men with similar attributes. Can you explain these vagaries?"

"Of course not," I returned. "Human beings aren't mere animals. Physical attraction plays its part, naturally, but intellectual affinity, the soul——"

"The psyche, if you please, *mein kollege.* Let us not be mediæval in our terminology."

"All right, the psyche, then. We see beneath the surface, find spiritual qualities that attract us, and base our love on them. A love with nothing but the outward-seeming of the body for foundation is unworthy of the name. It couldn't last——"

"Fool!" he half laughed and half snarled. "You believe in idealistic love—in the love that casteth out fear and endureth all things?"

"Absolutely——"

"So do those two down there——"

HE HAD halted at a turning of the hallway; as he spoke he pressed a lever, sliding back a silent panel in the floor. Immediately beneath us was a small room, comfortably furnished and well lighted. On a couch before the open fire a boy and girl were seated, hand in hand, fear written on their faces.

He was a lad of twenty-two or so, slightly made, with sleek, fair hair and a ruddy, fresh complexion. I did not need to hear him speak to know that he was English, or that I had the answer to the disappearance of the British consul's messenger.

The girl was younger by a year or so, and dark as her companion was blond.

Their costumes and positions were reminiscent of domestic bliss as portrayed in the more elaborate motion pictures; he wore a suit of violet pajamas beneath a lounging-robe of purple silk brocade, and a pair of purple kid house-boots. She was clothed in an elaborate hostess coat of Persian pattern, all-enveloping from throat to insteps, but so tight from neck to hips that it hid her lissome form no more

than the apple's skin conceals the fruit's contours. From hips to hem it flared out like a ballerina's skirt. Laced to her feet with narrow strips of braided scarlet leather were brightly gilded sandals with cork soles at least four inches thick, and the nails of her exquisitely formed hands and feet were lacquered brilliant red to match the sandal straps.

"No," she was saying as Friedrich-sohn slid back the panel, "it isn't hopeless, dear. They're sure to find us sometime—why, you were a king's messenger; the consulate will turn the country inside out——"

His bitter laugh broke in. "No chance! I've stultified myself, blasted my name past all redemption. They'll let me rot, and never turn a hand——"

"Neville! What do you mean?"

He put his elbows on his knees and hid his face in his cupped hands. "I should have let 'em kill me first," he sobbed, "but—oh, my dear, you can't imagine how they hurt me! First they beat me with a strap, and when that didn't break my spirit the little man with the black glasses did something to my neck—I don't know what—that made me feel as if I had a dentist's drill in every tooth at once. I couldn't stand the dreadful pain, and—and so I signed it, Lord forgive me!"

"Signed what, dearest?"

"A letter to the consul tellin' him I'd sold the papers that he'd trusted with me to the Germans, and that I'd hooked it with the money. I shouldn't have found it hard to die, dear, but the pain—the awful pain——"

"Of course, my dear, my poor, sweet dear"—she took his head against her bosom and rocked it back and forth as if he were a fretful child and she his mother—"I understand. Rita understands, dear, and so will they when we

get out of here. No one's responsible for things he's done when he's been tortured. Think of the people who denied their faith when they were on the rack——"

"And of the ones who had the stuff to stick it!" he sobbed miserably.

"Honey, listen. I don't love you 'cause you're strong and masterful and heroic; I love you 'cause you're you." She stopped his wild self-accusation with a kiss. Then back again to her first theme:

"They're sure to find us, dear. This is Twentieth Century America. Two people can't just disappear and stay that way. The police, the G-men——"

"How long have we been here?" he interrupted.

"I—I don't quite know. Not being able to look out and see the sun, I can't form estimates of time. We don't know even when it's night and when it's day, do we? All I remember is that I was late in leaving Philadelphia and I was hurrying to avoid the evening traffic from New York when, just outside of Cranberry, something flew against my face and stung me. I thought at first that it was a mosquito, but that was silly. Even Jersey skeeters don't come around in February. The next thing I knew I was awfully dizzy and the car was rocking crazily from one side of the road to the other; then—here I was. I found myself in a soft bed, and my clothes were gone, but these sandals and this house-coat were laid out for me. There was a bathroom letting off my chamber, and when I'd finished showering I found breakfast—or maybe it was luncheon or dinner—waiting for me on a tray beside the bed. They don't intend to starve us, sugar, that's a sure thing. Haven't you been well fed, too?"

