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What was the one unfinished task
that kept the phantom genius
earth-bound?



"Mon dieu!"
Fanchon cried.
"The thing is
—hellish!"

The MASTER STROKE

As told to GUY FOWLER

IN the spring of 1929 I came to the United States from Paris, bringing back to his own beloved country the paintings of my friend, the late Bruce Glendon. I kept for myself a single canvas, unfinished at the time of his death ten years before.

The story of Glendon's tragic end in a duel with Jean Fanchon, the art critic, is known even now to only the few who were his most intimate acquaintances. Among them, of course, is Denise Latour, the exquisite model for whom he fought and died that morning in the secluded woods of the Bois.

In the records of the Paris police his death is attributed to accidental shooting by his own hand. Even that is a forgotten episode to all except myself and Jean Fanchon. We two have reason to remember.

It was then, on the morning of Monday, July 18th, as I was preparing to return to Europe, that an *Associated Press* cable appeared in *The New York Times* with arresting news.

This amazing dispatch reported that the ghost of John Singer Sargent, the great American portrait painter, was believed to have returned to haunt his old studio in the Chelsea district of London. The story intrigued me for various reasons.

For one thing I, myself, am an artist of sorts and in my younger days was privileged to know Sargent rather informally. Added to this, of course, was the possibility that in that vague netherworld, the spirit of my friend, Bruce Glendon, might at last have gotten in touch with that of the genius he had so admired in life.

The reliability of *The New York Times*,

as well as of the *Associated Press*, is so well known and generally acknowledged that a hardened skeptic could scarcely question them in a matter of such significance.

I knew, for instance, that the cable was correct when it mentioned the unfinished portrait of Princess Mary, upon which Sargent had been engaged when he died. And by a natural association of ideas, I remembered vividly the one canvas which Glendon had left not quite complete.

The account from London stirred me to the depths. But its true significance was not to overwhelm me until I arrived in Paris, there to learn more of Glendon's greatness in life—and afterward. . . .

I HAVE said that I am an artist. The fact is that I am an unknown failure. Nevertheless, I have continued to maintain the studio in *Notre Dame Des Champs* on the left bank of the Seine, where Glendon shared with me the Bohemian life of our kind.

Accordingly, when my ship landed at Cherbourg, I immediately hastened to these quarters so hallowed by memory.

The familiar disorder greeted me. Glendon had always flung his belongings about with that charming abandon which was so essentially a part of his character. His last canvas stood on the easel covered by a drape. I drew the dusty cloth away and stepped back to study the subject. The significance of the scene was poignant, alive with the sympathetic understanding that was Glendon's greatest asset.

I recalled his words the morning he died. We were standing together before the canvas which yet required the finishing touches of his magic brush. He had titled it ironically—"Peace."

"I saw it once in Flanders, Paul," Glendon had said. "The woman was carrying on. Her man was buried somewhere at the front. She still had the cottage—what was left of it—and the baby."

I studied the scene again with new interest. In the foreground it showed a woman planting a strip of barren earth. She was amber-skinned and the peculiar quality of light which Glendon had worked into the oils was reflected in her tawny eyes. Her peasant dress could not conceal the grace of her body, nor her lowly occupation obscure the glory of her spirit.

In the background a plow horse drooped in the sunlight. The furrows the woman had turned lay open and raw. Close by there was a tree, its trunk and limbs gro-

tesquely severed, as so many were in France after 1914. There was a thatched cottage supported by leaning timbers and in its roof there gaped a shell hole. A child was playing on a heap of straw.

I remembered now how my voice choked when I first saw it.

"Denise Latour was the model supreme, Bruce, was she not?"

He had laughed softly.

"Strange," his voice came back to me again, "that she had exactly that expression in her eyes—that same tragic courage."

The studio, when I first entered it on my return, was heavy with the warmth of Paris in July. Now, suddenly, while I stood before Glendon's canvas the room became oddly chill. I half turned.

A voice like a whisper that was Glendon's spoke in the shadows. I gasped and whirled.

"Steady, old man. Don't be disturbed."

Glendon faced me from the gloom.

"*Mon Dieu!*" I cried out. "You—Bruce—it cannot be!"

He raised his hand in a familiar gesture.

"It is I, Paul. My work—you understand, it is not finished."

"But——"

My voice failed. My body trembled and I felt vaguely ashamed of the uncanny fear that possessed me. Perhaps, I thought swiftly, that story of Sargent had gone to my brain and this was madness.

"Yes," the steady voice wafted on the still air, "it is the same with Sargent, my friend. He, too, left work unfinished. But I—" he hesitated strangely—"I have more than—a painting to consider."

Still I could not speak.

"You can help me, Paul." The shadowy figure moved closer and halted a dozen feet from the canvas.

"I—I will do anything in my power," I managed to say.

