



Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Jest of Warburg Tantavul

By SEABURY QUINN



"You've kept me out thus far, but some day I'll get in, and——"

A tale about an evil old man who reached back from the grave to work his will—a story of Jules de Grandin

WARBURG TANTAVUL was dying. Little more than skin and bones, his face like a mask of parchment drawn drum-tight across his skull, crisscrossed with myriad wrinkles so small and fine and near together that they made shadows instead of lines, he lay propped up with pillows in the big sleigh bed and smiled as though he found the thought of dissolution faintly humorous.

Even in comparatively good health the

man was never prepossessing. Now, wasted with disease, that smile of self-sufficient satisfaction mingled with malignant glee upon his face, he was nothing less than hideous. The eyes, which nature gave him, were small, deep-set, and an oddly terrifying shade of yellow; calculating, cruel and ruthless as the yellow orbs of a crafty and ill-natured cat. The mouth, which his own thoughts had fashioned through the years, was wide

and thin-lipped, almost colorless, and even in repose was always tightly drawn against his small and queerly perfect teeth. Now, as he smiled, a flickering light, lambent as the quick reflection of an unseen flame, flared in his yellow eyes, and a hard white line of teeth showed on his lower lip, as though he bit it to hold back a chuckle.

"And you're still determined that you'll marry Arabella?" he asked his son, fixing his sardonic, mocking smile upon the young man's face.

"Yes, Father, but——"

"No buts, my boy"—this time his chuckle came, low and muted, but at the same time sharp and glassy-hard—"no buts. I've told you I'm against the match, and that you'll rue it to your dying day if you should marry her; but"—he paused, and the breath rasped in his wizened throat—"go ahead and marry her, if you will. I've said my say and warned you—heh, heh, my boy, never say your father didn't warn you!"

He lay back on his piled-up pillows for a moment, swallowing convulsively, as though to force the fleeting life-breath back; then, abruptly: "Get out," he ordered. "Get out and stay out, you poor fool; but remember what I've said."

"Father," young Tantavul began, taking a quick step toward the head of the bed, but the look of concentrated fury mixed with hatred which flashed up in the old man's tawny eyes halted him in midstride.

"Get — out — I — said!" his father snarled; then, as the door closed softly on his son:

"Nurse—hand—me—that—picture." His breath was coming slowly, now, in shallow, labored gasps, but the claw-like fingers of his withered hand writhed in a gesture of command, pointing to the silver-framed photograph of a woman

● One day back in 1925, Seabury Quinn wrote a story called "The Horror on the Links," which was published in WEIRD TALES for October of that year. The story told of a weird and uncanny mystery that was solved by a mercurial, egotistical yet altogether human and likable French scientist named Jules de Grandin. This strange figure—occultist, phantom-fighter and ghost-breaker, detective and physician, vain yet lovable—at once captured the sympathies of our readers, and also fired the imagination of Mr. Quinn, whose literary creation the little Frenchman is. Since "The Horror on the Links" appeared, this magazine has printed more than fifty stories about the weird exploits of the indomitable little Frenchman, and hopes to print as many more in the future. Month after month, year after year, Jules de Grandin has grown in the affections of the reading public, and his appearance in a new story is welcomed by many thousands of de Grandin fans as occasion for rejoicing. If you have not yet made the acquaintance of this strangest and most astonishing detective of fiction, you now have the opportunity to meet him in this story: "The Jest of Warburg Tantavul."

which stood upon a little table in the bedroom window-bay.

He clutched the portrait which she handed him as though it were some precious relic, and for a minute let his yellow eyes rove over it. "Lucy," he whispered hoarsely, and now his words were thick and indistinct, "Lucy, they'll be married, 'spite of all that I have said—they'll be married, Lucy—d'ye hear?" Thin and high-pitched as a child's, his voice rose to

a shrill and piping treble as he grasped the picture's heavy silver frame and held it level with his face. "They'll be married, Lucy, my dear, and they'll have——"

Abruptly as a penny whistle's note is stilled when no more air is blown in it, old Tantavul's cry was hushed. The picture, still grasped in his hands, fell to the tufted coverlet with a soft and muffled thud, the man's lean jaw relaxed, and he slumped back on his pile of pillows with a shadow of the mocking smile still showing in his glazing eyes.

Etiquette requires that the nurse await the doctor's confirmation at such times; so, obedient to professional dictates, Miss Williamson stood beside the bed until I felt the dead man's pulse and nodded; then, with the skill of years of practise, she began her offices, bandaging the wrists and jaw and ankles, that the body might be ready when the representative of Martin's Funeral Home came to convey it to the operating-room.

2

MY FRIEND de Grandin was annoyed. Arms akimbo, knuckles on hips, forcing back his black-silk kimono till it resembled the outspread wings of an angry bat, he took his stance in the center of the study and voiced his plaint in no uncertain terms. In fifteen little so small minutes he must leave for the theater, and that son and grandson of a pig who was the florist delayed delivery of the gardenia which must grace the left lapel of his evening coat. And was it not indisputably a fact that he could not go forth without a fresh gardenia? But certainly. What was it that the *sale chameau* was thinking of that he thus procrastinated in delivering that unmentionable flower till this unspeakable time of night? He was Jules de Grandin, he, and not to be oppressed by any species of a goat who

called himself a florist. But no. It must not be. It should not be, by blue! He, personally, would seek out the vile one and tweak his ears, pull his nose, thump his head most soundly. He would——

"Axin' yer pardon, sor," Nora McGinnis broke in from the study door, "there's a Miss an' Mистер Tantavul to see ye, an'——"

"Bid them be gone. Request that they will fill their pockets full of rocks and jump into the bay, say that we will not see——"

"*Grand Dieu*"——he cut his oratory short—"les enfants dans le bois!"

Truly, there was something reminiscent of the Babes in the Wood about the couple who had followed Nora to the study. Dennis Tantavul looked even younger and more boyish than I remembered him, and the girl beside him was so childish in appearance that I felt a quick, instinctive pity for her. Plainly they were frightened, too, for they clung together, hand to hand, like frightened children going past a graveyard, and in their eyes was that look of helpless, heart-sick terror I had seen so often when blood test and X-ray confirmed preliminary diagnosis of carcinoma.

"*Monsieur, Mademoiselle,*" the little Frenchman gathered his kimono and his dignity about him in a single sweeping gesture as he struck his heels together and bowed stiffly from the hips, "I apologize for my unseemly words. Were it not that I have been subjected to a terrible, calamitous misfortune, I should not so far have forgotten myself as to——"

The girl's quick smile cut through his words. "We understand," she reassured; "we, too, have been through trouble, and have come to see Doctor Trowbridge——"

"Ah? Then I have permission to with-

draw?" He bowed again and turned upon his heel, but I called him back.

"Perhaps you can assist us," I remarked as I introduced the callers.

"The honor is entirely mine, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin told her as he raised her fingers to his lips. "You and *Monsieur* your brother——"

"But he's not my brother," said the girl. "We're cousins. That's why we called on Doctor Trowbridge."

De Grandin tweaked the already needle-sharp points of his little, blond mustache as he looked at her. "*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle*," he begged; "I have resided in your country but five little years, and perhaps I do not understand the English fluently. It is because you and *Monsieur* are cousins that you come to see the doctor? Me, I am dull and stupid like a pig; I fear I do not comprehend."