"Yes, I have. My experience was

about the same as yours, except that I've seen them, the tall, thin man who looks like a walkin' corpse, and the little pipsqueak with black glasses. But I didn't see 'em till today—or was it yesterday? I can't seem to remember."

The girl knit her smooth brows. "Neither can I. I've tried to keep count of the meals they've served, allowing three meals to a day, so I could form some estimate of the time I've been here, and I've tried so hard to lie in wait and catch the one who serves 'em; but somehow I always seem to fall asleep, no matter how I strive to keep awake, and—it's funny about sleeping, isn't it? When you wake up you can't say if you've just dozed for five minutes or slept around the clock——"

The boy sat forward suddenly, gripping both her hands in his. "That's it! I'm sure of it! No wonder time seems to stand still in this place! They drug us—dope us some way, so that we go to sleep whenever they desire it. We don't know how long these drugged sleeps last. We may have been here weeks, months——"

"No, dear," she shook her head. "It isn't summer, yet. We haven't been here months."

"We may have been." Wild panic had him in its grip, his voice was rising, growing thin, hysterical. "How can you tell?"

"Silly!" She bent and kissed him. "Call it woman's intuition if you like, but I am sure we haven't been cooped up here for a month."

They sat in silence a few minutes, hand interlaced in hand; then:

"Rita?"

"Yes, dear?"

"When we get out—if we get out, and if I square myself with the Chief—will you marry me?"

"Try to keep me from it, Mister

Southerby, and you'll find yourself right in the middle of the tidiest breach-of-promise suit you ever saw! D'ye think that you can compromise me like this, sit here with me, dressed as we are, and without a chaperone, then ride off gayly? You'll make an honest woman of me, young feller me lad, or——" Her mask of badinage fell away, leaving her young face as ravaged as a garden after a hail storm. "Oh, Neville, you do think they'll find us, don't you?"

IT WAS his turn to comfort her. "Of course, of course, my darling!" he whispered. "They'll find us. They can't help but find us. Then——"

"Yes, honey, then"—she snuggled sleepily into his arms—"then we'll always be together, dear, close—so close that your dear face will be the first thing that I see when I awake, the last I see before I go to sleep. Oh, it will be heaven . . . heaven."

"I shall be interested to find out if it will. Time will tell, and I think time will side with me." Friedrichsohn pressed the spring that slipped the silent panel back in place, and rose, helping me up from my knees. "It will be an interesting experiment to observe, *nicht wahr, mein kollege?*"

"Wha—what d'ye mean?" I stammered, my voice almost beyond control. What dreadful plan had taken form behind that high, white brow? Would he subject this boy and girl to dreadful transformation? I had seen the remnant of the lovely Viki Boehm. Did he dare . . .

His soft, suave voice broke through my terrified imaginings. "Why, simply this, *mein lieber kollege*: They are ideal subjects for my test; better, even, than I had dared hope. I caught the girl by the simple device of waiting by the roadside with an airgun loaded with

impregnated darts. The slightest puncture of the epidermis with one of my medicated missiles paralyzes the sensory-motor nerves instantly, and as she told the young man, when she woke up she was in bed in one of my guest rooms.

"But my experiment requires Jill to have a Jack, Joan a Darby, Gretel a Hänsel, and so I set about to find a mate for her. Eventually this young man came along, and was similarly caught. I had arranged for everything. Their sleeping-quarters open on a common sitting-room, his to one side, hers upon the other. Each morning—or each night, they can't tell the difference—I permit them to awaken, open the automatic doors to their rooms, and let them visit with each other. When I think that they have made love long enough I—ah—turn the current off and put them back to sleep."

