

# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*

The INN of  
TERROR  
by GASTON  
LEROUX

AUTHOR OF

The PHANTOM  
of the OPERA

AUGUST 1929

HUGH RANKIN

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# Weird Tales

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# The INN of



**S**PEAKING of women," said Chaulieu, "I would never wish any of you a honeymoon like the one I took with my first wife. Besides coming very close to losing our lives . . . But here's the story without any further preamble. On my return from Saigon, I asked headquarters for a furlough and took advantage of it to marry little Maria-Luce of Mourillon, as had been previously decided. Her father had died in Madagascar and she lived with her grandfather.

"We went to Switzerland on our honeymoon. It was my idea, because at heart I'm a staid fellow, a land-lubber, and I hate adventures. If I was a sea captain for twenty years, it was simply to follow the family tradi-

tion and to please my parents, but the very thought of it in the beginning made me seasick.

"Well, there we were in Switzerland, my young bride and I, as in the days of Töppfer. We were very much in love, and . . . Have you ever been in Soleure?"

"I was married in Borneo," chuckled Dorat, the biggest wag in the party of old sea-dogs who spun their yarns on the terrace of the "Café of the Old Wet-Dock," in Toulon.

"I see. . . . Well, Soleure might be called the capital of French Switzerland—a long, quiet street with picture sign-boards swinging on their rods at the slightest puff of wind from the Wesseinstein.

"The Wesseinstein is one of the summits in the Jura mountains. It

Translated by Mildred Gleason Prochet.

# TERROR

by

GASTON  
LEROUX



**"What she was telling  
was less horrible than  
what she did."**

rises at the northwest of the town. More than one tourist has lost his way in the gorges and paths of the forest, and there are no hotels before reaching the summit, with the exception of one which at the time boasted a very sinister reputation.

"Two years before our trip, the town board had discovered, at the bottom of a well and in a near-by grotto, twelve skeletons and some objects belonging to travelers who had found a fatal hospitality there.

"The inquest in investigations brought to light the fact that the crimes had been committed by a couple who had so thoroughly terror-

ized the neighborhood that even the death of the two innkeepers, the dreadful Weisbachs — you may remember the story perhaps; it was in all the newspapers at the time—did not loosen any tongues. You see, a few old-timers in the mountains had suspected some of the goings-on; but Jean Weisbach had made it very clear that he did not care to have people meddling in his business, and they had let bad enough alone.

"The innkeepers had died quietly in their beds, in the end, rich and esteemed, as also did their factotum, one Daniel. When the mare's nest was discovered, the examining magistrates

were able after questioning hither and yon and forcing some stubborn old neighbors to speak, to reconstruct the crimes. The most important witness was an old woman with a goiter, who related certain horrible details which showed that, besides a grim greed for money, the Weisbachs had had a strain of sadism and cruelty in them that has rarely been exceeded.

"Naturally, this story was the chief topic of conversation in Soleure. The travelers, who were to go by coach to the peak of the Wesseinstein, to sleep in the hotel made famous by Napoleon, and from there go back into France through the Belfort gap, promised themselves by all means to stop for a drink, half-way up, at the 'Inn of Blood.' It had been called that as much because of the story as for the color it was painted. To stop there was one of the things planned in the trip up the mountain. While the driver gave the horses to drink, the tourists went inside to the bar and gossiped with the new proprietors. These two had been there only a year. Their predecessors, the immediate successors of the Weisbachs, had left the premises, as soon as the scandal broke, on the grounds that they were ruined. But the Scheffers, being shrewder, had said to themselves that there were plenty of fools in the world, whose curiosity would probably make them rich. Their reasoning had not been bad, if one could believe what was said in town. All the strangers now passing through Soleure wanted, of all things, to see the 'Inn of Blood,' and some even went so far as to sleep there.

"The weather was fine the day that Maria-Luce and I left for the Wesseinstein by diligence. We had had an excellent lunch and were prepared to enjoy a lovely drive, and live a few ideally romantic hours like a chapter from a novel. We had left our luggage in Soleure and were to return there for it. Maria-Luce had only a small hand-bag with her. Ah! we

narrowly missed never returning to Soleure and also lived that romantic chapter of ours in a way we would never have wished! You will see why. . . .

"When I think of it! . . . Perhaps that is what killed my good little Maria-Luce! . . . She was so pretty, so gay, so full of life . . . with such a clear lovely skin, and cheeks like roses. Well, such is life—a never-tiring destroyer. . . . I often wonder why we are born at all. . . .

"Ah! we were in love! . . . I had hired the coupé of the stage-coach just for the two of us, so that we could be by ourselves and kiss when we felt like it, which was only natural after all!

"JUST as we were about to leave, a man and woman arrived on the scene . . . a handsome pair! I'll never forget them as long as I live, and with reason. They were Italians: he, a big, handsome man, too handsome, in the thirties, with big, dark eyes like velvet, the kind of eyes they have in Italy and that make the signorinas lose their heads . . . flashing teeth, olive skin, clean-shaven and the appearance of an actor. He was one, in fact, a tenor who was already well-known and had had a brilliant success at La Scala in Milan . . . Antonio Ferretti as we learned later. . . . Amiable, jovial, in perfect health, he felt that he owned the world.

"His companion, who adored him openly with every look, was obviously his, body and soul. She was a young, ravishingly beautiful woman, as golden-haired as a Venetian, which she was, and belonging to the highest aristocracy. Her name belonged to history from that day on, judicial history, alas! . . . Countess Olivia Orsino. The handsome tenor had abducted her.

