

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIV

NUMBER 5

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States, \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The House
without a
Mirror
by FEBURY QUINN

"A feather-tipped arrow cleft the snake through the neck."

MY FRIEND Jules de Grandin was in one his gayest moods. Reclining against the plank seat of the john-boat he gazed with twinkling, bright blue eyes at the cloudless Carolina sky, tweaked the tips of his diminutive blond mustache till the waxed hairs thrust out to right and left of his small, thin-lipped mouth as sharply as a pair of twin fish-hooks, and gave vent to his own private translation of a currently popular song:

*"Oui, nous n'avons plus de bananes;
Nous n'avons plus de bananes aujourd'hui!"*

he caroled merrily.

"Say, looka yere, boss," protested our colored factotum from the boat's stern, "does yo' all want ter shoot enny o' dem birds, youh's best be cuttin' out dat music. Dese yere reed-birds is pow'ful skittish, wid so many no'then gemmen comin' ddown yere an' bangin' away all ober de place wid deir pump-guns, an——"

"Là, là, mon brave," the little Frenchman interrupted, "of what importance is it whether we kill ten dozen or none at all of the small ones?

Me, I had as soon return to Monsieur Gregory's lodge with empty bag as stagger homeward with a load of little feathered corpses. Have not these, God's little ones, a good right to live? Why should we slay them when our bellies are well filled with other things?"

The negro boy regarded him in hang-jawed amazement. That anyone, especially a "gemman" from the fabulous "no'th," should feel compunction at slaughtering the reed-birds swarming among the wild rice was something beyond his comprehension. With an inarticulate grunt he thrust his ten-foot pole into the black mud bottom of the swamp canal and drove the punt toward a low-lying island at the farther end of the lagoon-like opening in the waterway. "Does yo' all crave ter eat now?" he asked. "Ef yuh does, dis yere lan' is as dry as enny 'round yere, an——"

"But of course," de Grandin assented, reaching for the well-filled luncheon hamper our host had provided. "I am well-nigh perished with hunger, and if Monsieur Gregory has furnished brandy as well as

food—*mordieu*, may the hairs of his head each become a waxen taper to light his way to glory when he dies!”

The hamper was quickly unpacked and we sat cross-legged on a slight eminence to discuss assorted sandwiches, steaming coffee from vacuum bottles and some fine old cognac from a generously proportioned flask.

A faint rustling in the short grass at de Grandin's elbow drew my attention momentarily from my half-eaten sandwich. “Look out!” I cried sharply.

“Lawd Gawd, boss, don' move!” the colored boy added in a horrified tone.

Creeping unnoticed through the short, sun-dried vegetation with which the island was covered, a huge brown moccasin had approached within a foot of the little Frenchman and paused, head uplifted, yellow, forked tongue flickering lambently from venom-filled mouth.

We sat in frozen stillness. A move from the negro or me might easily have irritated the reptile into striking blindly; the slightest stirring by de Grandin would certainly have invited immediate disaster. I could hear the colored guide's breath rasping fearfully through his flaring nostrils; the pounding of my own heart sounded in my ears. I ran my tongue lightly over suddenly parched lips, noting, with that strange ability for minute inventory we develop at such times, that the membrane seemed rough as sandpaper.

Actually, I suppose, we held our statue-still pose less than a minute. To me it seemed a century. I felt the pupils of my eyes narrowing and ceasing to function as if I had just emerged from a darkened room into brilliant sunlight, and the hand which half raised the sandwich to my lips was growing heavy as a leaden fist when sudden diversion came.

Like a beam of light shot through a moonless night something whizzed through the still afternoon air from a

thicket of scrub trees some thirty feet behind us; there was a sharp, clipping sound, almost like a pair of scissors snapping shut, and the deadly reptile's head struck the ground with a smacking impact. Next instant the foul creature's blotched body writhed upward, coiling and wriggling about a three-foot shaft of slender, flexible wood like the serpent round Mercury's caduceus. A feather-tipped arrow had cleft the snake through the neck an inch or less behind its ugly, wedged-shaped head, and pinned it to the earth.

“Thank you, friend,” de Grandin cried, turning toward the direction from which the rescuing shaft had sped. “I know not who you are, but I am most greatly in your debt, for——”

He broke off, his lips refusing to frame another word, his small, round eyes staring unbelievably at the visage which peered at us between the leaves.

The negro boy followed the Frenchman's glance, emitted a single shrill, terrified yell, turned a half somersault backward, regaining his feet with the agility of a cat and scurrying down the mud-flat where our boat lay beached. “Lawdy Gawdy,” he moaned, “hit's de *ha'nt*; hit's de swamp *ha'nt*, sho's yuh bo'n! Lawd Gawd, lemme git erway fr'm heah! Please, suh, Gawd, sabe me, sabe dis pore nigger fr'm de *ha'nt*!”

He reached our punt, clambered aboard and shoved off, thrusting his pole against the lagoon bottom and driving the light craft across the water with a speed like that of a racing motorboat. Ere de Grandin or I could more than frame a furious shout he rounded the curve of a dense growth of wild rice and disappeared as completely as though dissolved into the atmosphere.

The Frenchman turned to me with a grimace. “*Cordieu*,” he remarked, “we would seem to be between the devil and the sea, Friend Trowbridge.

Did you, by any chance, see what I saw a moment hence?"

"Ye-es; I think so," I assented. "If you saw something so dreadful no nightmare ever equaled it——"

"*Zut!*" he laughed. "Let us not be ungrateful. Ugly the face is, I concede; but its owner did us at least one good turn." He pointed to the still-writhing snake, pinned fast to the earth by the sharp-tipped arrow. "Come, let us seek the ugly one. Though he be the devil's own twin for ugliness, he is no less deserving of our thanks. Perhaps he will show further amiability and point out an exit from this doubly damned morass of mud and serpents."

Treading cautiously, lest we step upon another snake, we advanced to the clump of scrub trees whence the repulsive face had peered. Several times de Grandin hailed the unseen monster whose arrow had saved his life, but no answer came from the softly rustling bushes. At length we pushed our way among the shrubs, and reached the covert where our unknown friend had been concealed. Nothing rewarded our search, though we passed entirely through the copse several times.

I was about ready to drop upon the nearest rotting log for a moment's rest when de Grandin's shrill cry hailed me. "*Regardez-vous,*" he commanded, pointing to the black, greasy mud which sloped into the stagnant water.

Clearly outlined in the mire as though engraved with a sculptor's tool was the imprint of a tiny, moc-casined foot, so small it could have been made only by a child or a daintily formed woman.

"Well——" I began, then paused for lack of further comment.

"Well, indeed, good friend," de Grandin assented with a vigorous nod. "Do not you understand its significance?"

"U'm—can't say I do," I confessed.

"*Ah bah,* you are stupid!" he shot back. "Consider: There is no sign of a boat having been beached here; there is nothing to which a boat could have been tied within ten feet of the water's edge. We have searched the island, we know we are alone here. What then? How came the possessor of this so lovely foot here, and *how did she leave?*"

"Hanged if I know," I returned.

"Agreed," he acquiesced, "but is it not fair to assume that she waded through yonder water to that strip of land? I think so. Let us test it."

We stepped into the foul marsh-water, felt the mud sucking at our boots, then realized that the bottom was firm enough to hold us. Tentatively, step by cautious step, we forded the forty-foot channel, finding it nowhere more than waist-deep, and, bedraggled, mud-eaked and thoroughly uncomfortable, finally clambered up the loamy bank of the low peninsula which jutted into the marsh-lake opposite the island of our adventure.

"*Tiens,* it seems I was right, as usual, Friend Trowbridge," the Frenchman announced as we floundered up the bank to solid ground. Again, limned in the soft, moist earth, was a tiny, slender footprint, followed by others leading toward the rank-growing woods.