"How do you mean——"

"Have not you noticed a peculiar odor here?"

"Yes, I smelled the incense when I first came in——"

"*Jawohl*. That is it. I have perfected an anesthetic gas which, according to the strength of its concentration, can put one in a state of perfect anesthesia in a minute, a second, or immediately. It is almost odorless, and such slight odor as it has is completely masked by the incense. Periodically I put them to sleep, then let them reawaken. That is why they cannot guess the intervals of time between their meetings, and—what is more important—when they begin to reason out too much, I see that they become unconscious quickly. I turned the anesthetic on when he began to guess too accurately concerning my technique a moment ago. By this time both of them are sleeping soundly, and Mishkin has

taken them to bed. When I see fit, I shall allow them to awake and eat and take their conversation up where they left off, but I do not think they will. They are too preoccupied with each other to give much thought to me—just now, at least."

"How long have they been here?" I asked. "I heard her say that she came first——"

"What is time?" he laughed. "She does not know how long she's been my guest; neither does he, nor you, *Herr Doktor*. It may have been a night I let you sleep in Stravinsky's cell, or it may have been a week, or two——"

"That's nonsense," I cut in. "I should have been half starved if that were so. As it is, I'm not even feeling hungry——"

"How do you know we did not feed you with a nasal tube while you were sleeping?"

I HAD not thought of that. It upset my calculations utterly. Certainly in normal circumstances I should have been ravenous if I'd been there but four and twenty hours. A longer period without nourishment and I should have felt weak, yet I felt no hunger. . . .

"To return to our young lovers," Friedrichsohn reminded me. "They are better suited to my purpose; better, even, than I'd thought. When I captured him I could not know that they had known each other for some time, and were more than merely mildly interested in each other. Since they have been my guests, propinquity has made that interest blossom into full-blown love. Tomorrow, or the next day—or the next day after that—I think I shall begin to work on them."

"To—work—on—them?"

"*Jawohl, mein lieber kollege*. You saw the fascinating beauty treatment I

gave Viki Boehm? *Ist gut*. I shall put them quietly to sleep and subject them to precisely similar ministrations. When they awake they'll find themselves in the dove-cote I have prepared for them. It is a charming, cozy little place where they can contemplate each other as the little lady said, where the face of each shall be the first thing that the other sees when he awakes, the last thing he beholds before he goes to sleep. It is larger than the chamber I assigned to Viki—more than twice as large—and one of them shall rest at one end of it while the other occupies the other, facing him. It has been lined with mirrors, too, so that they can see themselves and each other from both front and back. That is necessary, *Herr Doktor*, since they will not be able to turn around. Lacking legs, a person finds himself severely handicapped in moving, *lieber freund*."

"But why should you do this to them?" I faltered, knowing even as I asked the question that reason had no part in his wild plans.

"Can you ask that after our discussion of the merits of the face and form as stimulants of love? I am surprised and disappointed in you, *mein kollege*. It is to see if love—the love they pledge so tenderly to each other—can stand the sight of hideous deformity in the loved one. Their faces will be as they are now, only their forms will be altered. If they continue to express affection for each other I shall know the face is that which energizes love, but if—as I am sure they will—they turn from each other in loathing and abhorrence, I shall have proven that the form is more important. It will be a most diverting comedy to watch, *nicht wahr, Herr Doktor?*"

Horror drove my pulses to a hurrying rhythm. Something sharp, some-

thing penetrating as a cold and whetted knife-blade, seemed probing at my insides. I wanted to cry out against this outrage, to pray; but I could not. Heaven seemed unreal and infinitely far away with this phosphorescent-eyed monstrosity at my elbow, his pitiless, purring voice outlining plans which outdid hell in hellish ingenuity.

"You can't—you can't do this!" I gasped. "You wouldn't dare! You'll be found out!"