Dennis Tantavul replied: "It's not because of the relationship, Doctor—not entirely, at any rate, but because——"

He turned to me, a look of mingled fear and wonder in his eyes. "You were at my father's bedside when he died; you remember what he said about my marrying Arabella?"

I nodded.

"There was something—some ghastly, hidden threat—concealed in his warning," he continued. "It seemed as though he were jeering at me—daring me to marry her, yet——"

"Was there some provision in his will?" I asked, and:

"Yes, sir, there was," the young man answered. "Here it is."

From his pocket he produced a sheet of folded parchment, opened it and indicated a paragraph:

To my son, Dennis Tantavul, I give, devise and bequeath all my property of every kind and sort, real, personal and mixed, of which I may die seized and possessed, or to which I may be en-

titled, in the event of his marrying Arabella Tantavul, but, should he not marry the said Arabella Tantavul, then it is my will that he receive only one-half of my estate, the residue thereof to go to the said Arabella Tantavul, who has made her home with me since childhood and occupied the relationship of daughter to me.

"H'm," I replied, "that looks as if he really wanted you to marry your cousin, even though——"

"And see here, sir," Dennis interrupted, "here's an envelope we found in Father's papers."

Sealed with red wax, the packet of heavy, opaque parchment was addressed:

To my children, Dennis and Arabella Tantavul, to be opened by them upon the occasion of the birth of their first child.

De Grandin's small blue eyes were snapping with that flickering light they showed when he was interested. "*Monsieur* Dennis," he said, turning the thick envelope over and over between his small, white hands, "Doctor Trowbridge has told me something of your father's death-bed scene. There is a mystery about this business. My suggestion is you read this message now——"

"No, sir, I won't do that," the young man interrupted. "My father didn't love me—sometimes I think he hated me—but I never disobeyed a wish that he expressed, and I don't feel at liberty to do so now. It would be like breaking faith with the dead. But"—he smiled a trifle shamefacedly—"Father's lawyer, Mr. Bainbridge, is out of town on business, and it will be his duty to probate the will. In the meantime, I'd feel better if the will and envelope were in other hands than mine. So we came to Doctor Trowbridge to ask him to take charge of them till Mr. Bainbridge comes from Washington, and meanwhile——"

"Yes, *Monsieur*, meanwhile?" de Grandin prompted as the young man paused.

"You know human nature, Doctor,"

Dennis turned to me; "no one can see farther into hidden meanings than the man who sees humanity with its mask off, the way a doctor does. Do you think Father might have been delirious when he warned me not to marry Arabella, or——" His voice trailed off to silence, but his troubled eyes were eloquent.

"H'm," I moved uncomfortably in my chair, "I can't see any reason for your hesitation, Dennis. That bequest of all your father's property in the event you married Arabella would seem to indicate his true feelings." I tried to make my words convincing, but the memory of Warburg Tantavul's dying words dinned in my ears. There had been something gloating in his voice as he told the picture that his son and niece would marry.

DE GRANDIN caught the hint of hesitation in my tone. "*Monsieur*," he asked, "will you not tell us of the antecedents of your father's warning? Doctor Trowbridge is perhaps too near to see the situation clearly. Me, I have no knowledge of your father or your family. You and *Mademoiselle* are strangely like. The will describes her as having lived with you since childhood. Will you kindly tell us how it came about?"

The Tantavuls were, as he said, strangely similar in appearance. Anyone might easily have taken them for twins. Like as two plaster portraits from the same mold were the delicate features of their faces, the small, straight noses, the delicately curved lips, the curling, pale-gold hair. Arabella wore hers in a close-cut bob; Dennis' hair was slightly longer than the average man's. Strip off his dinner clothes and put them on his cousin, encase him in the simple dinner frock she wore, and not one person in a thousand could tell you which was man and which was woman.

Now, once more hand in hand, they sat before us on the sofa, and, as Dennis began speaking, I saw that frightened, haunted look shine once again in their light eyes.

"Do you remember us as children, sir?" he asked me.

"Yes," I answered. "It must have been some twenty years ago they called me out to see you youngsters. You'd just moved into the old Stephens House, and there was a deal of gossip about the strange gentleman from the West with his two little children and his Chinese cook, who greeted all the neighbors' overtures with churlish rebuffs and never spoke to anyone."

"And what did you think of us, sir?"

"Well, I thought you and your sister—as I thought her then—had as fine a case of measles as I'd ever seen."

"How old were we then, do you remember?"

"Oh, you were something like two years; the little girl was half your age, I'd guess."

"And do you remember the next time you saw us?"

"Yes. You were somewhat older then; eight or ten, I'd say. That time it was the mumps. Queer, quiet little shavers you were. I remember I asked you if you thought you'd like a pickle, and you answered: 'No, it hurts.'"

"It did, too, sir. Every day Father made us eat one; stood over us with a whip till we'd chewed and swallowed the last morsel."

"*What!*"

The young folks nodded solemnly as Dennis answered. "Yes, sir; every day. He said he wanted to check up the progress we were making."

For a moment he was silent; then: "Doctor Trowbridge, if anyone treated you with studied cruelty all your life—if

you'd never had a kind word or gracious act from that person in all your memory, then suddenly that person offered you a favor—made it possible for you to gratify your dearest wish, and threatened to penalize you if you failed to do so, wouldn't you be suspicious? Wouldn't you suspect some sort of dreadful practical joke?"

"I don't think that I quite understand," I answered.

"Very well, then, listen:

"In all my life I can't remember ever having seen my father smile. Not really smile with friendliness, humor or affection, I mean. My life—Arabella's, too—was one long persecution at his hands. I was eighteen months old when we came to Harrisonville, I believe, but I still have vague recollections of our Western home, of a house set high on a hill, overlooking the ocean, and a wall with climbing vines and purple flowers on it, and a pretty lady who would take me in her arms and cuddle me against her breast, and feed me ice-cream from a spoon, sometimes. I have a sort of recollection of a little baby sister in that house, too, but these things are so far back in babyhood that possibly they never really were more than some childish fancy which I built up for myself and which I loved so dearly and so secretly that they finally came to have a kind of reality for me.

"My real memories, the things I can recall with certainty, began with a hurried train trip through hot, dry, uncomfortable country with my father and a strangely silent Chinese servant and a little girl they told me was my cousin Arabella. Little things make big impressions on child-minds, you know, and of all that trip the thing which I remember most is seeing some Indians standing on the platform of a station with pottery and blankets to sell. My father had de-

scended from the car and walked beside the train, and I climbed down after him and tried to run and take his hand. I stumbled over something on the platform and fell and cut my forehead. I called to him for help, but he didn't even turn around, and one of the Indian women lifted me to my feet and wiped the blood from my face with her handkerchief. Then, when the bleeding didn't stop, she tore the handkerchief in half and used it for a bandage. It was the only act of kindness that had been shown me for many a year, and I still have that memento of a savage woman's tenderness somewhere among my childhood's treasures, Doctor.

"Father treated Arabella and me with impartial harshness. We were beaten for the slightest fault; and we had faults a-plenty. If we sat quietly we were accused of sulking and asked why we didn't go and play. If we played and shouted, we were whipped for being noisy little nuisances.