"I may be wrong," he admitted, surveying the trail, "but unless I am more mistaken than I think, we have but to follow our noses and these shapely tracks to extricate ourselves. Come; *allez vous en!*"

SIMPLE as the program sounded, it was difficult of accomplishment. The guiding footprints trailed off and lost themselves among the dead, crackling leaves with which the wood was paved, and the thick-set trees and thicker undergrowth disclosed nothing like a path. Beating the hampering bushes aside with our guns, staggering and crashing through thorny thickets by main strength and direct

assault, we forced our way, turning aside from time to time as the land became spongy with seeping bog-water or an arm of the green, stagnant swamp barred our advance. We progressed slowly, striving to attain open country before darkness overtook us, but before we realized it twilight fell and we were obliged to admit ourselves hopelessly lost.

"No use, old chap," I advised. "The more we struggle, the deeper in we get; with night coming on our chances of being mired in the swamp are a hundred to one. Best make camp and wait for daylight. We can build a fire and——"

"May Satan bake me in his oven if we do!" de Grandin interrupted. "Are we the Babes in the Woods that we should lie down here and wait for death and the kindly ministrations of the robin-redbreasts? Come away, my friend; we shall assuredly win through!"

He returned to the assault with redoubled vigor, beat his way some twenty yards farther through the underbrush, then gave a loud, joyous hail.

"See what is arrived, Friend Trowbridge!" he called. "*Cordieu*, did I not promise we should find it?"

Heavy-footed, staggering with fatigue, I dragged myself to where he stood, and stared in amazement at the barrier barring our path.

Ten feet away stood an ancient wall, gray with weather and lichen-spotted with age. Here and there patches of the stucco with which it had originally been dressed had peeled away, exposing the core of antique firebrick.

"Right or left?" de Grandin asked, drawing a coin from his pocket. "Heads we proceed right; tails, left." He spun the silver disk in the air and caught it between his palms. "*Bon*, we go right," he announced, shouldering his gun and turning on his heel to follow the wall.

A few minutes' walk brought us to a break in the barrier where four mas-

sive posts of roughly dressed stone stood sentry. There should have been gates between them, but only ancient hand-wrought hinges, almost eaten away with rust, remained. Graven in the nearest pillar was an escutcheon on which had been carved some sort of armorial device, but the moss of many decades had smothered the crest so that its form was indistinguishable.

Beyond the yawning gateway stood a tiny, box-like gatekeeper's lodge, like the wall, constructed of brick faced with stucco. Tiles had scuffed from its antiquated roof, the panes of old, green bottle-glass were smashed from its leaded casements; the massive door of age-discolored oak leaned outward drunkenly, its sole support a single lower hinge with joints long since solidified with rust.

Before us stretched the avenue, a mere unkept, overgrown trail straggling between two rows of honey-locusts. Alternating shafts of moonlight and shadow barred its course like stripes upon a convict's clothes. Nothing moved among the trees, not even a moth or a bird belated in its homeward flight. Despite myself, I shivered as I gazed on the desolation of this place of bygone splendor. It was as if the ghosts of ten generations of long-dead gentlefolk rose up and bade us stay our trespassing steps.

"*Eh bien*, it is not cheerful," de Grandin admitted with a somewhat rueful grin, "but there is the promise of four walls and at least the remnant of a roof beyond. Let us see what we shall see, Friend Trowbridge."

We passed between the empty gatepillars and strode up the driveway, traversing perhaps a hundred yards before we saw the house—a low, age-ravaged building of rough gray stone set in the midst of a level, untended grass plot and circled by a fourteen-foot moat filled with green, stagnant water in which floated a few despondent-looking lily pads. The avenue continued to a crumbling causeway, broke abruptly at the moat's lip,

then took up its course to the grilled entrance of the house. Two tumble-down pillars reared astride the driveway at the farther side of the break, and swung between them, amazingly, was a mediæval drawbridge of stout oaken planks held up by strands of strong, almost new Manila hawser.

"*Grand diable,*" the Frenchman murmured wonderingly, "a *château fort*—here! How comes it?"

"I don't know," I responded, "but here it is, and it's in tolerable repair—what's more, someone lives in it. See, there's a light behind that window."

He looked, then nodded briefly. "My friend," he assured me, "I damnation think we shall eat and sleep within walls tonight.

"*Allo,*" he shouted through cupped hands, "*holà là-haut*; we hunger, we thirst, we are lost; we are miserable!"

Twice more he hailed the silent house before lights stirred behind the narrow windows piercing its walls. Finally the iron grille guarding the door swung slowly outward and an elderly, stoop-shouldered man shuffled out, an old-fashioned bull's-eye lantern dangling in his left hand, a modern and efficient-looking repeating rifle cradled in the crook of his right elbow.

"Who calls?" he asked, peering through the darkness and pausing to flash his smoky lantern in our direction. "Who is it?"

"*Mordieu,* two weary, wayworn travelers, no more," de Grandin answered. "All afternoon we have battled with this *sacré* woodland, and lost ourselves most thoroughly. We are tired, *Monsieur,* we are enervated, and the magnitude of our hunger is matched only by that of our thirst."

"Where are you from?" the other challenged, placing his lamp on the ground and surveying us suspiciously.

"From the hunting-lodge of Monsieur Wardman Gregory. In a fortunate moment we accepted his invitation to come South and hunt the detestable little birds which frequent

these morasses. This afternoon our seventy-times-damned traitor of a guide fled from us, leaving us to perish in a wilderness infested by snakes and devil-faced monsters of the woods. Surely, you will not deny us shelter?"

"If you're Gregory's guests it's all right," the other returned, "but if you come from *him*—you needn't look for mercy if I find it out."

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin assured him, "half of what you say is intelligible, the other half is meaningless. The 'him' of whom you speak is a total stranger to us; but our hunger and fatigue is a real and present thing. Permit that we enter, if you please."

The master of the house eyed us suspiciously a second time; then he turned from his inspection and drew back the ratchet which held the hawser-drum. Creakingly, the drawbridge descended and bumped into place against its stone sill. "Come over," the old man called, taking up his gun and holding it in readiness, "but remember, the first false move you make means a bullet."

"*Parbleu,* he is churlish, this one," de Grandin whispered as we strode across the echoing planks.

Arrived beyond the moat, we assisted our unwilling host to rewind the ropes operating the bridge, and in compliance with a gesture containing more of suspicion than courtesy preceded him to the house.

THE building's gray, bare rooms were in keeping with its gray, dilapidated exterior; age and lack of care had more than softened the antique furnishings, it had reduced them to a dead level of tonelessness, without accent, making the big, stone-paved hall in which they stood seem empty and monotonous.

Our host put down his lantern and gun, then called abruptly: "Minerva—Poseidon—we have guests, prepare some food, make haste!"

Through a swinging door connecting with a rear apartment an ancient,

wrinkled little yellow woman sidled, paused at the threshold and looked about her uncertainly. "Did yuh say we all has *guests*, Marse Jawge?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes," replied her master, "they've been traveling all day, too. Shake up something to eat, quickly."

"Yas, suh," she returned and scuttled back to her kitchen like a frightened rabbit scurrying into its burrow.

She reappeared in a few minutes, followed by an aged and intensely black little man, each of them bearing a tray on which were slices of cold roast fowl, fresh white bread, preserved fruits, coffee and decanters of red, home-made wine. These they set on the massive table occupying the center of the room, and spread fresh napkins of coarse but carefully bleached linen, then stood waiting attentively.

A certain fumbling ineptness in their movements made me glance sharply at them a second time. Realization was slow in coming, but when it burst upon me I could hardly repress an exclamation. Both the aged servants were stone-blind; only the familiarity of long association enabled them to move about the room with the freedom of those possessing vision. I glanced hastily at de Grandin, and noted that his narrow, expressive face was alight with curiosity as he beheld the expressionless, sightless eyes of the servants.