"GOOD." The tone lifted. "You can begin here—where I left off." He indicated the unfinished painting.

"I?" My voice rose feebly. "Bruce, I would ruin it. I haven't the talent."

He waved my protest aside with a gesture.

"Come, I shall show you. Later," he turned great somber eyes upon mine, "there is a bigger task. This will give you the trick of it, my friend."

I went to work mechanically. The indistinct shadow stood over my shoulder; the voice gradually soothed me into a vague sort

of coma in which my hand and eyes strangely coordinated.

"A touch of sepia on the shadow of the woman, Paul."

At length I finished. I turned, half expecting to stare into a void, to discover that I had gone mad. But the tall figure remained. He nodded gravely.

"Now the signature."

"But Bruce, you wrote your name. I can't—"

"Just remember the long down stroke on the G. You'll do it."

I bent down to obey. The brush stroked the canvas swiftly. I stared at Glendon's signature done by my hand. It was perfect. It would defy detection by the most skilled art connoisseurs in Europe.

"Excellent."

That calm voice now carried warm approval.

"Say nothing of this, Paul." He stood over me, gazing down at the finished work with friendly eyes. "I will return presently—for a greater purpose."

"Bruce," I dropped the brush and struggled to my feet. "Tell me—"

But the ghostly vision melted into the shadows and vanished. I was alone, staring into the silent depths of the studio. I went to the couch beside the wall and threw myself upon it, exhausted and sick with dread.

When I awakened I went swiftly to the easel. The finished painting, the perfect signature, were convincing proof that I had not been lost in the fantasy of a dream. I determined to exhibit the canvas as the last work by Bruce Glendon, brought to light a decade after his death.

I scarcely need to remind those familiar with art that this Glendon canvas, "Peace," created something of a sensation in Paris. The critics, with a single stunning excep-

tion, were unanimous in their lavish praise.

The one dissenting voice came harshly from Jean Fanchon.

"The subject," he proclaimed curtly, "was too tremendous for the hand that stroked the canvas. Unfortunately, the late Bruce Glendon was swept by his theme into the mediocrity of melodrama. His detail is tiresome and minute."

I READ the words through a mist of rage. The injustice of Fanchon's attack was fiendish. My thoughts swept me back to the scene that morning in the Bois—to the duel between Bruce and Fanchon. I thought, for a desperate moment, of challenging Fanchon myself.

Oddly, as it had on that first occasion, my studio became suddenly cold and fearful. There was an unearthly quality in the draft and again I spun about.

"You must not take it so hard, Paul."

The tall wraith stood between me and the fireplace, yet through the shadowy form I could see the andirons and the metal shafts of the grate.

"I know of a better way, my friend."

He shrugged—a gesture I remembered perfectly.

"I have no interest in the sayings of Jean Fanchon." The voice sounded hollowly in my ears. "But the thing he is doing—that is different!"

My hot rage against Fanchon

gave me a sort of strength. I spoke savagely.

"He is a beast, Bruce. He should be made to suffer."

The ghost of Bruce Glendon came toward me. I knew it for what it was and steeled myself for what was coming.

"Yes," the voice murmured, "he is a beast."

There was a brief silence, so intense that my heart throbbing in my breast, drummed in my ears.

It was this item in the *New York Times* which, as Paul Du Bois says, "stirred him to the depths" and subsequently caused the weird events which are here narrated.

LONDON, July 17 (A.P.)—The ghost of John Singer Sargent, the American artist, in his grave these last two years, has returned to haunt the Chelsea studio where he died, in the belief of the present occupants of the house.

Frequently his footsteps are heard by Alfred Orr, his American artist friend, who took over the studio sixteen months ago. He says that they descend from the second floor workroom to the ground floor room in which Sargent died, and which now is used as a bedroom by Mr. and Mrs. Orr.

The latter also has heard footsteps which she recognized as Sargent's heavy tread. The American master was tall and heavy set and had a distinctive walk known to all his friends in the Chelsea artists' colony. Mr. Orr has no explanation for the mystery other than that Sargent has come back to the studio in which he rose to fame and in which he died while painting a portrait of Princess Mary.

"Sometimes when I hear footsteps," he said, "I call out 'Come in, Pop!'—we all used to call him Pop Sargent—but then they cease and I do not hear them again for several days."

"He has found Denise Latour. It is that which brings me back."

I sprang to my feet.

"I'll kill him, Bruce!"

The gaunt face was lowered so that I could see the thoughtful eyes, the seamed cheeks. He slowly shook his head.

"No, Paul, not that. I have a better way."

I waited in silence.

"To-morrow night," he said, "I will come to you at this hour. We will begin then. Have a canvas on the easel, Paul. Clean my old brushes. We will try an experiment."