"As we weren't allowed to associate with any of the children in the neighborhood, we made up our own games. I'd be Geraint and Arabella would be Enid of the dove-white feet, or perhaps we'd play that I was Arthur in the Castle Perilous, while she was the kindly Lady of the Lake who gave him back his magic sword. And though we never mentioned it, both of us knew that whatever the adventure was, the false knight I contended with was really my father. But when actual trouble came I wasn't an heroic figure.

"I MUST have been thirteen years old when I had my last thrashing. A little brook ran through the lower part of our land, and the former owners had widened it into a lily-pond. The flowers had died out years before, but the out-

lines of the pool remained, and it was our favorite summer play place. We taught ourselves to swim—not very well, of course, but well enough—and as we had no bathing-suits, we used to go in in our underwear. When we'd finished swimming we'd lie out in the sun until our under-things were dry, then don our outer clothing. One afternoon we were splashing in the water, happy as a pair of baby beavers sporting in the woods, and nearer to shouting with laughter than we'd ever been before, I think, when my father suddenly appeared upon the bank.

"'Come out o' there!' he ordered me, and there was a kind of sharp, hard dryness in his voice I'd never heard before. 'So that's the shameless way you spend your time behind my back?' he asked as I climbed up the bank. 'In spite of all I've done to keep you decent, you dared to do a thing like this?'

"'Why, Father, we were only swimming,' I began, but he struck me on the mouth.

"'Be quiet, you young rake!' he roared. 'I'll teach you.'

"Before I realized his intention he'd cut a willow switch, seized me by the neck and thrust my head between his knees; then, while he held me tight as in a vise, he flogged me with the willow lash until the blood came through the skin and stained my soaking cotton singlet. Then he released me and kicked me back into the pool as a heartless master might abuse a dog.

"As I said, I wasn't an heroic figure. It was Arabella who came to my rescue, helped me up the slippery bank, and took my head upon her shoulder. 'Poor Dennie,' she said. 'Poor, poor Dennie. It was my fault, Dennie dear; I never should have let you take me in the water.' Then she kissed me—it was the first time anyone had kissed me since the pretty lady

of my half-remembered dreams—and told me: 'We'll be married, dear, the very day that Uncle Warburg dies, and I'll be so sweet and good to you and you will love me so that we shan't remember any of these cruel things that we have to go through now.'

"We thought my father'd gone away, but he must have stayed to see what we would say; for as Arabella finished speaking he stepped out from behind a clump of rhododendron and then, for the first time, I heard him laugh. 'You'll be married, will you?' he asked jeeringly. 'Well, you'd better not. You'll both wish that the earth had opened and swallowed you if you ever dare to marry.'

"That was the last time he actually struck me, but from that time on he seemed to go out of his way to invent mental torments for us both. We weren't allowed to go to public school, but he had a private tutor, a little rat-faced man named Erickson, come in and give us lessons, and in the evening he would take the book and make us stand before him and recite. If either of us failed to answer promptly when he gave a problem in arithmetic or demanded that we spell a word or conjugate a French or Latin verb, he'd wither us with sarcasm, and always as a finish of his diatribe he'd bring the subject of our marriage up, jeering at us, and hinting at some awful consequence if we went through with what we'd set our hearts upon.

"So, Doctor, you can see," he finished, "why I can't help but suspect that this provision of my father's will is really some sort of horrible practical joke he's planned on us—almost as though he'd planned to force us into a situation which would make it possible for him to laugh at us from the grave."

"I can understand your feelings, boy," I answered, "but——"

"'But' be baked and roasted in the hottest oven hell possesses!" interrupted Jules de Grandin. "The wicked dead one's funeral is at two tomorrow afternoon, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"*Très bien.* At eight tomorrow evening—or earlier, if it will be convenient—you shall be married. I shall esteem it a favor if you permit that I shall be best man. Doctor Trowbridge will be there to give the bride away, and we shall have a merry time, by blue! You shall go upon a gorgeous honeymoon and learn how sweet the joys of love can be—sweeter for having been so long denied, *pardieu!* And in the meantime we shall keep those papers safe for you, and when your lawyer has returned, I shall see that he receives them in due course.

"You fear the so unpleasant joke? *Mais non,* I think the joke is on the other foot, my friends, and the laugh upon the wicked old one who had thought himself so clever!"

3

WARBURG TANTAVUL was neither widely known nor popular, but the solitude in which he had lived had invested him with mystery; now the bars of reticence were down and the walls of isolation broken, upward of a hundred neighbors, mostly women, gathered in the Martin funeral chapel as the services began. The afternoon sun beat softly through the stained glass windows and glinted upon the polished mahogany of the pews. Here and there it touched upon bright spots of color that marked a flower, a woman's hat or a man's tie. The solemn hush was unbroken save for occasional soft sibilations: "What'd he die of? Did he leave much? Were the two young folks his only heirs?"

Then the burial office: "Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from one generation

to another . . . for a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, seeing it is as a watch in the night. . . . Oh teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom . . ."

As the final Amen sounded, one of Mr. Martin's young men glided forward, paused beside the casket for a moment, and made the stereotyped announcement: "Those who wish to say good-bye to Mr. Tantavul may do so at this time."

The grisly rite of passing by the bier dragged on. I would have left the place, for I had no wish to look upon the man's dead face and folded hands; but de Grandin took me firmly by the elbow, held me back until the final curiosity-impelled female had filed past the body, then steered me quickly to the casket.

The little Frenchman paused beside the bier, and it seemed to me there was a hint of irony in the smile that touched the corners of his mouth as he leant forward. "*Eh bien,* my old one; we know a secret, thou and I, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked the silent form before us.

I swallowed back an exclamation of dismay. Perhaps it was a trick of the uncertain light, possibly it was one of those ghastly, inexplicable things which every doctor and embalmer meets with sometime in his practise—the effect of desiccation from formaldehyde, the pressure of some tissue gas within the body, or something of the sort—at any rate, as Jules de Grandin spoke the corpse's upper lids drew back the fraction of an inch, revealing slits of yellow eyes, which seemed to glare at us with mingled hate and fury.

"Good heavens; come away!" I begged. "It seemed as if he *looked* at us, de Grandin!"

"*Et puis*—and if he did?" he asked me as we left the chapel. "Me, I damn think that I can trade him look for look, my friend. He was clever, that one, I admit

it; but do not be mistaken, Jules de Grandin is no one's imbecile."

4

THE wedding took place in the rectory of St. Chrysostom's. Robed in stole and surplice, Doctor Bentley glanced benignly from Dennis to Arabella, then to de Grandin and me as he began: "Dear-ly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this company to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony. . . ." His round and ruddy face grew slightly stern as he continued: "If any man can show just cause why they should not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter for ever hold his peace."

He paused the customary short, dramatic moment, and I thought I saw a hard, grim look spread on Jules de Grandin's face. Very faint and far-off seeming, so faint that we could scarcely hear it, but gaining steadily in strength, there came a high, thin, screaming sound. Curiously, it seemed to me to resemble the long-drawn, wailing shriek of a freight train's whistle heard from miles away upon a still and sultry summer night, weird, wavering and ghastly. Now it seemed to grow in shrillness, though its volume was no greater. High, so high the human ear could scarcely register it, it beat upon our consciousness with a frightful, piercing sharpness. It was like a sick, shrill scream of hellish torment that set the tortured air to quivering till we could not say if we were really hearing it, or if it were but a subjective ringing in our heads.