"I'm telling you all this at the start to get rid of it, so that you can understand the people at first sight, which

was more than we did; all we considered at the moment was the fact that an annoying couple wanted to join us in the coupé, under the pretense that the interior compartment of the coach was already practically full, and would even have driven us out if it had been possible. An argument ensued, of course; the handsome tenor's free and easy manner irritated me, and I was even more annoyed because I had been so pleased with the idea of just the two of us taking this little trip together. If he had been more polite, however, Antonio Ferretti would certainly have won his cause, because after all I'm not a roughneck, and as I said before, his companion was charming.

"Maria-Luce advised me to give in, but one word spoiled everything, something like 'damned savages, these French.' I slammed the door violently, and as I had already paid for the four seats I insisted on my right and they were obliged to sit with the others. As a matter of fact, if it annoyed them to travel by diligence they had only to rent a carriage, but it wasn't an easy thing in those days before automobiles to find horses and carriage to go up to the Wesseinstein. They had to be wagons specially built like the diligence, with a hanging rod always ready to grip the road in case of slipping back, which was always to be feared. If I have lingered over this incident it is because it assumed a terrible importance, alas! for some of us.

"Our drive started through a pretty little cut in the hills, fresh, wooded, resounding with rippling waters, and in which nestles a little retreat, famous in that neighborhood—it was that of Saint Venère, Verena Einsiedolei, if I'm not mistaken—with chapels, grottoes, overhanging rocks, and from time to time, beautiful blocks of Soleure marble which caught the sun and shone in great, blinding spots.

"Three hours later we were in the

depths of the forest, far from any dwelling, and the sun had disappeared. Big clouds floated between us and the mountain peaks, and before long a black veil hid the entire valley. At the same time a dull noise like thunder rumbled down toward us; but it was not the thunder yet: it was a heavy sledge, loaded with wood, which tumbled down the road on its runners with overwhelming rapidity. A young boy, perched up on top, steered it.

"It was under the threat of a coming storm that we finally caught sight of the 'Inn of Blood.' In the livid light of the twilight, it was not a pleasant sight with its squat, thick walls, barred windows and the old, arched door, studded with iron, which led to the famous well. The whole was covered with a horrible, brownish paint which, it seems, is used on the arms of the guillotine.

"'Heavens, but it's ugly!' Maria-Luce cried, and it really must have been, for that afternoon, I can assure you, we were both in a mood to find everything lovely. We had not been bored with each other on the ride up! We had told each other stories, we had made plans for the future, and we had kissed to the health of our two Italians.

"JUST as the diligence stopped in front of this sinister dwelling, a regular torrent of rain, accompanied by flashes of lightning and great growls of thunder, came down. We rushed into the inn, or rather into an enormous kitchen at the end of which was a tremendous fireplace large enough to burn a tree. At the present moment, however, only an honest little fire of dried branches was crackling away, and above it in an honest little pot, hung from a pot-hook, boiled a beef stew which smelled excellent. Before us stood the innkeeper, round-bellied like a barrel, with a pleasant manner, small, twinkling eyes peering out from creases of fat,

and three chins, the tamest ogre in the world, all smiles.

"'Are you reassured?' I asked Maria-Luce.

"'Yes,' she answered, 'he won't have us cooked in that little pot, and he seems delighted! . . . But what weather!'

"As a matter of fact, the driver had unharnessed the horses and gotten them under shelter because he was beginning to worry about the equilibrium of the carriage under the repeated claps of thunder. I asked him how long we would be staying here.

"'An hour,' he answered. 'I'll be off again in an hour, no matter what the weather does!'

"I figured that we would arrive at the hotel at the Wesseinstein in the middle of the night, if we arrived at all, because the road skirted a precipice on the right. I came to a rapid decision, and Maria-Luce agreed with me; so, taking the innkeeper aside, I asked him if he had a room.

"'I have two,' the stout fellow answered, looking at me with a bantering twinkle in his eyes. 'You want to sleep here?'

"'Yes. Show me your rooms!'

"'If you'll just wait a moment until I have served the lady and gentleman in the drawing-room, I'll be at your service.'

"What he called the drawing-room was a small room off the kitchen, furnished with a round table covered with oil-cloth, four chairs, and a few prints of the battles of the First Empire hanging on the walls, which were whitewashed. Our two Italians had made for this luxurious and comfortable nook on leaving the coach, in order to escape from associations from which they had already suffered.

"When Scheffer, the innkeeper, opened the door which they had closed, I saw the handsome tenor at the window looking out at the landscape sadly. His companion was seated with her elbows on the table and did not seem any more cheerful.

"The innkeeper came back to us.

"'There are two more who want to sleep here! A drive in this rain doesn't attract them. You had better hurry about choosing your room, because, between you and me, there is only one decent one!'

"You can well imagine that I lost no time. We went up a stairway as steep as a ladder, that led on the left to the attic, which was directly over the kitchen, and on the right to a corridor which went to what was called 'the travelers' room.' This room was famous: it was here that almost all the murdered guests had slept.

"'You aren't afraid,' Scheffer chuckled, on opening the door; 'but then, of course, nowadays only honeymooners come here.'

"'That is true of us.'

"'Oh, then I won't worry about you,' he replied; 'you won't have any bad dreams! Have you any luggage?'