THERE crept into the voice a note of triumph that was almost like the quality of joy that always sounded in the old days when Bruce spoke of his work.

"Think over the past," he told me quietly. "Remember how Fanchon and I first quarreled—and why. Then, to-morrow, Paul, I shall have work for you—great work—and later, a story you have never heard."

I shrank back aghast.

"Do you mean, Bruce, that I am to attempt your work again? I tell you, I cannot—"

But the figure already was vanishing, misty as a breath of fog in the wind. The voice floated back distantly.

"Ah, but you can, my friend. I'll see to that."

I sank into my chair beside the easel. What did he mean, I questioned myself, by that admonition to trace the past? I knew, of course, that Bruce had considered the girl, Denise Latour, second only to his work. That was why he had never taken her. Moreover, she was then but a child of seventeen.

"She will always be second to my work," he had said to me. "Nothing can come before it. So you understand, old man, I couldn't subject her to that. It is not enough—a woman must have all."

He had pondered thoughtfully, in wistful sadness, and then added vehemently:

"But I would do anything to save her from Fanchon!"

It was soon after this that the climax came. There were whispers in the boulevard cafés when Bruce and Denise appeared together. Vile whispers they were and baseless, that had originated in some evil mind. Then, on an evening so gentle that it seemed impossible for hatred to exist, Glendon and Fanchon came face to face.

"You are a liar, Fanchon," said Paul abruptly. "Also, you are a poor loser."

The debonair critic had smiled.

"Surely," came his cutting reply, "one may scarcely consider Denise Latour a loss."

"Don't speak her name again. You're not fit!" Glendon's eyes had gleamed like the points of bayonets in the sun. "If I ever hear that you've mentioned her name again, I shall give you a real American beating."

That was the beginning of the tragic end. Those who saw and heard it brought the facts to me as I have described them.

"Bah," Fanchon had sneered, "you forget yourself—you and your model."

Glendon struck swiftly. His open palm left a crimson mark on the critic's cheek. Fanchon stepped back, his narrowed eyes glittering.

"A gentleman," he said, touching his face, "does not fight with a pig. He butchers the beast."

And then Glendon said a cryptic thing. I did not understand it at the time I was told of it, but now I do.

"Perhaps," he replied, smiling, "you remember a pig crawling in the mud."

Fanchon's challenge came in the morning. I was aghast. He was an expert with the pistol and notorious with the foils.

"Bruce" I pleaded, "this is outrageous. We are in the Twentieth Century. Come, let us laugh at him and forget it."

But Glendon only laughed at me instead.

There were five of us in the party, including the surgeon, for whom there was no need. Fanchon, confident and smiling, his second—a man with whom I was unacquainted—Glendon and myself, met in a secluded section of the *Bois* at sunrise.

We had taken precautions to avoid the police. It was agreed that whichever of the two was hit would be carried swiftly to his own quarters. If explanations became necessary, it would be said that the shooting was accidental.

IT was quickly done with. At the signal, Fanchon wheeled and fired. It seemed impossible that he could have sighted along the barrel of his weapon. Bruce faced him stiffly for an instant, smiling.

Then he tossed the pistol aside and fell forward. I caught him and lowered him to the ground. His eyes already were veiled with the curtain of approaching death. He died in my arms before the surgeon could bare the wound.

There was no thought of work in my heart as I awaited the return of that gaunt shadow from the world beyond. I stood before the blank canvas half in fear. It was

much the same as when I sat idle at a table, or at a telephone. I suddenly found myself stroking the expanse of white canvas with crayon. It was done subconsciously, with no thought of subject or design.

From the top of the canvas to the center I swept across in long curving strokes a horizontal arc of shadow. Beneath it I blocked in a heavier darkness, in perpendicular strokes now, which gave the illusion of a black pit in the brooding gloom of night.

My studio was dim in the yellow glow of the gas flame which burned fitfully above my easel. The chill breath of the night struck my back. It was damp, like a fog on the Seine. From the shadows behind me I heard the voice.

"You have it there, Paul. You must deepen the shadows in the foreground. The light must come from overhead, you remember."

I spun about involuntarily. There was nothing to be seen, but the room was full of his presence. Then gradually Bruce appeared. Tonight he wore his old smock as he had when he worked.

"Steady, old man. You have an excellent start. Go on, I shall watch you." The voice was soothing.

I turned to the canvas. My hand was steady enough, though my nerves recoiled and my brain was seething.

Studying the thing I had commenced, I suddenly recognized the blocked mass of crayon shadows for what it represented. Those sweeping horizontal lines became a troubled sky. The deeper shadows in perpendicular strokes now formed a ragged scar in the earth.

"The barbed wire fence in the background, Paul. Just a suggestion, you know."

My hand responded to a power not my own. "Now the figures."