I saw a look of haunted fright leap into Arabella's eyes, saw Dennis' pale face go paler as the strident whistle sounded shriller and more shrill; then, as it seemed

I could endure the stabbing of that needle-sound no longer, it ceased abruptly, giving way to blessed, comforting silence. And through the silence came a peal of chuckling laughter, half breathless, half hysterical, wholly devilish: *Huh—hu-u-uh—hu-u-u-uh!* the final syllable drawn out until it seemed almost a groan.

"The wind, Monsieur le Curé, it is the wind," said Jules de Grandin sharply. "Proceed to marry them, if you will be so kind."

"The wind?" Doctor Bentley echoed incredulously. "Why, I could have sworn I heard somebody laugh, but——"

"It is the wind, *Monsieur*; it plays strange tricks at times," the little Frenchman answered, his small, blue eyes as hard as frozen iron. "Proceed, if you will be so kind; we wait on you."

"Forasmuch as Dennis and Arabella have consented to be joined together in holy wedlock. . . I pronounce them man and wife," concluded Doctor Bentley, and de Grandin, ever gallant, kissed the bride upon the lips, and, before we could restrain him, planted kisses upon both of Dennis' cheeks.

"*Parbleu*, I thought that we might have the trouble, for a time," he told me as we left the rectory.

"What *was* that awful, shrieking noise we heard?" I asked.

"It was the wind, my friend," he answered in a hard, flat, toneless voice. "The ten times damned, but wholly ineffectual wind."

5

"SO, THEN, little sinner, weep and wail for the burden of mortality that has befallen thee; weep, wail, cry and breathe, my little wrinkled one! *Ha*, you will not? *Pardieu*, I say you shall!"

Gently, but smartly, Jules de Grandin

spanked the small red infant's small red posterior with the end of a towel wrung out in hot water, and as the smacking impact sounded, the tiny, toothless mouth opened to its fullest compass, and a thin, high, piping squall of protest sounded.

"Ah, that is better, *mon petit ami*," the little Frenchman chuckled. "One can not learn too soon that one must do as one is told, not as one wishes, in this world which you have entered. Look to him, *Mademoiselle*." He passed the wriggling, bawling morsel of humanity to the nurse and turned to me as I bent above the table where Arabella Tantavul lay. "How does the mother, good Friend Trowbridge?" he asked.

"U'm'p," I answered noncommittally, working furiously. "Poor youngster," I added as Arabella, swathed in blankets, was trundled to her room, "she had a pretty tough time of it, but——"

"But in the morning she will have forgotten!" de Grandin cut in with a laugh. "*Ha*, have I not seen it? She will gaze upon the little monkey-thing which I just caused to breathe the breath of life, and vow it is the loveliest of all God's lovely creatures. *Cordieu*, she will hold it at her tender breast and smile on it—she will——"

"*Sacré nom d'un rat*, what is that?"

From the nursery where, ensconced in wire trays twenty new-born fragments of humanity slept or squalled, there came a sudden frightened scream—a woman's cry of terror.

We raced along the corridor, reached the glass-walled room and thrust the door back, taking care to open it no wider than was necessary, lest a draft disturb the carefully conditioned air within the place.

Backed against the farther wall, her face gone gray with fright, the nurse in charge was staring at the skylight with horror-widened eyes, and even as we en-

tered she opened her lips to emit another shriek.

"Stop it, *Mademoiselle*, you are disturbing your small charges!" De Grandin seized the horrified girl's shoulder and administered a shake. Then:

"What is it that you saw, *Mademoiselle*," he asked her in a whisper. "Do not be afraid to speak; we shall respect your confidence—but speak softly."

"It—it was up there!" she pointed with a shaking finger toward the black square of the skylight. "They'd just brought Baby Tantavul in and I'd laid him in his crib when I thought I heard somebody laughing. Oh"—she shuddered at the recollection—"it was awful! Not really a laugh, but something more like a long-drawn-out hysterical groan. Did you ever hear a child tickled to exhaustion—how he moans and gasps for breath and laughs, all at once? I think the fiends in hell must laugh like that!"

"Yes, yes, we understand," de Grandin nodded shortly, "but tell us, if you please, what happened next?"

"I looked around the nursery, but I was all alone here with the babies. Then it came again, louder, this time, and seemingly right above me. I looked up at the skylight, and—there it was!"

"It was a face, sir—just a face, with no body to it, and it seemed to float in mid-air, just above the glass, then to dip down against it, like a child's balloon drifting in the wind, and it looked right past me down at Baby Tantavul and laughed again."

"A face, *Mademoiselle*, did you say——"

"Yes, sir, a face—the most awful face I've ever seen. It was thin and wrinkled, and shriveled like a mummy, and its long, gray hair hung down across its forehead, and its eyes were yellow—like a cat's!—and as they looked at Baby Tan-

tavul they seemed to stretch and open till the white of the balls glared all round the yellow irises, and the mouth opened, not widely, but as though it were chewing something that it relished—and it gave that dreadful, cackling, jubilating laugh again. That's it! I couldn't think before, but it seemed as if that bodiless head were laughing with a sort of evil triumph, Doctor de Grandin!"

"H'm," the little Frenchman tweaked his tightly waxed mustache. "I should not wonder if it did, *Mademoiselle*."

He turned to me, and: "Stay with her, if you please, my friend," he ordered. "I shall see the supervisor and have her send another nurse to keep her company. I shall request a special watch for the small Tantavul. I do not think that there is any danger, but—mice do not play where cats are wakeful."

"ISN'T he just lovely?" Arabella Tantavul looked up from the small knob of hairless flesh which rested on her breast, and ecstasy was in her eyes. "I don't believe I ever saw so beautiful a baby!"

"*Tiens, Madame*, his voice is excellent, at any rate," de Grandin answered with a grin, "and from what one may observe, his appetite is excellent, as well."

Arabella smiled and patted the small creature's back. "You know, I never had a doll in all my life," she told us. "Now I've got this dear little mite, and I'm going to be so happy with him. Oh, I wish Uncle Warburg were alive; I know this darling baby would soften even his hard heart."

"But I mustn't say such things about him, must I? He really wanted Dennis and me to marry, didn't he? His will proved that. You think he wanted us to marry, Doctor?"

"I am persuaded that he did, *Madame*.

Your marriage was his dearest wish, his fondest hope," de Grandin answered solemnly.

"I felt that way, too. He was harsh and cruel to us while we were growing up, and preserved his stony-hearted attitude to the end, but underneath it all there must have been some hidden streak of kindness, some lingering affection for Dennis and me, or he'd never have put that clause into his will——"

"Nor have left this memorandum for you," de Grandin interrupted, drawing from an inner pocket the parchment envelope which Dennis had given him the day before his father's funeral.

The youthful mother started back as though he menaced her with a live scorpion, and instinctively her arms closed protectively about the baby at her breast.

"The—that—letter?" she faltered, her breath coming in short, smothered gasps. "I'd forgotten it. Oh, Doctor de Grandin, burn it. Don't let me see what's in it. I'm afraid!"

It was a bright May morning, without sufficient breeze to stir the budding leaflets on the maple trees outside, but as de Grandin held the letter out I thought I heard the sudden rustle of a wind beyond the window, not loud, but shrewd and keen, like wind among the graveyard evergreens in autumn, and, curiously, there was a note of soft, malicious laughter mingled with it.