"No, we left it at Soleure.'

"It seemed to me that this detail irritated him. That may have been an idea that I invented later. Later, I also remembered that he eyed Maria-Luce's bag, the jewels she wore, and even the big ring I wore, very keenly. But I won't swear to it. He did it very quickly before leaving us. Outside it was still pouring, but the thunder had stopped.

## 2

IN THE fading light of the day, this room seemed a very peaceful retreat to us. It was large and clean, with light, flowered wall-paper; a big bed with white sheets, and an enormous red eider-down quilt, a comfortable Morris chair, the mantel decorated with bouquets of orange blossoms, under a glass globe, and two pictures taken from Monsieur de Chateaubriand's *Atala* and the *Last of the Abencérages*, the subject of which I explained to Maria-Luce.

"'We'll be very comfortable here,' she remarked, 'and if you were nice

you'd have a fire built on the hearth and we'd dine together in our room!

"'Good idea. I'll go right down and tell our landlord.'

"'I'll come with you!' she cried. 'You're not going to leave me alone in this room!'

"'Ah! it bothers you just the same. . . .'

"'Heavens, yes, when I think——'

"'Very well, come along, and don't think!'

"'We were at the head of the stairs in front of the door of the attic when we heard the Italian's voice.

"'But this isn't a room!' Antonio was exclaiming. 'It's a garret! It's a dirty hole! . . .'

"'It's the only thing I have to give you,' the innkeeper answered. 'I have already explained that my other room is taken!'

"'The door opened and we found ourselves face to face with the two Italians and the innkeeper.

"'Ah, you again, signor!' the tenor exclaimed. 'You must admit that we are out of luck.'

"'I could not stop a smile. I had caught sight of an iron bed in one corner of the attic which was stuffed with all the dull, rusty articles that one is accustomed to store in such places.

"'In fact,' I answered, 'this is not a very comfortable place to sleep in, especially when one is accustomed to a certain amount of luxury. Do you know what I would do in your place? Now that the coupé is free, I would leave with the diligence!'

"'He is right,' agreed the signora.

"'He is making fun of us!' the other muttered between his teeth.

"'I saw that there might be trouble, so I carried Maria-Luce off and went back down into the large, public room of the inn.

**I**N SPITE of the rain, the other travelers had wanted to see the well where the executioners had thrown their victims, and they all returned

dripping wet. They ordered hot grogs while the innkeeper, still joking a bit sarcastically, gave details:

"'They probably didn't drink the water from that well—everyone has his little niceties—but the peasants around here did. After all it didn't matter much, because the Weisbachs did things neatly. They cleaned their skeletons well. They boiled them for hours and hours in a cauldron that hung from that very pot-hook!'

"'Upon which, the travelers asked to see the cauldron, the pitchfork, the ax, and the knife, all the instruments of torture, in fact, that had become famous in this horrible affair.

"'They are in the little dungeon . . . and my wife has the key.'

"'Madame Scheffer, detained at some forester's because of the weather, took her time about returning. The driver announced in the meantime that he was ready to leave, and the room emptied itself in a moment.

"'The Italians did not come down until after the diligence had left. They seemed to have made up their minds to make the best of their part in the adventure and ordered dinner. We watched them out of the corner of our eyes, and Maria-Luce was very much amused. I was extremely polite and opened the conversation.

"'If I had been alone, I would have given my room up willingly. . . .'

"'A bad night is soon over,' the Italian answered me with a smile.

"'The woman, whom I'll call Countess Orsino although I did not know her name at the time, was charming to Maria-Luce.

"'We have been cheated,' she said to her; 'this inn is not at all horrible.'

"'A door at the end of the room opened, and Madame Scheffer, the innkeeper's wife, entered. She rid herself of an enormous coat and hood, and as she did so we could not control the chill of terror that ran up our spines. The sight was worse than horrible: it was sinister. Her hideousness was due mostly to her squint-



ing eyes and enormous, grinning mouth. Aside from that, she had sparkling teeth, beautiful golden hair, and a nose that was a bit thick, with ferociously sensual nostrils. I don't know what Madame Weisbach was like, but this woman certainly seemed to exhale an odor of blood. She was strong and still young, about thirty-eight, with firm limbs, and hands used to men's work.

"Behind her came the man-servant, whom we had not yet seen. He was thick-set, slightly humpbacked, and he limped. A red-head with the face of a brute.

"He threw down the burden he was hidden under on the paving and gave a sigh of relief. Then he looked at us in silence and lifted a trap-door under the stairs. He lighted a lamp, which was there prepared, and disappeared down into the cellar, dragging his bundle behind him. The innkeeper was cleaning the dirty wine-glasses and no one had said a word. The three of them had looked at us in silence, that was all.

" 'I'm frightened this time,' Maria-Luce whispered to me.

" 'Yes, it's beginning to become more interesting,' I answered, 'but don't get worked up and we'll have some fun out of it.'

"The innkeeper was the first to break the silence after his wife had disappeared into the cellar behind the servant.

" 'What do you think of my wife?' he asked. 'She fits in well in an inn like this, doesn't she? I couldn't have chosen better! . . .'

" 'I joined in the game. 'Yes, it's quite a good trick.'

"The little countess had retreated into the shadow of her handsome tenor, and he remarked pleasantly: 'Madame Scheffer would be very good-looking if she didn't squint.'