Our host accompanied us to table and poured a cup of coffee and a glass of wine for himself as soon as we began our attack on the more substantial portions of the menu. He was a man well advanced in years, thin-faced, lean and sun-burned almost to the point of desiccation. Time had not dealt gently with him; his long, high-cheeked face, rendered longer by the drooping gray mustache and imperial he affected, seemed to have been beaten into angularity by merciless hammer-blows of unkind fortune. His lips were thin, almost colorless and

exceedingly bitter in expression; his deep-set, dark eyes glowed and smoldered with a light of perpetual anger mingled with habitual distrust. He wore a suit of coarse linen crash, poorly tailored but spotlessly clean; his white-cotton shirt had seen better days, though not recently, for its wristbands were frayed and tattered at the edges, though it, too, was immaculate as though fresh from the laundress' hands.

Ravenous from his fast and the exhausting exercise of the afternoon de Grandin did voracious justice to the meal, but though his mouth was too full for articulate speech, his little, round blue eyes looked eloquent curiosity as they roved round the big, stone-floored hall, rested on the ancient, moldering tapestries and the dull Flemish oak furniture, and finally took minute inventory of our host.

The other noted the little Frenchman's wondering eyes and smiled with a sort of mournful pride. "The house dates from Jean Ribault's unfortunate attempt to colonize the coast," he informed us. "Georges Ducharme, an ancestor of mine, accompanied one of the unsuccessful expeditions to the New World, and when the colonists rose against their leaders at Port Royal, he and a few companions beat a path through the wilderness and finally settled here. This place was old when the foundations of Jamestown were laid. For almost four hundred years the Ducharmes have lived here, serving neither French king nor English, Federal Government nor Confederate States—they are and have always been a law unto themselves, accountable to none but their own consciences and God, sirs."

"U'm?" de Grandin cleared his mouth of roast pheasant and bread with a prodigious swallow, then helped himself to a generous stoup of home-made wine. "And you are the last of the Ducharmes, *Monsieur?*"

Quick suspicion was reborn in the other's dark, deep-set eyes as he regarded the Frenchman. For a moment he paused as a man may pause for breath before diving into a chilling stream; then, "Yes," he answered shortly. "I am the last of an ancient line. With me the house of Ducharme ceases to exist."

De Grandin tweaked the waxed ends of his tiny blond mustache after the manner of a well-fed tom-cat combing his whiskers. "Tell me, Monsieur Ducharme," he demanded as he chose a cigarette from his case with deliberate care and set it alight in the flame of one of the tall candles flickering on the table, "you have, presumably, passed the better part of your life here; of a certainty you are familiar with the neighborhood and its traditions. Have you, by any fortunate chance, heard of a certain monstrosity, a thing of infinite hideousness of appearance, which traverses the trackless wastes of these swamps? Today at noon I was all but exterminated by a venomous serpent, but a timely arrow—an arrow, mind you—shot from a near-by thicket, saved my life. Immediately I would have given thanks to the unknown archer who delivered me from the reptile, but when I turned to make acknowledgment, I beheld a face so vilely ugly, so exceedingly hideous, that it startled me to silence. *Eh bien*, it did more than that to our superstitious negro guide. He shrieked something about a specter which haunts the swampland and fled incontinently, leaving us to face the wilderness alone—may seven foul fiends torment his spirit unceasingly in the world to come!

"Thereafter we did search for some trace of the ill-favored one, but nothing could we find save only a few footprints—*parbleu*, such footprints as a princess might have boasted to possess!" He bunched his slender fingers at his lips and wafted an ecstatic kiss toward the vaulted stone ceiling.

Ducharme made a queer, choking

noise in his throat. "You—you found footprints? You—traced—them—here?" he asked in an odd, dry voice, rising and gripping his chair till the tendons showed in lines of high, white relief against the backs of his straining hands.

"By no means," de Grandin answered. "Though we did struggle like flies upon the *papier des mouches* to extricate ourselves from this detestable morass, we found neither sign nor trace of human thing until we were stopped by the wall which girdles your estate, for which last the good God be devoutly thanked!"

Ducharme bent a long, questioning look on the little Frenchman, then shrugged his shoulders. "No matter," he murmured as though speaking to himself; "if you're *his* messengers I'll know it soon enough, and I'll know how to deal with you."

Aloud he announced: "You are probably tired after the day's exertions. If you've quite finished your repast, we may as well retire—we sleep early at Ducharme Hall."

Beside the newel-post of the wide, broad-stepped staircase curving upward from the hall stood a small oaken table bearing several home-dipped candles in standards of antique silver. Taking one of these, our host lit it from the candelabrum on the dining-table, handed it to me, then repeated the process and supplied de Grandin with a taper. "I'll show you to your room," he offered with a courteous bow.

We trooped up the stairs, turned down a narrow, stone-paved corridor and, at Ducharme's invitation, entered a high-ceiled, stone-floored chamber lighted by a single narrow window with leaded panes of ancient greenish glass and furnished with a four-post canopied bed, a massive chest of deep-carven oak and two straight-backed cathedral chairs which would have brought their weight in gold at a Madison Avenue antique dealer's.

"I'll have Poseidon wait on you in the morning," our host promised. "In spite of his natural handicaps he makes an excellent valet." What seemed to me a cruel smile flickered across the thin, pale lips beneath his drooping mustache as he concluded the announcement, bowed politely and backed from the room, drawing the door soundlessly shut behind him.

For a moment I stood in the center of the little, narrow room, striving to make a survey of our surroundings by the light of our tallow dips; then, moved by a sudden impulse, I ran on tiptoe to the door, seized its ancient, hand-wrought handle and pulled with all my might. Firm as though nailed to its casing, it resisted my strongest effort. As I gave over the attempt to force the panels open and turned in panic to de Grandin I thought I heard the muted echo of a low, malicious chuckle in the darkened corridor outside.

"I say, de Grandin," I whispered, "do you realize we're caught here like flies in a spider-web?"

"Very probably," he replied, smothering a yawn. "What of it? If they slit our throats while we sleep we shall at least have the advantage of a few minutes' repose before bidding Saint Peter *bonjour*. Come, let us sleep."

But despite his assumed indifference I noticed that he placed one of the great carved chairs before the door in such manner that anyone entering the apartment would do so at imminent peril of barked shins, perhaps of a broken leg, and that he removed only his boots and jacket and lay down with his vicious little automatic pistol ready to his hand.

"**T**ROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*, awake, arise and behold!" de Grandin's sharp whisper cut through my morning sleep. The early October day was well advanced, for a patch of warm, golden sunlight lay in a prism-mottled field on the stone pavement of the room, little half-moons of opalescent

coloring marking the curved lenses of the green bottle-glass of the casement through which the beams came. Gazing with fixed intensity at some object below, the little Frenchman stood at the half-opened window and motioned me to join him.

As I stepped across the chilled paving-blocks of the bedroom floor the high, sweet notes of the polonaise from *Mignon* floated up to us, the singer taking the quadruple trills with the easy grace of a swallow skimming over sunlit water, never faltering in the vocal calisthenics which give pause to many a professional musician. "Wha—who——" I stammered wonderingly as I reached his side. "I thought Ducharme said——"

"*S-s-st!*" He cut me off. "Remark her; *c'est belle, n'est-ce-pas?*"

Just beyond the drawbridge, full in the rich flood of early-morning sunlight, stood a girl, slim, straight and virginal as a hazel wand, her head thrown back, a perfect torrent of clear, wine-rich soprano melody issuing from her throat. Only the rippling cascade of her abundant, wavy auburn hair told her sex, for from feet to throat she was arrayed like a boy—small, sturdy woodsman's moccasins laced calf-high about her straight, slender legs, riding-breeches of brown corduroy belted about her slight waist by a wide girdle of soft, brown leather, an olive-drab flannel shirt of military pattern, rolled elbow-high at the sleeves and open at the collar encasing her spare torso. Her back was to us as she trilled her joyous aubade to the rising sun, and I noticed that a leather baldric was swung across her left shoulder, a quiver of arrows with unstrung bow thrust among them laced to the wide suede-strap.