"That's what Viki Boehm said when I told her of the future I had planned for her," he broke in with a susurrating laugh. "But they didn't find me out. They never will, *Herr Doktor*. This is a madhouse—pardon me, a sanitarium—duly licensed by the state and impervious to private inquiry. People expect to hear cries and shrieks and insane laughter from such places. Passers-by and neighbors are not even curious. My grounds are posted against trespassers; your law insures my privacy, and no one, not even the police, may enter here without a warrant. I have a crematory fully equipped and ready to be used instantly. If attempts are made to search the house I can destroy incriminating evidence—inanimate *and* animate—in a moment and without trouble. I shall prosecute my work uninterrupted, *lieber kollege*—and that reminds me, I have a proposal to make you."

HE HAD reached the red-walled room again, and he pushed me suddenly, forcing me into a chair.

"There are times when I feel Mishkin is inadequate," he said, taking out a cigarette and setting it alight. "I have taught him much, but his lack of early training often makes him bungle things. I need a skilled assistant, one with surgical experience, capable of helping me



in operations. I think you are admirably fitted for this work. Will you enlist with me——”

“I?” I gasped. “I’ll see you damned first.”

“Or will you fill Stravinsky’s coffin?”

“Stravinsky’s—coffin?”

“Exactly. You remember that I told you Abraham Stravinsky was a patient here and that he died the day you came? *Jawohl*. His family have not yet been notified of his death. His body is preserved and waiting shipment. Should you accept my offer I shall notify his relatives and send his corpse to them without delay. If you decline” —the green eyes seemed to brighten in the gloom as they peered at me—“I shall put him in the crematory, and you shall take his place in the coffin. He was a Hebrew of the orthodox persuasion, and as such will have a plain pine coffin, rather than a casket. I have several boxes like that ready, one of them for you, unless you choose to join me. You are also doubtless aware that the rules of his religion require burial of the dead within twenty-four hours of death. For that reason there is small fear that the coffin will be opened. But if it should be, his family will not know that it is you and not their kinsman whom they see. I shall say he died in an insane seizure, as a consequence of which he was quite battered in the face.

“You need not fear, *mein lieber kollege*: the body will be admirably battered—past all recognition. Mishkin will attend to all the details. He has a very dexterous talent with the ax, but——”

“But he will not exercise it, I damn think!” From behind me Jules de Grandin spoke in ordinary conversational tone, but I recognized the flatness of his voice. Cyclopean fury boiled in him, I knew. Friedrichsohn might

be insane, fierce and savage as a tiger; de Grandin was his match in fierceness, and his clear French brain was burdened with no trace of madness.

“*Kreuzsakrament!*” As de Grandin stepped before me Friedrichsohn launched himself across the table, leaping like a maddened leopard. “You——”

“It is I, indeed, thou very naughty fellow,” de Grandin answered, and as the other clawed at him rose suddenly into the air, as if he were a bouncing ball, brought both feet up at once, and kicked his adversary underneath the chin, hurling him unconscious to the floor. “*Tiens*, a knowledge of *la savate* is very useful now and then,” he murmured, as he turned and loosed the strap that bound my arms and transferred it to his fallen foeman. “So, my most unpleasant friend, you will do quite nicely thus,” he said, then turned to me.

“*Embrasse moi!*” he commanded. “Oh, Trowbridge, *cher ami*, *brave camarade*, I had feared this stinking villain had done you an injury. *Alors*, I find you safe and sound, but” —he grinned as he inspected me—“you would look more better if you had more clothing on!”

“There’s a chest behind you,” I suggested. “Perhaps——”

He was already rummaging in the wardrobe, flinging out a miscellany of garments. “These would be those of Monsieur Southerby” —he tossed a well-cut tweed suit on the floor—“and these a little lady’s” —a woolen traveling-suit with furred collar came to join the man’s clothes. “And this—ah, here they are!” My own clothes came down from the hooks and he thrust them at me.

“Attire yourself, my friend,” he ordered. “I have work elsewhere. If he shows signs of consciousness, knock

him on the silly head. I shall return for him anon."