The little Frenchman heard it too, and for an instant he looked toward the window, and I thought I saw the flicker of an ugly sneer take form beneath the ends of his mustache.

"Open it, *Madame*," he bade. "It is for you and Monsieur Dennis, and little *Monsieur Bébé* here."

"No-o; I daren't——"

"*Très bien*, then Jules de Grandin does!" Drawing out his penknife he slit

the heavy envelope, pressed suddenly against its ends, so that its sides bulged out, and dumped its contents on the counterpane. Ten twenty-dollar bills dropped on the coverlet. And nothing else.

"Two hundred dollars!" Arabella gasped. "Why——"

"As a birthday gift for *petit* Monsieur Dennis, one surmises," de Grandin smiled. "*Eh bien*, the old one had a sense of humor underneath his ugly outward shell, it seems. He kept you on the tenterhooks lest the message in this envelope were one of evil import, while all the time it was a present of congratulation."

"But such a gift from Uncle Warburg—I can't understand it!" Arabella murmured wonderingly.

"Perhaps it is as well, *Madame*," he answered as we rose to go. "Be happy with the gift, and give your ancient uncle credit for at least one act of kindness. *Au 'voir*."

"HANGED if I can understand it either," I told him as we left the hospital. "If that old curmudgeon had left a message berating them for fools for having offspring, it would have been more in character, but such a gift—well, I'm surprized."

Amazingly, de Grandin halted in mid-stride and laughed until the tears rolled down his face. "*Parbleu*, my friend," he told me when he managed to regain his breath, "I do not think that your surprize is half so great as that of Monsieur Warburg Tantavul!"

6

DENNIS TANTAVUL regarded me with misery-haunted eyes. "I just can't understand it," he admitted. "It's all so sudden, so utterly——"

"*Pardonnez-moi*," de Grandin inter-

rupted from the door of the consulting-room, "I could not help but hear your last remark, and if it is not an intrusion——"

"Not at all," the young man answered. "I'd like the benefit of your advice. It's Arabella, and I'm dreadfully afraid that she——"

"*Non*, do not try it, *mon ami*," de Grandin warned. "Do you give us the symptoms, let us make the diagnosis. He who acts as his own doctor has a fool for a patient, you know."

"Well, then, here are the facts: This morning Arabella woke me up, crying as though her heart would break. I asked her what the trouble was, and she looked at me as if I were a stranger—no, not exactly that, rather as if I were some dreadful thing she'd suddenly discovered lying by her side. Her eyes were positively round with horror, and when I tried to take her in my arms and comfort her she shrank away as though I were infected with the plague.

"'Oh, Dennie, don't!' she begged, and positively cringed away from me. Then she sprang out of bed, and drew her kimono about her as though she were ashamed to have me see her in pajamas, and ran sobbing from the room.

"Presently I heard her crying in the nursery, and went down there to try and comfort her——" He paused, and tears started to his eyes. "She was standing by the crib where little Dennis lay, looking at him with tears streaming down her cheeks, and in her hand she held a long, sharp steel letter-opener. 'Poor little mite; poor little flower of unpardonable sin,' she said. 'We've got to go, Baby darling; you to limbo, I to hell—oh, God wouldn't, *couldn't* be so cruel as to damn you for your parents' sin!—but we'll all three suffer torment endlessly, because we didn't know!"

"She raised the knife to plunge it in

the little fellow's heart, and he stretched his baby hands out and laughed and cooed as the sunlight glinted on the deadly steel.

"I was on her in an instant, wrenching the knife from her with one hand, holding her against me with the other, but she fought me off.

"Don't touch me, Dennie, please, please don't!" she begged. 'I know it's deadly sin, but I love you so, my dear, that I can't resist you if I let you put your arms around me.'

"I tried to kiss her, but she hid her face against my shoulder and moaned as if in pain when she felt my lips against her neck. Then she went suddenly limp in my arms, and I carried her, unconscious but moaning pitifully, into her sitting-room and laid her on the couch. I left Sarah, the nurse maid, with her, giving strict orders not to let her leave the room till I returned. Can't you come over right away?"

De Grandin's cigarette had burned down till it threatened his mustache, and in his small, blue eyes was such a look of murderous rage as I had not seen for years. "*Bête!*" he murmured savagely. "*Sale chameau*; species of stinking goat! This is his doing, or Jules de Grandin is a lop-eared fool! Come, my friends, let us rush, hasten, fly; I would talk with Madame Arabella!"

"**N**AW, suh, she's gone," the colored nurse-maid told us when we asked for Arabella. "Master Dennie started ter squeal sumpin awful right after Mistu Dennis lef', an' Ah knowed it wuz time fo' 'is breakfas', so Mis' Arabella wuz lying' nice an' still on th' sofa, an' Ah says to her, Ah says, 'Yuh lay still, dere, now honey, whilst Ah goes an' sees after yo baby; so Ah goes down ter th' nussery an' fixes 'im all up, an'

carries 'im back ter th' settin'-room where Miss' Arabella wuz, an' she ain't dere no mo'. Naw, suh."

"I thought I told you——" Dennis began furiously, but de Grandin laid a hand upon his arm.

"Softly, if you please, *Monsieur*," he soothed. "*La bonne* did wisely, though she knew it not; she was with the small one all the while, so no harm could come to him. Was it not better so, after what you witnessed in the morning?"

"Ye-es," the other grudgingly admitted. "I suppose so. But Arabella——"

"Let us see if we can find a trace of her," the Frenchman interrupted. "Look, do you miss her clothing?"

Dennis looked about the pretty, chintz-hung room. "Yes," he decided as he finished his inspection; "her dress was on that lounge, and her shoes and stockings on the floor beneath it. They're all gone."

"So," de Grandin nodded. "Distract as she appeared to be, it is unlikely she would have stopped to dress had she not planned on going out.

"Friend Trowbridge, will you kindly call Police Headquarters, inform them of the situation, and ask to have all exits to the city watched?"

As I picked up the telephone he and Dennis started on a room-by-room inspection of the house.

"Find anything?" I asked as I hung up the 'phone after notifying headquarters.

"*Cordieu*, I should damn say yes!" de Grandin answered as I joined them in the upstairs living-room. "Look yonder, if you please, my friend."

The room was obviously the intimate apartment of the house. Electric lamps under painted shades were placed beside the big leather-upholstered chairs, ivory-enameled bookshelves lined the walls to a height of four feet or so, upon their

tops was a litter of gay, unconsidered little trifles—cinnabar cigarette boxes, bits of hammered brass. Old china, blue and red and purple, glowed mellowly in cabinets of mahogany, its colors catching up and accentuating the muted blues and reds of an antique Hamadan carpet. A Paisley shawl was draped scarfwise across the baby grand piano in the corner.

Directly opposite the door a carven crucifix was standing on the bookcase top. It was an exquisite bit of Italian work, the cross of ebony, the corpus of old ivory, and so perfectly executed that, though it was a scant four inches high, one could note the tense, tortured muscles, the straining throat which overflowed with groans of agony, the brow all knotted and bedewed with the cold sweat of torment. Upon the statue's thorn-crowned head, where it made a bright, iridescent halo, was a band of gem-encrusted platinum, a woman's diamond-studded wedding ring.

"*Hélas*, it is love's crucifixion!" whispered Jules de Grandin.