" 'If she hadn't squinted, I would not have married her,' the innkeeper answered. 'Weisbach's wife squinted!

And I wonder if you noticed my man-servant . . . he's humpbacked and bow-legged like Daniel, the Weisbachs' servant. I had to go all the way to Chaux-de-Fonds to find him.'

" 'Why don't you laugh, Olivia?' asked the tenor, who seemed to be enjoying himself.

" 'Did they ever murder anyone in the attic?' Olivia gasped.

" 'Did they ever murder anyone in the attic!' Scheffer exclaimed. 'Well, I should say so! I have all the newspapers if you want to look them over. Daniel slept in the attic and stood guard over the travelers in the other room. When he believed that they were safely asleep, he would knock three times on the floor, and the Weisbachs, who kept themselves in readiness for the signal, came up. . . .'

" 'Sometimes the deed was easily and quietly done; other times there was a scuffle. The woman with the goiter told how Mengal from Breslau, president of the court of justice, defended himself so well that his wife was able to escape. But on leaving the room, the unfortunate woman rushed into the attic where Daniel always waited, holding himself in readiness to help. He broke her skull in with one blow of the ax. . . . You will see the ax! . . .'

" 'How horrible!' moaned the countess.

" 'Oh, that's nothing,' the innkeeper went on, shrugging his shoulders; 'there are lots of other tales about them that are more interesting than this. And I'm not making them up. There's the one about the beautiful brunette chained down in the grotto. But you ought to reconstruct the scene of the tale for yourselves in the little dungeon, if you are fond of such things! You will also see the pitchfork that the Weisbachs used to caress the little brunette! . . .'

" 'I felt Maria-Luce's hand tremble in mine.

" 'Give me a light,' I said to the innkeeper, and when I had lighted

my pipe: 'Scheffer, you're a dirty fraud!'

"'By Gad, no! What about the inquest? . . . and the newspapers?'

"'Possible. . . . But you make me laugh with your ax and your pitchfork! It's as though you told me that the Weisbachs cooked their victims in that pot over there!'

"'You're a shrewd one,' he burst out with a roar of laughter. 'But I found the cauldron I need yesterday. My wife went to pay for it today and the man brought it back with some other little things that won't go badly with the landscape! Yes, it's true, I'm helping the atmosphere along a little. . . . It was my idea. . . . And when everything is just as it was *before*, people will feel that they are back in the times of the Weisbachs. . . . But you must believe! . . . When I tell you that this is the cauldron, this the ax, and this the pitchfork, you must believe, or there's no fun in it. . . . but then you're not an amateur in such things! . . . What I am doing is for the amateurs who specialize in horrors! The fact that it is the actual dungeon, the well, and the inn, is a good start and with a little imagination it won't be hard to believe that the crimes have just been committed . . . without counting the fact that my wife and servant are a stroke of genius! . . . I hope to be rich in ten years. When I think that the people who were here before me had the travelers' room done over and added a drawing-room! . . . The fools! As though it were possible to ruin the "Inn of Blood" like that!'

"He sighed and went on, 'You see, I'm not trying to put anything over on you. You're not out for thrills, so I have shown you the inside of everything. But there are people who would be angry with me if I were to give the show away. There are some, you know, who *love it!* . . . Don't be afraid, little lady,' he said to the Countess, 'if the idea that you are going to sleep in the attic where they

murdered that poor woman upsets you, I'll have a mattress put in the drawing-room.'

"'No, we'll sleep in the attic,' Antonio Ferretti declared.

"'Very well. And you,' the innkeeper asked, turning to me, 'does the idea of sleeping in the "travelers' room" bother you?'

"'Not a bit, not a bit! Does it, Maria-Luce?'

"'Oh, the whole place frightens me,' Maria-Luce answered.

"'At that, we three men burst out laughing and the women joined us at the end, but only half-heartedly.

## 3

"**M**ADAME SCHEFFER reappeared out of the trap-door, followed by the servant, and we stopped laughing immediately. Only Scheffer seemed vastly amused by the effect that his wife had had on us. He called out to his servant: 'Daniel!' . . . *like the other one!*

"'He ordered him to wring the neck of two chickens, but Olivia said that she was not hungry and that a cup of bouillon would satisfy her.

"'Excuse me, but I am,' Antonio protested, 'and a chicken won't frighten me!'

"'And you?' I asked Maria-Luce.

"'Nor me,' she answered, squeezing up close to me; 'that is the only thing in the house that doesn't frighten me.'

"'Shall we dine together?' Antonio asked. He had obviously forgotten the incident of the diligence.

"'No, thank you,' I answered; 'I've had a fire lit in our room and my wife and I will dine alone in our quarters.'

"'It's very nice up there,' he replied, smiling. 'I have seen the room. You're in luck. I can understand how people sleep there *even at the risk of being murdered!*'

"'You are cheerful!'

"'Oh, I'm only speaking of those who were before you.'

"The innkeeper started to rattle some keys. He had just lighted the lamps, as night had completely fallen.

"'While waiting for dinner, I'll show you around. The rain has stopped and we can go to the well, to the grotto, and in the stable.'

"The women hesitated, but we persuaded them to follow us. The innkeeper went ahead with a swinging lantern; and in the stable, in front of the well, and in the grotto, which was about a hundred yards from the inn and the existence of which had been ignored for a long time, he reconstructed the whole story—and more. He put in a few details of his own! The crimes of the Peyrebelle Inn were mere trifles compared to the crime of the 'Inn of Blood'!