Hands as white and delicately formed as any I had ever seen fluttered graciously in rhythm to the music as she poured her very heart out in song; as she ended on a high, true note, she wove her fingers to-

gether in a very ecstasy of self-engendered emotion, stood in lovely tableau a moment, then set off toward the forest with a swinging, graceful stride which told of long days spent in walking beneath the open sky with limbs unhampered by traveling-skirts and feet unfettered by modish shoes.

"De Grandin," I exclaimed, "can it be—is it possible—those little, moccasined feet, those arrows—can *she* be the archer who killed the snake yester—"

"You do forget the face we saw," he interrupted in a bleak, monotonous voice.

"But couldn't she—isn't it possible she wore a dreadful mask for some reason—"

"One wonders," he returned before I could complete my argument. "One also wonders who she is and what she does here."

"Yes, Ducharme distinctly told us he was the only one—"

"*Ah bah*," he cut in. "That Monsieur Ducharme, I think he flatters himself he fools us, Friend Trowbridge. Meanwhile — *allo?* Who calls?"

A soft, timid knock sounded on our door, followed by a second rap, then, after a discreet interval, a third.

"Hit's Poseidon, suh," the old negro's voice answered quaveringly. "Marse Jawge, he done tol' me ter come up yere an' valet y'all dis mo'nin'. Is yuh ready fo' yo' baffs an' shaves, suhs? Ah done got de watah yere fo' yuh."

"By all means, enter, my excellent one," de Grandin replied, crossing to the door and flinging it back. With a start I noticed that it swung inward without resistance.

The old blind servant shuffled into the room, a towel and two old-fashioned razors in one hand, a porcelain basin clutched beneath his elbow and a pewter pitcher of steaming water in the other hand. "Ah'll shave yuh first, den drag in de baff, if yuh please, suh," he announced, turning

his sightless eyes toward the corridor where a long, tin bathtub rested in readiness.

"*Bien non, mon brave*," de Grandin denied, "I shall shave myself, as I have done each day since my sixteenth year. Bring me the mirror, if you please."

"Mirruh, suh?" the servant queried. "Dey ain't no sech thing in de house, suh. Minervy an' me, we don' need nuffin like hit, an' Marse Jawge, he manage ter git erlong wid me ter shave him. Mis' Clarimonde, she ain't nebber seen 'er—oh, Lawdy, suh, please, *please*, suh, don' nebber tell Marse Jawge Ah said nuffin erbout—"

"*Tiens*, my friend," the Frenchman reassured, "fear nothing. The best of us sometimes make slips of the tongue. Your lapse from duty shall be safe in my keeping. Meanwhile, however excellently you may barber your master, I fear I must dispense with your services. Trowbridge, my friend, lend me your glasses, if you please."

"My glasses?" I repeated, in surprise. "What—"

"But certainly. Must one draw diagrams before you understand? Is Jules de Grandin a fool, or has he sense? Observe." Taking my spectacles from the carved chest, he fixed them to the back of one of the tall chairs, draping his jacket behind the lenses to make a dark background. Thus equipped he proceeded to regard his image in the primitive mirror while he spread the lather thickly over cheeks and chin, then scraped it off with the exquisitely sharp blade of the perfectly balanced English razor the blind servant handed him.

"*Très bon*," he announced with a satisfied smile. "Behold, I am my own valet this morning, nor has my complexion suffered so much as one little scratch. This old one here, he seems too innocent to practise any wrong on us, but—he who goes to dinner with the devil should take with

him a long spoon. Me, I do not care to take unnecessary chances."

Following de Grandin's example, I shaved myself with the aid of my glasses-mirror, and one after the other we laved ourselves in the tubs of luke-warm water the ancient servitor dragged in from the hall.

"If y'all is ready, suhs," the negro announced as we completed our toilets, "Ah'll 'scort yuh to de dinin'-room. Marse Jawge is waitin' yo' pleasure below."

"Ah, good morning, gentlemen," Ducharme greeted as we joined him in the main hall. I trust you enjoyed a good night's rest?"

The Frenchman eyed him critically. "I have had worse," he replied. "However, the sense of security obtained by well-bolted doors is not greatly heightened by knowledge that the locks operate from the further side, *Monsieur*."

A faint flush mounted our host's thin cheeks at de Grandin's thrust, but he chose to ignore it. "Minerva!" he cried sharply, turning toward the kitchen. "The gentlemen are down; bring in some breakfast."

The old, blind negress emerged from her quarters with the promptness of a cuckoo coming from its cell as the clock strikes the hour, and placed great bowls of steaming cornmeal mush before us. Idly, I noticed that the pitcher for the milk accompanying the mush was of unglazed pottery and the pot in which the steaming coffee was served was of tarnished, dull-finished silver.

With a rather impatient gesture, Ducharme motioned us to eat and excused himself from joining us by saying he had breakfasted an hour or so before.

De Grandin's little eyes scarcely left our host's face as he ate ravenously, but though he seemed on the point of putting some question point-blank more than once, he evidently thought better of it, and held his peace.

"It's impossible for me to get a guide for you this morning, gentlemen," Ducharme apologized as we finished breakfast, "and it's hardly practicable for me to accompany you myself. However, if you'll be good enough to remain another day, I think—perhaps—I may be able to find someone to take you back to Gregory's. Provided, of course, you really wish to go there." Something like a sneer crossed his lips as he concluded, and de Grandin was on his feet instantly, his small face livid with rage.

"*Monsieur*," he protested, his little eyes snapping ominously, "on more than one occasion you have been good enough to intimate we are impostors. I have heard much of your vaunted Southern hospitality in the past, but the sample you display leaves much to be desired. If you will be so good as to stand aside we shall give ourselves the pleasure of shaking your dust from our feet forthwith. Meantime, since you have small liking for the post of social host, permit that we compensate you for our entertainment." His face still white with fury, he thrust his hand into his pocket, withdrew a roll of bills and tossed several on the table. "I trust that is sufficient," he added cuttingly. "Count it; if you desire more, more shall be forthcoming."

Ducharme had risen with de Grandin. As the Frenchman finished his tirade, he stepped quickly to the corner and snatched up his rifle. "If either of you attempts to leave this house before I give permission," he announced in a low, menacing voice, "so help me God, I'll blow his head off!" With a quick backward step he reached the door, slipped through it and banged it shut behind him.

"Are you going to stand this?" I demanded angrily, turning to de Grandin. "The man's mad—mad as a hatter. We'll be murdered before sunset if we don't get away!"

"I think not so," he returned, re-

suming his seat and lighting a cigarette. "As for killing us, he will need more speed than he showed just now. I had him covered from my pocket before he took up his gun, and could have stopped his words with a bullet any time I was so minded, but—I did not care to. There are things which interest me about this place, Friend Trowbridge, and I desire to remain until my curiosity is satisfied."

"But his insinuations—his insulting doubt——" I began.

"*Tiens*, it was well done, was it not?" he interrupted with a self-satisfied smile. *Barbe d'un chameau*, I play-acted so well I did almost deceive myself!"

"Then you weren't really angry——"

"Jules de Grandin is quick to anger, my friend, if the provocation be sufficient, but never has he bitten off his nose through desire to revenge himself upon his face. No. Another time I might have resented his boorishness. This morning I desire to remain more greatly than I wish to leave; but should I disclose my real desires he would undoubtedly insist upon our going. *Alors*, I make the monkey business. To make our welcome doubly sure, I deceive Monsieur Ducharme to think that leaving is our primary desire. *C'est très simple, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"I suppose so," I admitted, "but what earthly reason have you for wanting to stay in this confounded place?"

"One wonders," he returned enigmatically, blowing a twin cloud of smoke from his nostrils.

"One certainly does," I agreed angrily. "I, for one——"

He tossed his cigarette into his porringer and rose abruptly. "Is it of significance to you, my friend, that this *sacré* house contains not only not a single mirror, but not so much as one polished surface in which one may by any chance behold himself—with the exception of the spectacles

which adorn your kindly nose this minute? Or that the servants here are blind?" he added as I shook my head doubtfully. "Or that Monsieur Ducharme has deliberately attempted to mislead us into thinking that he, we and the two blind ones are the only tenants of the place?"