THREE months went by, and though we kept the search up unremittingly, no trace of Arabella could be found. Dennis Tantavul installed a full-time, highly trained and recommended nurse in his desolate house, and spent his time haunting police stations and newspaper offices. He aged a decade in the ninety days since Arabella left; his shoulders stooped, his footsteps lagged, and a look of never-ending misery dwelt within his eyes as he trod his daily *Via Dolorosa*, a prematurely old and broken man.

"It's the most uncanny thing I ever saw," I said to Jules de Grandin as we walked through Forty-second Street toward the West Shore Ferry. We had gone over to New York for some surgical supplies, and I do not drive my car in the

metropolis. Truck chauffeurs there are far too careless and repair bills for wrecked mudguards far too high. "How a full-grown woman could evaporate that way is something I can't understand," I added as we stepped briskly through the bracing autumn air. "If it had happened twenty years ago there might be some excuse for it, but today, with our radio police-call systems and all the other modern——"

"*S-s-st*," his sibilated admonition cut me short. "That woman there, my friend, observe her, if you please." He nodded toward a female figure twenty feet ahead of us.

I looked, and wondered at his sudden interest in the draggled hussy.

She was dressed in tawdry finery much the worse for wear. Sleazy silken skirt was much too tight, cheap fur jaquette far too short and snug; high heels of her satin slippers shockingly run over, make-up plastered on her cheeks and lips and eyes, and her short black hair fairly bristled with untidiness beneath the rim of her abbreviated hat. Written unmistakably upon her was the nature of her calling, the oldest and least honorable profession known to womanhood.

"Well?" I answered tartly. "What possible interest can you have in a——"

"Do not walk so fast," he whispered as his fingers closed upon my arm, "and do not raise your voice. I would that we should follow her, but I do not wish that she should know."

The neighborhood was far from savory, and I felt uncommonly conspicuous as we turned from Forty-second Street into Eleventh Avenue in the wake of the young strumpet, followed her provocatively swaying hips down two malodorous blocks, finally paused as she went in the doorway of a filthy, unkempt "rooming-house."

With de Grandin in the lead, stepping softly as a pair of cats, we trailed the woman through the dimly lighted, barren hall and up a flight of shadowy, uncarpeted stairs. We climbed two further flights, the last one letting into a sort of little oblong foyer bounded on one end by the stair-well, on the farther extremity by a barred and very dirty window, and on each side by two sets of sagging, paint-blistered doors. On each of these was pinned a card, handwritten with the many flourishes dear to the chirography of the professional card-writer who still does business in the poorer quarters of our great cities. The air was heavy with the odor of cheap whisky, stale bacon and fried onions.

We made a hasty circuit of the hall, studying the cardboard labels. On the farthest door the notice read MISS SIEGLINDE.

"*Mon Dieu,*" exclaimed de Grandin, "*le mot propre!*"

"Eh?" I answered, puzzled.

"Sieglinde, do you not recall her?"

"No-o, I can not say I do. The only Sieglinde I remember is the character in Wagner's *Die Walküre* who unwittingly became her brother's mistress and——"

"*Précisément.* Let us enter, if you please." Without pausing to knock, he turned the handle of the door and stepped across the threshold of the squalid room.

The woman sat upon the bed, her hat pushed backward from her brow, a cracked and dirty tumbler in one hand, a whisky bottle poised above it. "Get out!" she ordered thickly. "Get out o' here—I don't want——" A gasp cut short her utterance, and she turned her head away. Then:

"Get t'ell out o' here, you lousy rummies!" she half screamed. "Who d'ye think you are, breakin' into a lady's room like this? Get out, or——"

De Grandin eyed her steadily, and, as her strident order wavered:

"Madame Arabella, we have come to take you home," he told her softly.

"Good Lord, man, you're crazy!" I exclaimed. "Arabella? This——"

"Precisely, my good friend; this is Madame Arabella Tantavul, whom we have sought these many months in vain."

Crossing the room in two quick strides he seized the cringing woman by the shoulders and turned her face up to the window. I looked, and felt a sudden swift attack of nausea.

He was right. Thin to emaciation, her face already lined with the deep-bitten scars of dissipation, the woman on the bed was Arabella Tantavul, though the shocking change wrought in her features and the black dye in her hair had disguised her so I never would have recognized her.

"We have come to take you home, *ma pauvre,*" he repeated. "Your husband——"

"My husband?" Her reply was half a scream. "Oh, dear God, as if I had a husband——"

"And a little one who needs you," the Frenchman interrupted. "You can not leave him so, *Madame*——"

"I can't? Ah, that's where you're mistaken, Doctor. I can never see him again, in this world or the next. Please, please, go away and forget you found me, or I'll have to drown myself—I've tried it twice already, but my courage failed. But if you try to take me back, or tell Dennis that you saw me——"

"Tell me, *Madame,*" he broke in, "was not your flight caused by a visitation from the dead?"

HER faded brown eyes widened. "How did you know?" she asked.

"*Tiens,* one may make surmises," he

replied. "Will you not tell us just what happened? I think there is a way out of your difficulties."

"There isn't any way," she muttered dully, and her head sank listlessly upon her chest. "He planned his work too well; all that's left for me is death—and damnation afterward."

"But if there were a way—if I could show it to you?"

"Can you repeal the laws of God?"

"I am a very clever person; perhaps I can discover an evasion, if not an absolute repeal. Now, tell me: how and when did *Monsieur* your late but not lamented uncle, come to you?"

"The night before—before I went away. I woke up about midnight, thinking I heard a cry from Dennie's nursery. I rose to go to him, and when I reached the room where he was sleeping I saw my uncle's face glaring at me through the window. It seemed to be illuminated by a sort of inward, hellish light, for it stood out against the darkness like a jack-o'-lantern, and it smiled an awful smile at me. 'Arabella,' it said, and I could see its thin, dead lips writhe back as though its teeth were burning-hot, 'I've come to tell you that your marriage is a mockery and a lie. The man you married is your brother, and the child you bore is doubly illegitimate. You can't continue living with them, Arabella. That would be an even greater sin than the one you have committed. You must leave them; leave them right away, or'—once more his lips crept back until his teeth were bare—'or I shall come to visit you each night, and when the baby has grown old enough to understand, I'll tell him of his parents' sin. Take your choice, my dear. Leave them and let me go back to my grave in peace, or stay and see me every night, and know that I will tell your son when he is old enough to understand. And if I do it

he'll loathe and hate you for the things you are, and curse the day you bore him.'

"'And you'll promise never to come near Dennis or the baby if I go?' I asked.

"He promised, and I staggered back to bed, where I fell fainting.

"Next morning when I wakened I was sure that it had been a dream, but when I looked at Dennis and my own reflection in the glass, I knew it was no dream, but a dreadful visitation from the dead.

"It was then that I went mad. I tried to kill my baby, and when Dennis stopped me I watched my chance to run away, came over to New York and took to this." She looked significantly around the miserably furnished room. "I knew they'd never look for Arabella Tantavul among the sisters of the pavement; I was safer from pursuit right here than if I'd been in Europe or in China."

"But *Madame*"—de Grandin's voice was vibrant with shocked reproof—"that which you saw was nothing but a dream; a most unpleasant dream, I grant, but still a dream. Look in my eyes, *Madame!*"

She raised her eyes to his, and I saw his pupils widen, as a cat's do in the dark, saw a line of white outline the cornea, and, responsive to his piercing gaze, beheld her brown eyes set in a fixed stare, first as though in fright, then with a glaze almost like that of death.