"The Weisbachs had made a sort of crematory oven out of one end of the grotto, and some fragments of human bones, too large to be confused with the bones of sheep, had been found there.

"It was useless trying to be strong-minded; we all came back from that little expedition somewhat upset. We were glad to re-enter the big room of the inn with its cheerful hearth . . . and yet! . . . Yes, but over the fire, two chickens were turning on the spit and filled the air with an extremely pleasant aroma. The bow-legged servant basted them from time to time with their juice, meanwhile polishing up a big leather basin.

"'What are you doing?' I asked him.

"He lifted his brute face up toward me and went on with his rubbing.

"'Don't ask Daniel questions,' the innkeeper said with a little laugh. 'It's a waste of time, because he won't answer you. Not that he is dumb, but I have ordered him to be mute like the other, who really was! You understand?'

"'Oh, yes, I understand. Con-

gratulations, you haven't overlooked a thing.'

"'Nothing. And when the cauldron is on the hearth, you'll see what a sensation I'll make when I repeat the story told to the judge by the woman with the goiter.'

"'What was that?' Antonio asked.

"'Why, the story of what happened to her when she first awoke to the fact that she was working for very peculiar people. One night when she came in from her washing, she found a roaring fire on the hearth. She went closer to see what they were cooking in the pot, and she lifted the cover; but Weisbach appeared on the run and gave her a blow that sent her reeling against the wall. But she had seen! . . . She had seen a man's head turning around in the bouillon, surrounded by chunks of flesh.

"'You see,' Weisbach said to her, 'curiosity is always punished. If I did what was right, I'd send you to the bottom of the pot to find out what is going on there! But I need you. In the meantime, keep your mouth shut!'

"'The wretched woman threw herself at his feet, swearing that she would never speak. And she stayed with him, because she knew that they would never let her go alive! From that day on, they talked openly before her, and there were even some nights when they forced her to help them in many ways. They would tell her to follow them down to the grotto and close the argument by kicking her down ahead of them. . . .

"'Come, let's go down there now. It's the best part of the whole place.'

"And he picked up his lantern again.

"The women exchanged looks; then, catching sight of the bow-legged man who was staring at them covertly while he continued to polish his cauldron, they made up their minds and we went down into the cellar behind Scheffer. A slimy stairway, a greasy cord, weird shadows thrown by his

flickering light . . . it was awful! We soon heard ringing blows like those of a hammer beating against chains. And, as a matter of fact, that is what it was. At the end of a subterranean passage the man threw open a door and we saw another lantern on the damp earth of the vault. Madame Scheffer was crouched on the ground, busy fastening a piece of chain to a ring in the cave wall, from which hung a lantern. At the end of the chain there was an iron collar. She had her back to us and did not bother even to look up, but continued her hammering with the violence of a madwoman. At last she stopped a moment.

"That," the man explained, "I have had to have done. But it's old iron just the same. The marks of the hammer won't show as soon as it has rusted, and some people will be even able to find blood-stains."

"What a beast!" I murmured; "there is no possible way of being bored with you!"

"No, eh? Nor with my wife! . . . Wait, and she'll give you a thrill. She'll tell you the story of the pretty little brunette who was imprisoned in this cave. It's worth the trouble of listening. . . ."

"You ought to set up your little trick in Paris, Boulevard Rochechouart, near the Café of the Yellow-Hammer. You'd be a big success."

"I know," he answered. "I've traveled. There are plenty of fools in the world."

**T**HE grotto was not very big. Nevertheless, there was room enough for a little exhibit. An enormous, rusty knife, a saw, an ax, and all the necessary implements for an innkeeper who conducts his business in the way that the deceased Weisbach did, hung from nails embedded between the cracks of the stones. In one place were a pitchfork and an ox-goad; against the wall were some tongs. Some shapeless, colorless rags

also hung from stalactites. Once, it seems, they had been clothes, and in another spot was a pile of debris which included some pieces of old leather, all that remained of some shoes.

"Read my collection of newspapers and you will see that all this stuff is mentioned. I haven't made up a thing. Unfortunately, the police kept all the originals and I had to replace them as best I could!" He laughed and said to his wife, "Go to it; it's your turn now."

"She stood up and came toward us and we shrank back. I shall see those squinting eyes and that big mouth all the rest of my life. And what a setting! The whole was brought into fantastic relief by the fierce, blood-red light thrown by the two lanterns, one of which was still on the ground. It was like a horrible, evil etching. . . ."

"The woman put out her arms and grasped the pitchfork almost greedily, and as she spoke she glared at the little countess with such ferocity that the other was forced to turn away. . . . And what a voice! It was like a sound from hell.

"And yet you know," Scheffer said to us, "she only drinks her little swallow of brandy in the morning after her coffee like the rest of the world. Good old Annette!" (*He called her Annette, like the other one!*) "You will see what a wonder she is."

"Perhaps one of the ladies would like to try the iron collar," she began. "It doesn't matter that Madame is blond: it would be just as effective."

"But the suggestion was not very well received, and Annette smiled a horrible smile!