"It is mystifying," I agreed, "but I can't seem to fit the facts into any kind of pattern. Probably they're just coincidences, and——"

"Coincidence is the name we give to that we can not otherwise explain," he interrupted. "Me, I have arrived already at a theory, though much still remains obscure. At dinner tonight I shall let fly a random shot; who knows what it may bring down?"

D UCHARME kept out of sight the remainder of the day, and it was not till well after dark we saw him again. We were just concluding our evening meal when he let himself in, a more amiable expression on his sour face than I had seen before.

"Dr. de Grandin, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted as he placed his rifle in an angle of the wall and drew a chair up to the table, "I have to tender you my humblest apologies. My life has been a bitter one, gentlemen, and I live in daily dread of something I can not explain. However, if I tell you it is sufficient to make me suspicious of every stranger who comes near the house, you may understand something of the lack of courtesy I have shown you. I did doubt your word, sirs, and I renew my apologies for doing so. This morning, after warning you to stay indoors, I went to Gregory's—it's less than a three hours' trip, if you know the way—and made certain of your identity. Tomorrow, if you wish, I shall be happy to guide you to your friends."

The Frenchman bent a long, speculative stare upon our host. At length: "You are satisfied from

Monsieur Gregory's report that we are indeed physicians?" he asked.

"Of course——"

"Suppose I add further information. Would it interest you to know that I hold degrees from Vienna and the Sorbonne, that I have done much surgical work for the University of Paris, and that in the days after the Armistice I was among those who helped restore to pre-war appearance the faces of those noble heroes whose features had been burned away by Hunnish *flammenwerfer*?" He pronounced the last words with slow, impressive deliberation, his level, unwinking gaze fixed firmly on the dark, sullen eyes of our host.

Quick, incredulous fury flamed in the other's face. "You spying scoundrel—you damned sneak!" he cried, leaping from his chair and making for his rifle.

"Slowly!" De Grandin, too, was on his feet, his small, round eyes blazing with implacable purpose, his little, deadly pistol aimed unwaveringly at Ducharme's breast. "Greatly as I should regret it," he warned, "I shall kill you if you make one further move, *Monsieur*."

The other wavered, for there was no doubting de Grandin's sincerity.

"Ah, that is better," he remarked as Ducharme halted, then returned slowly to his seat. "Now we shall talk sense.

"A moment since, *Monsieur*," he continued as Ducharme dropped heavily into his chair and sank his face in his hands. "I did avail myself of what the Americans call the bluff. Consider, I am clever; the wool can not successfully be drawn across my eyes, and so I suspected what I now know for the truth. Yesterday an arrow saved my life; anon we found small footprints in the the mud; last night when we arrived here we met with scant welcome from you, and inside the house we found you waited on by blinded servants. This morning, when I ask

for a mirror that I may shave myself, your servant tells there is not one in all the house, and on sober thought I recall that I have seen no single polished surface wherein a man may behold his own image. Why is it? If strangers are unwelcome, if there be no mirrors here, if the servants be blind—is there not something hideous within these walls, something of which you know, but which you desire to be kept most secret? Again, you are not beautiful, but you would not necessarily be averse to regarding your reflection in a mirror. What then? Is it not, perhaps, I think, that you greatly desire that the ugly one—whoever it be—shall not only not be seen, but shall not see itself? It are highly probable.

"This morning I have seen a so lovely young girl, attired for *le footing*, who sings divinely in the early sunlight. But I have not seen her face. No. However, she wears upon her back a bow and quiverful of arrows—and an arrow such as those saved me from the serpent yesterday, one little moment before we beheld the face of awful ugliness.

"Two and two invariably make four, *Monsieur*. You have said there is no other person but yourself and your servants in the house; but even as you doubted me, so I have doubted you. Indeed, from what I have seen, I know you have been untruthful; but I think you are so because of some great reason. And so I tell you of my work in restoring the wrecked faces of the soldiers of France.

"But I am no idle boaster. No. What I say is true. Call in the unfortunate young lady; I shall examine her minutely, and if it are humanly possible I shall remold her features to comeliness. If you do not consent you are a heartless, inhuman monster. Besides," he added matter-of-factly, "if you refuse I shall kill you and perform the operation anyway."

Ducharme gazed unbelievably at him. "You really think you can do it?" he demanded.

"Have I not said it?"

"But, if you fail——"

"Jules de Grandin does not fail, *Monsieur*."

"Minerva!" Ducharme called. "Ask Miss Clarimonde to come here at once, please."

The old blind woman's slipshod footsteps sounded along the tiled floor of a back passage for a moment, then faded away as she slowly climbed a hidden flight of stairs.

FOR something like five minutes we sat silently. Once or twice Ducharme swallowed nervously, de Grandin's slim, white fingers drummed a noiseless devil's tattoo on the table, I fidgeted nervously in my chair, removed my glasses and polished them, returned them to my nose, then snatched them off and fell to wiping them again. At length the light tap-tap of slippers sounded on the stairs and we rose together as a tall, graceful figure emerged from the stairway shadow into the aura of light thrown out by the candles.

"My daughter, gentlemen—Clarimonde, Dr. de Grandin; Dr. Trowbridge," Mr. Ducharme introduced in a voice gone thin and treble with nervousness. From the corner of my eye I could see him watching us in a sort of agony, awaiting the horror we were bound to show as the girl's face became visible.

I saw de Grandin's narrow, pointed chin jut forward as he set his jaw against the shock of the hideous countenance, then watched the indomitable will within him force his face into the semblance of an urbane smile as he stepped forward gallantly and raised the girl's slim, white hand to his lips.

The figure which stepped slowly, reluctantly, into the dull luminence of the candles was the oddest patch-

work of grotesquerie I had ever seen. From feet to throat she was perfectly made as a sculptured Hebe, slim, straight, supple with the pliancy of youth and abundant health. Shoes of white satin and stockings of sheerest white silk complemented a straight, plain frock of oyster-white which assuredly had come from nowhere but Vienna or the Rue de la Paix; a Manila shawl, yellowed with years and heavily fringed, lay scarf-wise over her ivory shoulders and arms; about her throat was clasped a single tight-fitting strand of large, lustrous pearls.

The sea-gems were the line of demarcation. It was as if by some sorcery of obscene surgery the lovely girl's head had been sheared off by a guillotine three inches above the clavicle and replaced by the foulest specimen from the stored-up monstrosities of a medical museum. The skin about the throat was craped and wrinkled like a toad's, and of the color of a tan boot on which black dressing has inadvertently been rubbed, then ineffectually removed. Above, the chin was firm and pointed, tapering downward from the ears in good lines, but the mouth extended a full five inches across the face, sweeping in a curving diagonal from left to right like a musical turn mark, one corner lifted in a perpetual travesty of a grin, the other sagging in a constant snarl. Between the spaces where the brows should have been the glabella was so enlarged that a protuberance almost like a horn stood out from the forehead, while the eyes, fine hazel, flecked with brown, were horribly cocked at divergent angles so that it was impossible for her to gaze at an object directly before her without turning her head slightly to the side. The nose was long and curved, exaggeratedly high-bridged and slit down the outer side of each flaring nostril as the mouth of a hairlipped person is cleft. Like the throat, the entire

face was integumented in coarse, loosely wrinkled skin of soiled brown, and, to make the contrast more shockingly incongruous, a mass of gleaming auburn hair, fine and scintillant as spun rose-gold, lay loosely coiled in a Grecian coronal above the repulsive countenance.

Had the loathsomeness been unrelieved by contrasting comeliness, the effect would have been less shocking; as it was, the hideous face inlaid between the perfect body and glowing, ruddy diadem of hair was like the sacrilegious mutilation of a sacred picture—as though the oval of the Sistine Virgin's face were cut from the canvas and the sardonic, grinning features of a punchinello thrust through the aperture.