"Attend me, *Madame Arabella*," he commanded softly. "You are tired—*grand Dieu*, how tired you are! You have suffered greatly, but you are about to rest. Your memory of that night is gone; so is all memory of all things which have occurred since. You will move and eat and sleep as you are bidden, but of what takes place until I bid you wake you will retain no recollection. Do you hear me, *Madame Arabella?*"

"I hear," she answered softly, in a small, tired voice.

"*Bien*. Lie down, my little poor one. Lie down, rest and dream; dream happy dreams of love. Sleep, rest; dream and forget.

"Will you be good enough to 'phone to Doctor Wyckoff?" he asked me. "We shall place her in his sanitarium, wash this *sacré* dye out of her hair and nurse her back to health; then, when all is ready, we can bear her home and have her take up life—and love—where she left off. None shall be the wiser. This chapter in her life is closed and sealed for ever.

"Each day I'll call upon her and renew hypnotic treatments that she may simulate the mild but curable mental case which we shall tell the good Wyckoff she is. When finally I release her from hypnosis, her mind will be entirely cleared of that bad dream which nearly wrecked her happiness."

7

ARABELLA TANTAVUL lay upon the sofa in her charming upstairs living-room, an orchid negligée trimmed in white marabou about her slender shoulders, an eiderdown rug tucked around her feet and knees. Her wedding ring was once more on her finger. Pale with a pallor not to be disguised by the most skilfully applied cosmetics, and with deep violet circles underneath her amber eyes, she lay back listlessly, drinking in the cheerful warmth which emanated from the fire of apple-logs that snapped and crackled on the hearth. Two months of rest in Doctor Wyckoff's sanitarium had erased the marks of dissipation from her face; even as the skilled ministrations of beauticians had restored the yellow luster to her pale-gold hair, but the listlessness which followed her complete breakdown was still upon her like the weakness from a fever.

"I can't remember anything about my illness, Doctor Trowbridge," she told me with a weary little smile, "but vaguely I connect it with some dreadful dream I had. And"—she wrinkled her smooth forehead in an effort at remembrance—"I think I had a rather dreadful dream last night, but——"

"*Ab-ba?*" de Grandin leant abruptly forward in his chair, his little mustache twitching like the whiskers of an irritated tom-cat. "What was it that you dreamed?"

"I—don't—know," she answered slowly. "Odd, isn't it, how you can remember that a dream was so unpleasant, but can't recall its details? Somehow, I connect Uncle Warburg with it, but——"

"*Parbleu*, your uncle? Again? *Ab bab*, he makes me to be so mad, that one!"

"IT is time we went, my friend," de Grandin told me as the tall clock in the hall beat out its tenth deliberate stroke; "we have important duties to perform."

"For goodness' sake," I protested, "where are you going at this time of night?"

"Where but to Monsieur Tantavul's?" he answered with a smile that had small humor in it. "I am expectant of a visitor tonight and—we must be ready for him."

When he was in a mood like this I knew that questioning would be a waste of breath; accordingly I drove him to the Tantavuls' in silence, knowing he would have an explanation when he deemed the time had come.

"Is Madame Arabella sleeping?" he asked as Dennis met us in the hall.

"Yes, like a baby," answered the young husband. "I've been sitting by her all evening, and I don't believe she's even turned in bed."

"And did you keep the window closed, as I requested?"

"Yes, sir; closed and latched."

"*Bien*. Await us here, *mon brave*; we shall rejoin you presently."

He led the way to Arabella's bedroom, removed the wrappings from a bulky parcel, and displayed the object thus disclosed with the air of a magician about to do a trick. "You see him?" he demanded proudly. "Is he not a beauty?"

"Why—what the deuce?—it's nothing but a window-screen," I answered.

"Ah, but it is made of copper," he informed me, as though explaining something of inordinate importance.

"Well——"

"Well? *Pardieu*, I shall say it is well; it is very exceedingly well, my friend. Observe him, how he works."

From his kit bag he produced a reel of insulated wire, an electrical transformer and a set of tools. Working quickly, he *passé-partouted* the screen's wooden frame with electrician's tape, then plugged a wire into a near-by lamp socket, connected it with the transformer, and from the latter led a double strand of cotton-wrapped wire to the screen. This he clipped firmly to the copper meshes and led a third wire to the metal grille of the heat register. Last of all, he filled a bulb-syringe with water and sprayed the screen from it, repeating the dousings till the woven copper sparkled like a cobweb in the morning sun. "Now, *Monsieur le Revenant*, I damn think we are ready for you," he announced, surveying his handiwork with every sign of satisfaction.

We waited quietly for something like an hour; then de Grandin rose and bent above the bed where Arabella slept.

"*Madame!*"

The girl stirred faintly, murmuring some half-audible response, and:

"In half an hour you will rise," he told her in a low, insistent voice. "You will put on your robe and stand before the window, but on no account will you go near it or lay hands on it. Should anyone address you from outside, you will reply, but you will not remember what you say or what is said to you."

He motioned me to follow him, and we left the room, taking station in the hallway just outside.

How long we waited I have no idea. Perhaps it was an hour, perhaps less; at any rate, the silent vigil seemed unending, and I raised my hand to stifle a tremendous yawn, when:

"Yes, Uncle Warburg, I can hear you," we heard Arabella saying softly in the room beyond the door.

We tiptoed to the entry: Arabella Tantavul stood before the window, looking fixedly at its darkened square, and beyond her, framed in the window-casing as a masterpiece of horror might be framed for exhibition, glared the face of Warburg Tantavul.

It was dead, there was no doubt about it. In the sunken cheeks, the pinched-in nose and the yellowish-gray skin there showed the evidence of death and early putrefaction, but dead though it was, it was also animated with a dreadful sort of life. The eyes were glaring horribly, as though illuminated with some inward phosphorescence, and they bulged forward in their sunken sockets as though a throttling hand were clutching at the dead thing's throat. The lips were red—red as rouge—but they were not red with life; they were dead, and painted with fresh blood.

"You hear me, do ye?" he demanded, and the ruddy, foam-flecked lips writhed across his yellow teeth. "Then listen, girl; you broke your bargain with me,

now I'm come to keep my throat: Every time you kiss your husband"—a shriek of bitter laughter cut his words, and his staring, starting eyes half closed with hellish merriment—"or the child you love so well, my shadow will be on you. You've kept me out thus far, but some day I'll get in, and——"

Once more the foam-dyed lips writhed across the gleaming teeth, and the lean, dead jaw dropped downward, then snapped up, as though it champed on living flesh; then, suddenly, the whole expression of the corpse-face changed. Surprise, incredulous delight, anticipation, as before a feast, were pictured on it. "Why"—its cachinnating laughter sent a chill down my spine—"why, you're window's open now! You've changed the screen, and I can enter!"

Slowly, like a child's balloon stirred by a vagrant wind, the dreadful face moved closer to the window, and I noted with a nauseated start that it was bodiless. Closer, closer to the screen it came, and Arabella Tantavul gave ground before it, shuddering with nameless dread, putting up her hands to shield her eyes from the laughing thing which menaced her.