"Everyone to his own taste. This is what happened, according to the woman with the goiter. A beautiful brunette arrived one afternoon accompanied by a middle-aged gentleman. They were obviously rich and had lots of jewelry. A mishap to their carriage forced them to take shelter

at the inn for the night, and the coachman, who went back to Soleure, was to return the next day with another carriage for them. When he arrived the next morning, he was informed that the two had departed early in the morning and that they had left money for him. He took the amount coming to him and went off without bothering any further about his customers. But his customers had never left the inn. . . .

“The gentleman, knocked unconscious by Daniel and cut up into pieces by Weisbach, was already in the cauldron. As to the lovely brunette, she was still alive in the little grotto. . . . She lived there for fifteen days, according to the woman with the goiter. Every night as soon as the inn was closed they went down to see her. They had her chained down there to this iron collar. One evening the woman with the goiter heard cries and slipped down into the cellar, but Weisbach, who had sharp ears, discovered her. He dragged her into the vault. “You want to see?” he said to her. “Then see you must . . . see what will happen to you if you talk.” And she saw. . . .

“The lovely brunette was there, completely naked and chained as I have already described. She was just one piece of torn flesh, and Weisbach’s wife, now with the pitchfork, now with the goad, was stroking her ribs.’

“So saying, Madame Scheffer went into action. And what she was telling was less horrible than what she did! Half bent over herself, with a savage light in her eyes, and that enormous mouth foaming at the corners, she hurled first her fork and then her goad where the chain hung. And she did it with a fire that suddenly ceased to be play and became a kind of madness and wild enjoyment.

“The slut!’ she screamed, and the sound of her voice sent a chill up my spine; ‘she killed the poor little brunette like this! like this! and again!

and again! She crushed in her ribs, tore the flesh, while the walls resounded with the other’s cries of pain. “Now you’re beautiful! Let your lover come now! Ah, and this, too. Now you are more beautiful than I!”

“I must tell you,’ Madame Scheffer said, panting and turning toward us, or rather toward the little countess, who had to lean against the wall to keep from falling, ‘I must explain that Weisbach’s wife was as ugly as sin, and she squinted! Naturally, she could not bear the sight of beautiful eyes’—so saying Madame Scheffer stared straight into the little countess’ eyes—‘without wanting to scratch them out!’

“Let’s go! let’s go!’ Olivia Orsino cried; ‘I won’t stay here another second!’ And she rushed from the vault.

“We all followed her, and Scheffer, who was behind, said with a great laugh, ‘I told you she was priceless! She has learned her lesson well. But don’t let it upset you. Aside from that, she is as gentle as a lamb . . . and an excellent cook, too, as you will see.’

“And then the woman herself, who had joined us, said, ‘So I frightened you? Well, I must tell the story; it will make people come!’

## 4

“I FELT Maria-Luce tremble and we were all a little pale when we came back into the big room. We looked at each other and finally burst out laughing . . . all except the countess.

“What a horrible, horrible woman!’ she murmured.

“And with all that, you don’t know the end of the story,’ said Scheffer, jabbing at the chickens with a fork to see how nearly done they were. He stopped the string which turned the spit. ‘They are done to a turn, and with a good salad . . . you’ll praise our cook. . . . The end of the story is this: The day when

the woman with the goiter was dragged into the vault was the day in which Madame Weisbach scratched the little brunette's eyes out with the pitchfork. She would teach the other to have more beautiful eyes than her own!

" "Squint now, squint now!" is what she shrieked,' Madame Scheffer completed, loading herself with a pile of dishes from a large chest.

" 'Enough,' I said firmly, 'we've had enough of an appetizer; let's eat!'

" 'Do you know what the Italian woman said to me?' Maria-Luce whispered. 'She doesn't want us to leave them. Let's eat down here.'

" 'Oh no!' I protested; 'I'm sick of these stories and I want you all to myself.'

"We took leave of the other two and I led my wife upstairs. We had a little trouble in finding our room in that strange hallway. The stairs were so steep that we came near to toppling down them, and it made me think of the Weisbachs. The traveler would go up the stairs while the servant waited for him in the dark at the top and pushed him down to the innkeepers, who were waiting at the bottom. And that was the end of him.

"We, however, were a bit luckier, and, as there was only one room in the inn, we finally found it. But before locating it I opened doors into several other rooms filled with packing-cases and all sorts of débris. I wondered why, in an inn, they did not make use of so much precious space, and while Scheffer was serving us our supper, in front of a good fire and under a tame enough lamp, I could not help asking him for an explanation of this. He answered that it would be a great expense, useless perhaps . . . and finally after hesitating a moment he added:

" 'Besides it seems to me that the Weisbachs *did not care to have too many travelers at one time!*'

"And he left, after putting a bottle

of champagne on the table and wishing us good-night.

" 'Did you hear?' Maria-Luce whispered to me as soon as he was gone; 'but why does he want to leave things in the same condition?'

" 'He hasn't been here long. Give him a chance. You're not going to begin imagining things, are you?'

"By the time supper was over, I had cheered her up again. We had emptied our bottle of champagne gayly and forgotten all about the horrors. We were just about to go to bed when a light knock came at the door. . . . There was no bolt in this door, but there was a key and a sort of hook that fastened to a ring in the casing.

" 'Who is there?' I asked.

" 'Don't open!' Maria-Luce whispered. She was already terror-stricken, for we had made quite an evening of it and might well be supposed asleep. . . .

" 'Open, open quickly,' came a heavy voice which I recognized as the Italian's.

"At that I opened the door and the man threw himself into the room, shutting the door behind him. He was very pale and seemed in the throes of the wildest emotion. . . .