**H**URRYING footsteps clattered on the floor outside as I dragged on my clothes. A shout, the echo of a shot. . . .

I flung the door back just in time to see de Grandin lower his pistol as Mishkin staggered toward the front door, raised both arms above his head and crashed sprawling to the floor.

"My excellent de Grandin!" Jules de Grandin told himself. "You never miss, you are incomparable. *Parbleu*, but I admire you——"

"Look, look!" I shouted. "The lamp——"

Clawing blindly in the agony of death, Mishkin's hand had knocked one of the red-globed oil lamps from its place before a statuary niche. The lacquer-coated, oil-soaked walls were tinder to the flame, and already fire was running up them like a curtain.

"In there," I cried. "Southerby and a young girl are locked up there somewhere, and——"

"Hi, Frenchy, where the devil are you?" Hiji's hail came from the transverse corridor. "Find Trowbridge yet? We've got Southerby and a——" He staggered out into the central hall with the still unconscious Southerby held in his arms as if he were a sleeping babe. Behind him came Costello with the girl, who was also sunk deep in anesthesia.

"Whew, it's gettin' hotter than Dutch love in here!" the Englishman exclaimed. "We'd best be hookin' it, eh, what?"

"Indubitably what, my friend," de Grandin answered. "One moment, if you please." He dashed into the red room, reappearing in a moment with arms filled with clothes. "These are their proper raiment," he called, drap-

ing the garments over Hiji's shoulder. "Take them to the garage and bid them dress themselves becomingly for public appearance. Me, I have another task to do. Assist me, if you will, Friend Trowbridge."

Back in the red-walled room he raised the fallen madman, signing me to help him. "The place will be a furnace in a moment," he panted, "and me, I am not even one of the so estimable young Hebrews who made mock of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery wrath. We must hasten if we do not wish to cook!"

He had not exaggerated. The oil-soaked walls and floors were all ablaze; lashing, crackling flames swept up the stairway as if it were a chimney flue.

"Good heavens!" I cried, suddenly remembering. "Up there—he's got two others locked in cells——"

Down from the upper story, clear and sweet and growing stronger, came a voice, the voice of Viki Boehm:

*"So stürben wir, um ungetrennt,  
Ewig einig ohne end . . ."*

*"So should we die, no more to part,  
Ever in one endless joy . . ."*

The mounting notes of a violin accompanied the words of Tristan and Isolde's plea for death which should unite them in the mystic world beyond life.

*"Mon Dieu! Concede misericors,  
Deus . . ."* De Grandin looked up at the fire-choked stairway. "There is no chance of reaching them——"

The crash of breaking timbers drowned his words, and a gust of flame and sparks burst from the stairwell as the draft was forced down by the falling floors. The song had died; only the roar of blazing, oil-soaked wood sounded as we bent our heads against the smoke and staggered toward the door. "It is their funeral pyre

—*fideliū animae per misericordiam Dei, requiescant in pace!*” de Grandin panted. “*A-a-ah!*”

“What’s the matter?” I asked. “Are you——”

“Bid Hiji or Costello come at once!” he groaned. “I—am—unable——”

“You’re hurt?” I cried solicitously.

“*Vite, vite*—get one of them!” he choked.

I rushed through the front door and circled around the house toward the garage. “Hiji—Costello!” I shouted. “Come quickly, de Grandin’s hurt——”

“*Pardonnez-moi, mon ami*, on the contrary I am in the best of health, and as pleased as I can be in all the circumstances.” At my very heels de Grandin stood and grinned at me.

“You got clear? Good!” I exclaimed. Then: “Where’s Friedrichsohn?”

There was no more expression in his small blue eyes than if they had been china eyes in a doll’s face. “He was detained,” he answered in a level voice. “He could not come.”

Suddenly I felt an overmastering weakness. It seemed to me I had not eaten for a year; the cold bit at my bones as if it were a rabid wolf. “What day is it?” I asked.

“You are unpatriotic, my friend. It is the anniversary of the Great Emancipator’s birth. Did not you know?”

“February twelfth? Why, that’s today!”