"*Sapristi!*," swore de Grandin softly, his fingers clenched about my elbow till they numbed my arm. "Come on, my old and evil one; come a little nearer; only one so little tiny step, and——"

The dead thing floated closer. Now its mocking mouth and shriveled, pointed nose were pressing against the screen; now they seemed to filter through the copper meshes like a wisp of fog——

There came a blinding flash of blue-white flame, the cracking, sputtering gush of fusing metal, a wild, despairing shriek which ended ere it fairly started in a sob of mortal torment, and the sharp and acrid odor of burned flesh!

"Arabella—darling—is she all right?"

Dennis Tantavul came charging up the stairs. "I thought I heard a scream——"

"You did, *Monsieur!*" de Grandin answered, "but I do not think that you will ever hear its repetition, unless you are so unfortunate as to go to hell when your earthly pilgrimage is ended."

"What was it?" began Dennis, but de Grandin stopped him with a smile.

"One who thought himself a clever jester pressed his jest a bit too far," he answered enigmatically. "Meantime, look to *Madame* your wife. See how peacefully she lies upon her bed. Her time for evil dreams is past, my friend. Be kind to her, do not forget that a woman loves to have a lover, even though he is her husband." He bent and kissed the sleeping girl upon the brow, and:

"*Au 'voir*, my little lovely one," he murmured. Then, to me:

"Come, Trowbrdige, my good friend. Our work is finished here; let us leave them to their happiness."

8

JULES DE GRANDIN poured an ounce or so of Couvoisier into a lotus-bud shaped brandy sniffer and passed the goblet back and forth beneath his nose, inhaling the rich fragrance of the brandy. "*Morbleu*, old Omar had it right," he told me with a grin; "what is it that the distillers buy one-half so precious as the stuff they sell?"

"And when you get through misquoting poetry, perhaps you'll deign to tell me what it's all about?" I countered.

"Perhaps I shall," he answered. "Attend me, if you please: You will recall that this annoying Monsieur Who Was Dead Yet Not Dead appeared several times and grinned most horribly through the window? Through the window, please remember. At the hospital, where he near-

ly caused the *garde-malade* to have a fit, he laughed and mouthed at her through the glass skylight, which was tightly closed. When he first appeared and threatened Madame Arabella, he also spoke to her through the window, and——"

"But the window was open," I protested.

"Yes, but screened," he answered with a smile. "Screened with iron, if you please."

"What difference did that make? Tonight I saw him force his features part-way through the screen——"

"*Précisément*," he agreed. "But it was a screen of copper; I saw to that."

Then, seeing my bewilderment: "Iron is of all metals the most earthy," he explained. "It and its derivative, steel, are so instinct with the essence of the earth that creatures of the spirit world can not abide its presence. The legends tell us that when Solomon's Temple was constructed no tool of iron was employed, because even the friendly spirits whose help he had enlisted could not perform their tasks in close proximity to iron. The werewolf, a most unpleasant sort of creature which is half a demon, can be slain by a sword or spear of steel. The witch can be detected by the pricking of an iron pin——never by a pin of brass.

"Very well. When first I thought about this evil dead one's reappearances, I noted that each time he stared outside the window. Glass, apparently, he could not pass——and glass contains a modicum of iron. Iron window-wire stopped him. 'He are not a ghost, then,' I inform me. 'They are things of spirit only, they are thoughts made manifest. This one is a thing of hate, but also of some physical material as well; he is composed in part of the emanations from that body which lies in the tomb and for which the Devil of hell and the devils of decay fight, each

for their due shares. *Voilà*, if he have physical properties, he can be destroyed by physical means.'

"And so I set my trap. I procure a screen of copper, through which he could make entrance to the house——but I charged it with electricity——I increase the potential of the current with a step-up transformer, to make assurance doubly sure——and then I wait for him to try to enter, and electrocute himself."

"But is he really destroyed?" I asked dubiously.

"As the candle-flame when one has blown on it," he replied. "He was——how do you say it?——short-circuited. No convict in the chair at Sing Sing ever died more thoroughly than that one did tonight, my friend."

"It seems queer, though, he should have come back from the grave to haunt those two poor kids and break up their marriage, when he really wanted it," I murmured wonderingly.

"Wanted it?" he echoed. "*Ha*, yes, he wanted it as the hunter wants the bird to step within his snare."

"But he gave them such a handsome present when little Dennis was born——"

"Oh, my good, kind, trusting friend, are you, too, deceived?" he laughed.

"Deceived——"

"But certainly. That money which I gave to Madame Arabella was my own. I put it in that envelope."

"Then what was in the message which he really left?"

The little Frenchman sobered suddenly. "It was a dreadful thing, that wicked jest he played on them," he told me solemnly. "The night that Monsieur Dennis left that packet with me I determined that the old one meant him injury; so, when he went, I steamed the package open and destroyed Monsieur Warburg's

message from it. In it he made plain the things which Dennis thought that he remembered.

"Long and long ago Monsieur Tantavul lived in San Francisco. His wife was seven years his junior, and a pretty, joyous thing she was. She bore him two fine children, a little boy and girl, and on them she bestowed the love which he could not appreciate. His business took him often from the city, but when he went away he set a watch on her.

"*Ha*, the eavesdropper seldom hears good tidings of himself, and he who spies on others often wishes that he did not so. His surliness, his evil temper, his reproaches without praise, had driven her to seek release. She met and loved another man, and though she shrank from seeking freedom in that way, at last she yielded to his importunities, and was ready to escape, when Master Bluebeard-Tantavul suddenly returned.

"*Eh bien*, but he had planned a pretty scheme of vengeance! His baby girl he spirited away, gave her for keeping to some Mexicans, then told his wife his plan: He would bring the children up as strangers to each other, and when they grew to full estate he would marry them and keep their consanguinity a secret till they had a child, then break the dreadful truth to them. Thereafter they would live on, bound together for their children's sake, and fearing the world's censure; their consciences would cause them ceaseless torment, and the very love which they had for each other would be like fetters forged of white-hot steel, binding them in a prison-house from which there offered no release.

"When he had told her this his wife went mad, and, heartless as a devil out of hell, he thrust her into an institution, left her there to die, and took his babies with him, moving to New Jersey, and

permitting them to grow to manhood and womanhood together, ceaselessly striving to guide them toward the altar, knowing always that his vengeance would be sated when his vile design had been accomplished."

"But, great heavens, man, they're brother and sister!" I exclaimed in horror.

"Perfectly," he answered coolly. "They are also husband and wife, and father and mother."

"But—but——" I stammered, utterly at a loss for words.

"But me no buts, good friend," he bade. "I know what you would say. Their child? *Ab bab*; consider: Did not the kings of ancient times repeatedly take their own sisters to wife, and were not their offspring sound and healthy? But certainly. Did not both Darwin and Wallace fail to find foundation for the doctrine that cross-breeding between healthy people with clean blood is productive of inferior offspring? Look at the little Monsieur Dennis. Were you not blinded by your silly training and tradition — did you not know his parents' near relationship — you would have no hesitation in pronouncing him an unusually fine and healthy child.

"Besides," he added earnestly, "they love each other, not as brother and sister, but as man and woman. He is her happiness, she is his, and little Monsieur Dennis is the happiness of both. Why destroy this joy—*le bon Dieu* knows they earned it by a joyless childhood!—when I can preserve it for them by simply keeping silent?"

"But——"

"But what you have learned you learned under the seal of your profession," he warned me solemnly. "You can not tell. I will not.

"Meantime" — he poured himself another drink—"I thirst."