To his everlasting credit, de Grandin did not flinch. Debonair as though at any social gathering, he bowed the monstrous creature to a chair and launched a continuous flow of conversation. All the while I could see his eyes returning again and again to the hideous countenance across the table, his keen surgeon's-mind surveying the grotesque features and weighing his chances of success against the almost foregone certainty of failure.

THE ordeal lasted something like half an hour, and my nerves had stretched to the snapping point when sudden diversion came.

With a wild, frantic movement the girl leaped up, oversetting her chair, and faced us, her misdirected eyes rolling with a horrible ludicrousness in their sockets, tears of shame and self-pity welling from them and coursing down the sides of her grotesque face. Her wide, cavernous mouth opened obliquely and she gave scream after scream of shrill, tortured anguish. "I know; I know!" she cried frenziedly. "Don't think you've fooled me by taking all the mirrors from the house, Father! Remember, I go about the woods at

will, and *there are pools of quiet water in the woods!* I know I'm hideous; I know I'm so repulsive that even the servants who wait on us must be blind! I've seen my face reflected in the moat and the swamp; I saw the horror in your eyes when you first looked at me, Dr. de Grandin; I noticed how Dr. Trowbridge couldn't bear even to glance at me just now without a shudder! Oh, God of mercy, why haven't I had courage to kill myself before?—Why did I live till I met strangers and saw them turn from me with loathing? Why——"

"*Mademoiselle*, be still!" de Grandin's sharp, incisive command cut through her hysterical words and stung her to silence. "You lament unnecessarily," he continued as she turned her goggling toad-eyes toward him. "*Monsieur*, your father, bids you come to us for a specific purpose; namely, that I inspect your countenance and give him my opinion as a surgeon concerning the possibility of cure. Attend me: I tell you I can so reshape your features that you shall be completely beautiful; you shall grace the salons of Washington, of New-York, of Paris, and you shall have young men to do you honor and lay their kisses thick upon your hands and lips, and breathe their tales of love into your ears; you——"

A shriek of wild, incredulous laughter silenced him. "I? I have admirers—lovers? Dear God—the bitterness of the mockery! I am doomed to spend my life among the snakes and toads, the bats and salamanders of the swamps, a thing as hideous as the ugliest of them, cut off from all my kind, and——"

"Your fate may be a worse one, unless I can prevent it," Ducharme broke in with an odd, dry croaking voice.

We turned on him by common consent as he rasped his direful prophecy. His long, goat-like face was

working spasmodically; I could see the tendons of his thin neck contracting as he swallowed nervously, and the sad, bitter lips beneath the drooping gray mustache twisted into a smile that was more than half a snarl as he gazed at de Grandin and his daughter in turn.

"You wondered why I greeted you with suspicion when you came asking food and shelter last night, gentlemen?" he asserted rather than asked, looking from the Frenchman to me. "This is why:

"As I told you last night, the Ducharmes have lived here since long before the first English colony was planted in Virginia. Although our plantation has been all but eaten up by the swamps, the family wealth holds out, and I am what is counted a rich man, even in these days of swollen fortunes. It was the custom of our family for generations to send their women to a convent at Rheims for education; the young men were sent to Oxford or Cambridge, Paris or Vienna, occasionally to Louvain or Heidelberg, and their training was completed by the grand tour.

"I followed the family tradition and studied at the Sorbonne when my undergraduate work at Oxford was completed. It was while I lived in Paris I met Inocencia. She was an *Argentina*—a native of the Argentine, a dancer in a cabaret, and as lovely a creature as ever set a man's blood afire. All the students were mad about her, but Ruiz, a fellow-countryman of hers, and I were the most favored of her coterie of suitors.

"Leandro Ruiz was a medical student, the son of an enormously wealthy cattleman, who took to surgery from an innate love of blood and suffering rather than from any wish to serve humanity or earn a livelihood, for he already had more money than he could ever spend, and as for humanitarianism, the devil himself had more of it.

"One night as I sat studying, there came a terrified rapping at my door, and Inocencia fell, rather than ran, into my rooms. She had struggled through the raging sleet-storm from Montmartre, and Ruiz was hot behind her. He had accosted her as she left the café, and demanded that she come forthwith and consort with him—there never was an honorable thought in the scoundrel's mind, and what he could not buy he was accustomed to take by force.

"I had barely time to lock and bar the door when Ruiz and three hired bullies came clamoring up the stairs and battered on the panels like werewolves shut out from their prey. Ha, I left my mark on him that night! As he stooped down to bawl obscenities through the keyhole I thrust a sword-cane through the lock and blinded him in one eye. Despite his wound he hung around the door nearly all night, and it was not till two gendarmes threatened him and his companions with arrest for public disturbance that they slunk away.

"Next morning Inocencia and I arranged to be married, and as soon as the formalities of French law could be complied with, we were wed and made a tour of Europe for our honeymoon. When we returned to Paris we heard Ruiz had contracted pneumonia the night he raged outside my quarters in the sleet, and had died and been buried in St. Sulpice. Ha, you may be sure we shed no tears at the news!

"I was nearly thirty, Inocencia barely twenty when we married. It was not till ten years later that Clarimonde was born, and when at last we had a child to crown our union we thought our cup of joy was surely overflowing. God!" He paused, poured himself a goblet of wine and drained it to the bottom before continuing:

"No hired *bonne* was good enough to take our darling out; Inocencia herself accompanied her on every

outing and filled the afternoons with recitals of the thousand cunning things our baby did and said while toddling in the park.

"One day they did not return. I was frantic and set the entire gendarmerie by the ears to search for them. Nowhere could we find a trace till finally my wife's dead body, partly decomposed, but still identifiable, was rescued from the Seine. Police investigation disclosed she had been murdered—her throat severed and her heart cut out, but not before a hundred and more disfiguring wounds had been inflicted with a knife.

"My baby's fate was still unknown, and I lived for weeks and months in a frenzy of mingled despair and hope till—" Again he paused; once more he filled and drained a wine-glass. Then: "At last my fears were set at rest. At daylight one morning the thin, pitiful wailing of a little frightened child sounded at my door, and when the *concierge* went to investigate she found Clarimonde lying there in a basket. Clarimonde, my Clarimonde, her mother's sole remaining souvenir, dressed in the baby garments she had worn the day she vanished, positively identified by the little, heart-shaped birthmark on the under side of her left arm, but, my God, how altered! Her face, gentlemen, was as you see it now, a dreadful, disfigured, mutilated mask of horror, warped and carved and twisted almost out of human semblance, save as the most grotesque caricature resembles the thing it parodies. And with her was a letter, a letter from Leandro Ruiz. The fiend had caused the report of his death to be given us, and bided his time through all the years, always studying and experimenting in plastic surgery that he might one day carry out his terrible revenge, watching Inocencia and Clarimonde when they least sus-

pected it, familiarizing himself with their habits and ways so that he might best set his *apaches* on them and kidnap them when the time was ripe for his devil's vengeance. After dishonoring and torturing Inocencia, he killed her slowly—cut her heart from her living breast before he slashed her throat. The next three months he spent carefully disfiguring the features of our baby, adding horror on horror to the poor, helpless face as though he were a sculptor working out the details of a statue with slow, painstaking care. At last, when even he could think of nothing more to add to the devastation he had made, he laid the poor, mutilated mite on my doorstep with a note describing his acts, and containing the promise that all his life and all his boundless wealth would be devoted to making his revenge complete.

"You wonder how he could do more? Gentlemen, you can not think how vile humanity can be until you've known Leandro Ruiz. Listen: When Clarimonde reaches her twenty-first year, he said he would come for her. If death had taken him meanwhile, he would leave a sum of money to pay those who carried out his will. He, or his hirelings, would come for her, and though she hid behind locked doors and armed men, they would ravish her away, cut out her tongue to render her incapable of speech, *then exhibit her for hire in a freak show*—make my poor, disfigured baby girl the object of yokels' gawking curiosity throughout the towns and provinces of Europe and South America!