“*Mon Dieu*, what did you think it was, tomorrow or yesterday?”

“But—I mean—we left Harrisonville on the morning of the twelfth, and I’ve been in that place at least——”

He glanced down at his wrist watch. “A little over two hours. If we hasten we shall be in time to lunch at Keyport. They have delicious lobster there.”

“But—but——”

“Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin, these are Miss Perinchief and Mr. Southerby,” Hiji broke in as he and Costello came from the garage shepherding a most ecstatic-looking pair of youngsters.

“I’ve seen——” I began; then: “I’m very glad to meet you both.” I acknowledged the introduction.

HE MADE me tell him my adventures from the moment I had left him by the brook where Southerby’s car was foundered, listening with tear-filled eyes as I described the loathsome things Friedrichsohn had made of Viki Boehm and her husband, weeping unashamedly when I recounted what I’d overheard while I looked through the trap-door into the room in which young Southerby and Rita Perinchief confessed their love. “And now, in heaven’s name, what were you doing all that time?” I asked.

“When you failed to return we were puzzled. Costello wished to go to the farmhouse and inquire for you, but I would not permit it. One look at that place and I knew it had the smell of fish upon it. So I posted them out by the great tree at the turning of the driveway, where they could be in plain sight while I crept around the house and sought an opening. At the last I had to cut the lock away from the back door, and that took time. I do not doubt the Mishkin rascal watched them from some point of vantage. *Bien*. While he was thus engaged Jules de Grandin was at work at the back door.

“At last I forced an entrance, tiptoed to the front door and unfastened it, signaling to them that all was well. I was waiting for them when I saw that *sale chameau* Friedrichsohn come down the stairs with you.

"Can this be endured?' I ask me. 'Can anyone be permitted to lead my good Friend Trowbridge as if he were a dog upon a leash? *Mais non*, Jules de Grandin, you must see to this.' So I crept up to the room where he had taken you and listened at the keyhole. *Voilà tout*. The rest you know."

"No, I don't," I denied. "How did Hiji and Costello know where to look for Southerby and Rita?"

"*Tiens*, they did not know at all, my friend. They came in and looked about, and they espied the Mishkin rogue on guard before their prison door. He ran, and they broke down the door and brought the prisoners out. They should have shot him first. They have no judgment in such matters. *Eh bien*, I was there. It is perhaps as well. I have had no target practise for a long, long time——"

"Did they find the papers Southerby was carrying?"

"But yes. Friedrichsohn set no value on them. They were in the desk of the room where you first saw him. Hiji has them safely in his pocket."

"It seems incredible I was in there such a little while," I mused. "I could have sworn that I was there at least a week——"

"Ah, my friend, time passes slowly in a prison. What you thought was hours' space as you lay shivering in that cell was really only half an hour or so. Time does not pass at all, it stands entirely still while you are sleeping. They rendered you unconscious with

their gas, and woke you in perhaps five minutes. Suggestion did the rest. You thought that you had slept around the clock-dial, and since you could not see the sun, you had no clue to what the hour really was. Sleep and our own imaginings play strange tricks upon us, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

THE broiled live lobster was, as he had promised, delicious. Luncheon done, de Grandin, Hiji and Costello marched toward the bar, with me bringing up the rear. Neville Southerby and Rita Perinchief cuddled close together on a settle set before the fireplace in the lounge. As I passed the inglenook in which they snuggled side by side, I heard her: "Honey lamb, I think I know how Robinson Crusoe felt about his island when they'd rescued him. He kept remembering it all his life, and even though he'd undergone a lot of hardships there, he loved it. Somehow, I'll always feel that way about the place that madman shut us up in. Just suppose they'd never found us . . . suppose we'd stayed there always, just the two of us, being with each other always, looking at each other . . . we might have been changed some by being cooped up, but——"

"*Morbleu*, my friend, you look as if you'd seen a most unpleasant ghost!" de Grandin told me as I joined them at the bar and reached unsteadily for a drink.

"I have," I answered with a shudder. "A most unpleasant one."