" 'I've come to warn you,' he exclaimed, his voice trembling with emotion. 'First of all, we can hear everything they say in the kitchen. These people are murderers. I heard his wife say to Scheffer: "*We have nothing to fear. If they find the bones, they'll think they belonged to that other affair!*" We're not going to stay another second in this den. I've found a rope in the attic and I've fastened it to the window-ledge that overlooks the outside of the house, not the courtyard. Get dressed and follow us!'

"Maria-Luce was already half undressed and I had thrown my coat on the chair.

" 'This is a fine tale!' I exclaimed, dumfounded.

“‘You didn’t see that woman’s eyes,’ said Maria-Luce, her teeth chattering with fright.

“Seeing that I was undecided, the Italian lost no time and left us. Maria-Luce was dressing hastily, shaking in every limb.

“‘Let’s go! let’s go!’ she begged. ‘You haven’t even a revolver.’

“That was true. And besides it was impossible to oppose Maria-Luce. I took the bag, and two minutes later we were in the attic, after removing our shoes to make no noise. The little wooden door of the garret window was open and the cord fastened to the screw of a pulley. The Italians had already gone. We put our shoes on hastily, and it was then that I discovered a little streak of light coming through a crack in the floor. It came up from the kitchen, and I tried to peer through it. I saw nothing, but I could hear Scheffer’s voice say: ‘Which one shall we begin on?’”

**CHAULIEU** had reached this point in his narrative, when Captain Michel hit the table with such a blow of his fist that the saucers under their glasses jumped.

“I expected that! What an original story! But in Paul-Louis Courier’s tale the innkeeper says, ‘Shall we kill them both?’ and he was only referring to two chickens! You take us for geese, Chaulieu!”

“Wait a minute,” said Chaulieu. “I don’t know what this Paul-Louis thing of your is—I don’t know him from the man in the moon—and if you are geese, inform your respective relations of the fact. . . . I’m telling the adventure just as it happened to me.”

“Let him finish,” said Dorat; “I’ll bet he had forgotten all about love when he heard those words.”

“Yes, old man, I certainly had, and so had Maria-Luce. And I can tell you we lost no time in making our escape! I made another knot in the cord and

grasped hold of it. Maria-Luce, to whom I had given the bag, which contained quite a large sum of money, and our toilet articles, got up on my shoulders, and when we reached the ground we ran for ten minutes without stopping. We started down toward Soleure by the first path we came to because we did not dare risk the main road. I expected to catch up to the Italians, but we lost ourselves in the pitch-black darkness. Slipping and sliding and falling on the soaked ground, we plunged on madly.”

“You were frightened to death by that time,” laughed Michel.

“I should say we were. I couldn’t even stop Maria-Luce, who thought we were being pursued by bandits ready to shoot us down at any minute. The worst was that it began to rain again—and how! . . . Good Lord, what a night! . . . lost in a forest, torn and scratched by branches, and pelted with the heaviest kind of rain! Never in my life have I ever spent such hours. And I finally had to carry Maria-Luce, who was nothing more than a dripping bundle of rags. . . . At last, a light! A peasant’s cottage. . . . They took us in, warmed us, and gave us a bed. They dried our clothes for us, and in emptying my pockets I found a piece of paper with a few words written on it in pencil:

“Thanks for the room. I leave you the coupé.”

“I would have sworn it!” exclaimed Captain Michel. “You must be a fool.”

“Wait a minute,” Chaulieu said again. “I haven’t finished! You can well imagine what a temper I was in over this stupid joke, which, considering Maria-Luce’s condition, narrowly escaped being criminal. . . . It was no use rubbing her; she stayed as cold as ice. During the night she was taken with a high fever and I sent to Soleure for a doctor. It was two days before we were able to leave those kind peasants.

## 5

"I HAD had enough of Switzerland, and we returned to Mourillon the shortest way possible; but, alas! the good southern sun was not enough to cure Maria-Luce. She had always told me that her lungs were not very strong, and from that day on she began to cough. And when at last, a few years later, she stopped coughing she was dead."

Dorat coughed at that to show that he was still very much alive.

"Listen, poor old Chaulieu," he said, "we're all sorry, but as far as Maria-Luce's death is concerned, it is a misfortune which might have occurred under entirely different circumstances, after a damp walk in the woods, for example. The truth of the matter, as far as your story goes, is that they played a rotten joke on you, that's all."

"No!" Chaulieu growled; "not at all. . . . *The story only begins to be interesting from now on!*"

"The following year the Italian papers, and finally newspapers all over the world, were full of the disappearance of a man and a woman. And that is how we knew that our two Italians had been Antonio Ferretti and Countess Olivia Orsino. If we had had any doubts, which was impossible because the resemblance between them both was perfect, we would have been convinced by this fact: that they had been traced as far as Soleure, and there the trail ended!

"When Maria-Luce and I learned of this we looked at each other in silence, and the same terrible thought struck us both. The unfortunate pair had wanted to make fun of us. They had hidden in a corner of the hall and after our departure had slipped into our room, where the Scheffers had murdered them *in our place!*"

"Well, what do you say to that?" he asked, enjoying the astonishment of his friends. "Not so bad, eh? Wait. . . ."

"Remembering all we had seen and heard in the vault, and especially Madame Scheffer's frenzied illustration with the goad and pitchfork, we became more and more convinced that these people had gone from pretense to actuality . . . I mean to say, they had carried the reconstruction of the crimes of the 'Inn of Blood' to the finish!