"I fled from Paris as Lot fled from Sodom, and brought my poor, maimed child to Ducharme Hall. Here I secured Minerva and Poseidon for servants, because both were blind and could not let fall any remarks which would make Clarimonde realize her deformity. I secured

blind teachers and tutors; she is as well educated as any seminary graduate; every luxury that money could buy has been given her, but never has there been a mirror in Ducharme Hall, or anything which could serve as a mirror, since we came here from Paris.

"Now, gentlemen, perhaps you understand the grounds for my suspicions? Clarimonde was twenty-one this month."

Jules de Grandin twisted the fine, blond hairs of his diminutive mustache until they stood out in twin needle-points each side of his mouth, and fixed a level, unwinking stare upon our host. "*Monsieur*," he said, "a moment hence I was all for going to the North; I would have argued to the death against a moment's delay which kept me from performing the necessary work to restore Mademoiselle Clarimonde's features to their pristine loveliness. Now, *parbleu*, five men and ten little boys could not drag me from this spot. We shall wait here, *Monsieur*, we shall stay here, rooted as firmly as the tallest oak in yonder forest, until this Monsieur Ruiz and his corps of assassins appear. Then"—he twisted the ends of his mustache still more fiercely, and the lightning-flashes in his little, round eyes were cold as arctic ice and hot as volcanic fire—"then, by damn, I think those seventy-six-thousand-times accursed miscreants shall find that he who would step into the hornet's nest would be advised to wear heavy boots. Yes; I have said it."

FROM that night Ducharme Hall was more like a castle under siege than ever. In terror of abduction Clarimonde no longer roamed the woods, and Mr. Ducharme, de Grandin or I was always on lookout for any strangers who might appear inside the walled park. A week, ten days passed quietly, and we resumed

our plans for returning North, where the deformed girl's face could receive expert surgical treatment.

"I shall give Mademoiselle Clarimonde my undivided attention until all is accomplished," de Grandin told me as we lay in bed one evening while the October wind souged and moaned through the locust-trees bordering the avenue and a pack of tempest-driven storm clouds harried the moon like hounds pursuing a fleeing doe. "With your permission I shall leave your house and take up residence in the hospital, Friend Trowbridge, and neither day nor night shall I be beyond call of the patient. I shall—

"*Attendez, voilà les assassins!*" Faintly as the scuffing of a dried twig against the house, there came the gentle sound of something scratching against the rubble-stone of the wall.

For a moment the Frenchman lay rigid; then with bewildering quickness he leaped from the bed, bundled the sheets and pillows together in simulation of a person covered with bed-clothes, and snatched down one of the heavy silken cords binding back the draperies which hung in mildewed festoons between the mahogany posts. "Silence!" he cautioned, tiptoeing across the chamber and taking his station beside the open casement. "No noise, my friend, but if it is possible, do you creep forward and peer out, then tell me what it is you see."

Cautiously, I followed his instructions, rested my chin upon the wide stone window-sill and cast a hurried glance down the wall.

Agilely as a cat, a man encased in close-fitting black jersey and tights was scaling the side of the house by aid of a hooked ladder similar to those firemen use. Behind him came a companion, similarly costumed and equipped, and even as I watched them I could not but marvel at the almost total silence in which they swarmed up the rough stones.

I whispered my discovery to de Grandin, and saw him nod once understandingly. "*Voleurs de nuit*—professional burglars," he pronounced. "He chose expert helpers, this one. Let us await them."

A moment later there was a soft, rubbing sound as a long steel hook, well wrapped in tire-tape, crept like a living thing across the window-sill, and was followed in a moment by a slender and none too clean set of fingers which reached exploringly through the casement.

In another instant a head covered by a tight-fitting black jersey cowl loomed over the sill, the masked eyes peered searchingly about the candlelit room; then, apparently satisfied that someone occupied the bed and slept soundly, the intruder crept agilely across the sill, landed on the stone floor with a soft thud and cleared the space between bed and window in a single feline leap.

There was the glint of candlelight on sharpened steel and a fiendish-looking stiletto flashed downward in a murderous arc and buried itself to the hilt in the pillow which lay muffled in the blankets where I had lain two minutes before.

Like a terrier pouncing on a rat de Grandin leaped on the assassin's shoulders. While awaiting the intruder's advent he had looped the strong curtain cord into a running noose, and as he landed on the other's back, driving his face down among the bedding and effectively smothering outcry, he slipped the strangling string about the burglar's throat, drew it tight with a single dexterous jerk, then crossed its ends and pulled them as one might pull the draw-string of a sack. "Ha, good *Monsieur le Meurtrier*," he whispered exultantly, "I serve you a dish for which you have small belly, *n'est-ce pas?* Eat your fill, my friend, do not stint yourself, Jules de Grandin has plentiful supply of such food for you!

"So!" He straightened quickly and whipped the cord from his captive's throat. "I damnation think you will give us small trouble for some time, my friend. Attention, Friend Trowbridge, the other comes!"

Once more he took his place beside the window, once more he cast his strangling cord as a masked head protruded into the room. In a moment two black-clad, unconscious forms lay side by side upon the bed.

"Haste, my friend, *dépêchez vous*," he ordered, beginning to disrobe our prisoners as he spoke. "I do dislike to ruin Monsieur Ducharme's bedding, but we must work with what we have. Tear strips from the sheets and bind these unregenerate sons of pigs fast. There is no time to lose; a moment hence and we must don their disguises and perform that which they set out to do."

We worked feverishly, tying the two desperadoes in strip after strip of linen ripped from the sheets, gagging them, blindfolding them; finally, as an added precaution, lashing their hands and feet to the head- and foot-posts of the bed. Then, shedding our pajamas, we struggled into the tight-fitting jerseys the prisoners had worn. The stocking-like garments were clammy wet and chilled me to the marrow as I drew them on, but the Frenchman gave me no time for complaint. "*Allons, en route*, make haste!" he ordered.

Leaving the unconscious thugs to such meditations as they might have upon regaining consciousness, we hastened to Ducharme's chamber.

"Fear not, it is I," de Grandin called as he beat imperatively on our host's door. "In our chamber repose two villains who gained entrance by means of scaling ladders—from the feel of their clothes, which we now wear, I should say they swam your moat. We go now to lower the draw-bridge and let the master villain in. Do you be ready to receive him!"

"*Holà!*" he called a moment later as we let ourselves out the front door and lowered the drawbridge. "Come forth, all is prepared!"

Two men emerged from the darkness beyond the moat in answer to his hail, one a tall, stoop-shouldered fellow arrayed in ill-fitting and obviously new clothes, the other small, frail-looking, and enveloped from neck to high-heeled boots in a dark mackintosh or raincoat of some sort which hung about his spare figure like the cloak of a conspirator in a melodramatic opera. There was something infinitely wicked in the slouching truculent swagger of the big, stoop-shouldered bully, something which suggested brute strength, brute courage and brute ferocity; but there was something infinitely more sinister in the mincing, precise walk of his smaller companion, who advanced with an odd sort of gait, placing one foot precisely before the other like a tango dancer performing to the rhythm of inaudible music.

"Judas Iscariot and Company," de Grandin whispered to me as the queerly assorted couple set foot on the drawbridge; then with an imperative wave of his hand he beckoned them toward the house and set off up the driveway at a rapid walk. "We must not let them get close enough to suspect," he whispered, quickening his pace. "All cats are gray in the dark, and we much resemble their friends at a distance, but it is better that we take no chances."

Once or twice the other two called to us, demanding to know if we had encountered resistance, but de Grandin's only answer was another gesture urging them to haste, and we were still some ten feet in the lead when we reached the door, swung it open and slipped into the house, awaiting the others' advent.