"'Do you remember,' Maria-Luce said to me, 'do you remember how she stared at the countess?' Here Maria-Luce shivered and went on, 'It was terrifying! One might have believed that the countess was already her prey, chained to the wall like the "pretty little brunette" . . . and that she was scratching her eyes out with the pitchfork! Ah, poor wretches! The ruffians may have tortured her, too, for fifteen days, having already cooked Antonio. And when I think . . . when I think that if it hadn't been for that trouble over the coupé, they would never have played that trick as a revenge! . . . It was we who——'"

"'Don't think about it,' I exclaimed. But the matter could not rest there. Maria-Luce had nightmares about it at night, and so did I. At last, to get rid of the obsession, we did our duty. We returned to Soleure, and our first move was to go directly to the police, where we told the whole story from beginning to end.

"An inquest followed which brought immediate results. All the details we gave, all the incidents just as they had happened before our eyes, were confirmed. . . . And the Scheffers did not deny a thing. They did not seem in the least phased by it. And yet there were several questions which might well have embarrassed them; but Scheffer had an answer to everything.

"For example, when the judge asked: 'What did the words Monsieur Chaulieu heard mean: "Which one shall we begin on?"' he answered

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# The Inn of Terror

(Continued from page 165)

quite naturally: 'How do I know? How do you expect me to remember what I said that evening any more than any other evening? My words were of no importance except to the two who thought I was going to murder them. What stupidity! Perhaps they had something to do with the next day's work. I couldn't say....'

"But the judge insisted: 'How was it that you and your wife weren't astonished when only two people came down the next morning? Why were you silent about that? We would never have known a thing about all this if Monsieur and Madame Chauvieu had not come themselves to tell us that they fled in the night!'

"'Why should I be astonished?'" Scheffer answered. 'You know the little show we gave and still continue to give for amateurs. It had frightened the little lady, and she can tell you herself that several times during the evening she said: "The whole place frightens me!" No, I was not surprized, and I must admit that we had a good laugh over it when the two Italians told us the next morning, before leaving, that Monsieur and Madame had been frightened to death and had escaped by the attic window. . . . Besides, we found the rope there. . . . As for the Italians, after the abrupt departure of Monsieur and Madame, they had carried their bedding into the other room and had passed an excellent night there.'

"'Still, if the incident was as funny as that, you had no reason to keep still about it!'

"'But who told you I did? On the contrary, I've told it scores of times to travelers stopping for a drink . . . But to find them now——'

"'You might have said something to the stage-driver.'

"'Oh, when he stops at the inn he has other things to do: he is busy

with his horses. Besides, he may have heard my tale, at that.'

"'No, he has never heard it. . . . He never suspected a thing.'

"'That is quite possible. What should he suspect? . . . That story is a trivial matter. You surprize me with all this fuss.'

"'The Italians didn't tell you that they frightened Monsieur and Madame in order to obtain possession of the room?'

"'Good heavens, no.'

"The answer was a serious one, because after all, if the whole thing had only been a joke it was strange that the Italians had not boasted of it before their departure.

"'I am the only victim in the whole affair,' Scheffer went on, 'because I have not been paid for the bill yet. And that is probably why the Italians did not confess that they were responsible for the flight of the other two: they did not want to be asked to pay for the bill.'

"As you see, he had an answer ready for everything.

"Nevertheless, the judge was perplexed and the inquest continued for some time. They made new searches, but they found nothing and the matter was finally dropped. It was not until three years later, a year after Maria-Luce's death, that the affair came to light again, and this time the papers were full of wild tales.

"Antonio Ferretti and Olivia Orsino had never been heard of again, and you must admit that it was strange. I know that Antonio Ferretti was married and that he may have gone to some far corner of the earth to enjoy his happiness under an assumed name, but, after all, he was just becoming famous, and to give up such a splendid career forever! . . . I grew more and more convinced that they had been murdered, and even to-

day after a lapse of over twenty years I am positive of the fact.

"But I was saying that three years later something new occurred. In excavating not far from the inn, some new bones were found, and you can well picture the stir that it caused. The Weisbachs were on everyone's tongue again. And the Scheffers had become famous overnight, as famous as the Weisbachs had been! The experts, however, did not agree on the age of the bones.

"In the meantime, first one, then two, and then three families who had had disappearances among their relations, claimed that they might quite possibly have been victims of the Scheffers, because they had taken a trip through French Switzerland. They went even so far as to establish the fact that a young man from Linz, who had abducted a girl of good family, had slept one night at the 'Inn of Blood.' At that, the Scheffers and their servants were arrested and I was called as one of the witnesses.

"Their guilt seemed established and there was no doubt that they would be sentenced, when we suddenly learned that the young man in question had married the young girl of good family in America, and that they were farmers in Minnesota! The Scheffers were acquitted. . . . And now my story is done."

"And nothing more was ever heard of the Italians?" Dorat demanded.

"Never."

"And the Scheffers are still going strong?" Captain Michel asked, and this time he was not joking.

"Yes, they are still there making money. I heard of them quite recently from a friend who passed through Soleure. The 'Inn of Blood' has become historical. People come from far and near to see it; only no one ever asks to spend the night in the 'travelers' room'!"

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Another vivid story by Gaston Leroux, "The Woman With the Velvet Collar," will be published soon.