The candles burned with a flickering, uncertain light, scarcely more than staining the darkness flooding

the big stone hall as the two men trailed us through the door. By the table, the candlelight falling full upon her mutilated face, stood Clarimonde Ducharme, her hideously distorted eyes rolling pathetically in their elongated sockets as she turned her head from side to side in an effort to get a better view of the intruders.

A shrill, cackling laugh burst from the smaller man. "Look at that, Henri," he bade, catching his breath with an odd, sucking sound. "Look at that. That's *my* work; isn't it a masterpiece?"

Mockingly, he snatched the wide-brimmed soft black-felt hat from his head, laid it over his heart, then swept it to the floor as he bowed profoundly to the girl. "*Señorita hermosa, yo beso sus manos!*" he declared, then burst into another cackle of cackling laughter. As he removed his headgear I observed he was bald as an egg, thickly wrinkled, and wore a monocle of dark glass in his right eye.

His companion growled an inarticulate comment, then turned toward us with an expectant look. "Now?" he asked. "Shall I do it now and get it over?"

"*Si, como no?*—certainly, why not?" the smaller man lisped. "They've served their purpose, have they not?"

"Right," the big man returned. "They did the job, and dead men tell no tales——"

There was murderous menace in every movement of his big body as he swaggered toward de Grandin. "Come, little duckie," he bade mockingly in *gamin* French, "come and be killed. We can't have you running loose and babbling tales of what you've seen tonight the first time you get your hide full of *vin ordinaire*. Say your prayers, if you know any; you've precious little time to do it. Come, duckie——" As he advanced he thrust his hand beneath his ill-fitting jacket and drew a knife of fearsome proportions, whetting it softly against

the heel of his hand, smiling to himself as though anticipating a rare bit of sport.

De Grandin gave ground before the other's onslaught. Two or three backward running steps he took, increasing the distance between them, then paused.

With a flick of his left hand he swept the disguising hood from his features and smiled almost tenderly at the astonished bully. "*Monsieur*," he announced softly, "it sometimes happens that the weasel discovers the duck he hunts to be an eagle in disguise. So it would seem tonight. You have three seconds to live; make the most of them. *Un—deux—trois!*" The spiteful, whip-like report of his pistol sounded sharp punctuation to his third count, and the bravo stumbled back a step, an expression of amazement on his coarse face, a tiny, bruised-looking circle almost precisely bisecting the line of heavy, black brows which met above his nose.

"Wha—what?" the smaller villain began in a strangled, frightened scream, wheeling on de Grandin and snatching at a weapon beneath his cloak.

But George Ducharme leaped out of the darkness like a lion avenging the slaughter of its mate, and bore him, screaming madly, to the floor. "At last, Leandro Ruiz—at last!" he shouted exultantly, fastening his fingers on the other's thin, corded neck and pressing his thumb into the sallow, flaccid flesh. "At last I've got you! You killed my wife, you deformed my baby, you've made me live in a hell of fear for eighteen years; but now I've got you—I've got you!"

"*Eh bien*, have a care, *Monsieur*, you are unduly rough!" de Grandin protested, tapping Ducharme's shoulder gently. "Be careful, I implore you!"

"What?" George Ducharme cried angrily, looking up at the diminutive Frenchman, but retaining his stran-

gling hold on his foeman's throat. "D'ye mean I'm not to treat this dog as he deserves?"

The other's narrow shoulders rose nearly level with his ears in an eloquent shrug. "I did but caution you, my friend," he answered mildly. "When one is very angry one easily forgets one's strength. Be careful, or you kill him too swiftly.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge, the night is fine outside. Let us admire the view."

THE prisoners in the bedroom were only too glad to take their departure without stopping to inquire concerning their late employer. From remarks they dropped while he hunted clothing to replace the conspicuous black tights of which we had relieved them, I gathered they had distrusted Ruiz's good faith, and insisted on payment in advance. That Monsieur Ruiz had left, leaving no address, and consequently would not be in position to extort return of his fee with the aid of the gigantic Henri was the best possible news we could have given them, and they took speedy farewell of us.

The following day de Grandin and I set out for the North, accompanied by the Ducharmes. Clarimonde traveled closely veiled, and we occupied a drawing-room suite on the B. & O. fast train which bore us from Washington to Harrisonville. The first night in New Jersey was spent at my house, Clarimonde keeping closely to her room, lest Nora McGinnis, my faithful but garrulous Irish household factotum, behold her mutilated features and spread news of them along the kitchen-door telegraph line.

A suite of rooms at Mercy Hospital was engaged the following day, and true to his promise, de Grandin took up residence in the institution, eating, sleeping and passing his entire time within half a minute's walk of his patient.

What passed in the private operating-room Ducharme's money made possible for his daughter's case I did not know, for the press of my own neglected practise kept me busy through most of the daylight hours, and de Grandin performed his work unassisted except by three special nurses who, like him, spent their entire time on duty in the special suite secured for Clarimonde.

Nearly three months passed before my office telephone shrilled one bright Sunday morning and de Grandin's excited voice informed me he was about to remove the bandages from his charge. Ten minutes later, out of breath with haste, I stood in the comfortably furnished sitting-room of Clarimonde's suite, and stared fascinated at the little Frenchman who posed and postured beside his patient like a lecturer about to begin his discourse.

"My friends," he announced, sweeping the circle composed of Ducharme, the nurses and me with twinkling eyes, "this is one of the supreme moments of my life. Should my workmanship be successful, I shall proceed forthwith to get most vilely, piggishly intoxicated. If I have failed"—he paused dramatically, then drew a small, silver-mounted automatic pistol from his pocket and laid it on the table beside him—"if I have failed, Friend Trowbridge, I beseech you, write in the death certificate that my suicide was induced by a broken heart. *Allons.*"

With a pair of surgical scissors he slit the outermost layer of bandages about the girl's face and began unwinding the white gauze with slow, deliberate movements.

"*A-a-ah!*" The long-drawn exclamation came unbidden from all of us in chorus.

The wrinkled, blotched, leather-like skin which had covered the girl's face had, by some alchemy employed by de

Grandin, been bleached to an incredibly beautiful shade of light, sun-tanned *écru*, smooth as country cream and iridescent as an alloy of gold and platinum. Above a high, straight brow of creamy whiteness her soft auburn hair was loosely dressed in a gleaming diadem of sun-stained metallic luster. But it was the strange, exotic molding of her features which brought our hearts into our eyes as we looked. Her high, straight forehead continued down into her perfectly formed nose without the slightest indication of a curve—like the cameo-fine formation of the most beautiful faces found on recovered artistic treasures of ancient Greece. With consummate skill the Frenchman had made the enlargement of her eyes an ally in his work, for while he had somewhat decreased the length of the cuts with which Ruiz had mutilated the girl's eyes, he had left the openings larger than normal and raised them slightly at the outer corners, imparting to the face which would have otherwise been somewhat too severe in its utter classicism a charming hint of Oriental piquancy. The mouth was still somewhat large, but perfect in its outline, and the lips were thin, beautifully molded lines of more than usual redness, in repose presenting an expression of singular sweetness, retracting only slightly when she smiled, giving her face an expression of languid, faint amusement which was as provocative in its appeal as the far-famed smile of Mona Lisa.

"My God—Clarimonde, you're beautiful!" Ducharme cried brokenly, and stumbled across the floor to drop kneeling before his daughter, burying his face in her lap and sobbing hysterically.

"*Pipe d'une souris!*" de Grandin pocketed his pistol and bent above his patient. "Jules de Grandin and none other shall have the first kiss from these so beautiful lips!" He placed a

resounding salute upon the girl's scarlet mouth, then turned toward the adjoining room.

"Behind that door," he announced, "I have secreted several pints of the hospital's finest medicinal brandy, Friend Trowbridge. See to it, if you

please, that I am not disturbed until I say otherwise. For the next four and twenty hours Jules de Grandin shall be delightfully engaged in acquiring the noblest case of delirium tremens the institution's staff has ever treated!"