The masterful voice seemed far away and again I felt the dank draft on my back.

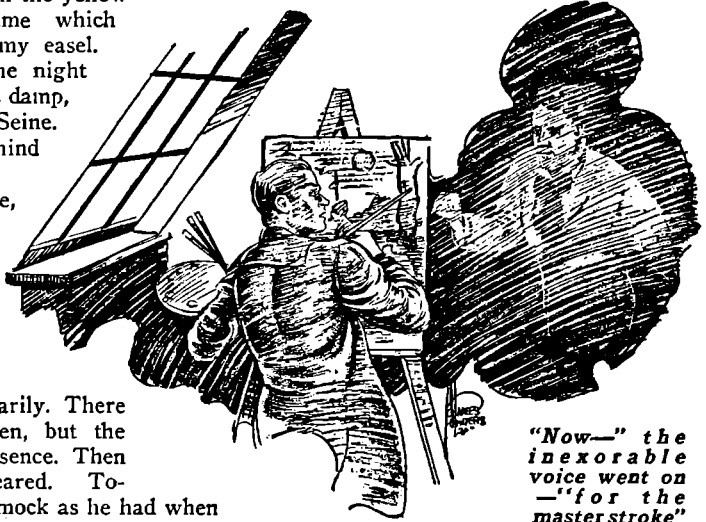
"Watch the lights, Paul. You remember how a bayonet gleams—high up on the blade. Get your shadows low—that's it. You've got it!"

I did not trust myself to speak. Like a man under the spell of a hypnotist I worked on through the night. Sweat poured from

my body. My legs trembled, but my hand, strangely enough, was steadier than it had ever been when I tried to set my own ideas down. There was magic in the crayon and all the while the voice kept drawing the scene as I reproduced it stroke by stroke.

"An excellent beginning, Paul. It will be an amazing thing."

I faced about. Glendon stood thoughtfully with his chin cupped in one hand. My gaze followed his to the sketch. Rough



"Now—the inexorable voice went on—'for the master stroke'"

though it was, I realized that its detail was beyond my talent.

"The figures," he said dreamily, "are not quite true. The one must be inert—no action whatever."

Life seemed to flow into my fingers at the sound and understanding coursed through my whole being.

"THERE is a scattering of papers," the voice suggested. "The man on his knees has been reading them. There is a map sketched on one—a chart of our sector."

I found myself filling in the scene with swift skill.

"That is it, exactly, Paul. You have caught the atmosphere. Now—the color."

"*Mon Dieu!*" I cried. "Color! Do you expect me to lay it on—in the night light?"

The shadowed head bent quickly.

"You have something more than human power tonight. Go on. The whole *motif* is indigo and green. Even their flesh is touched with it."

Driven by a strange force, I again took up palette and brushes. I worked as I had

never done in all my life. My eyes burned and my legs faltered. As the last gray moments of approaching dawn wore on, the insistent voice came nearer.

"That blue is perfect. The green highlights, too. You've got the glitter of the 'Very' light remarkably."

He bent over my shoulder to study the figures in the pit.

"Now," he slowly straightened, "for the master stroke."

I returned to the task. With a genius that was never mine I fashioned the face of the kneeling soldier. Suddenly I cried out and sprang away.

"BRUCE, Bruce, *Mon Dieu!* I am going mad. I have painted—your face!"

"Quite so, Paul. A good likeness, too. Now the other."

Some secret strength stole into my veins and again I bent to the canvas. At length I straightened. My nerves were tingling with some grotesque dread that I could not understand.

Never had I touched brush to canvas with such deft certainty, such sureness in minute detail. Never until now had I been able to make a sheet of stretched rag and a daub of oil become a living thing.

"Those faces," said the voice of Bruce Glendon, "are portraits in miniature. You have put them down as they were, Paul."

I stared at the painted faces. The kneeling figure was Glendon beyond a doubt. The other, likewise in the horizon blue of France, was, to my amazement, indisputably—Fanchon!

"Paul," I gasped. "It is a picture of—treachery! You have made him a— a traitor!"

"Yes," said the voice quietly. "I shall call it—'The Light of Truth'."

My hands fell to my sides.

"No one will believe I did it," I spoke aloud and the voice sounded unlike my own. "Ah, your signature—in the lower left."

I obeyed mechanically.

There it stood, a creation of the nether-world, an amazing thing beyond any inspiration that had ever been mine. Yet it bore my name and my hand had created it. I found the strength to face him.

"Is it—true, Bruce? What am I to do now?"

He continued to study the painting. Directly he turned to me.

"You will ask Fanchon to come here tonight, Paul. Tell him there is a document

that he should see. That will bring him. I shall return."

I sank down into a chair, too overcome for speech.

"*Au revoir*, my friend. You have done well—in a noble cause." The voice broke. "You know, Paul, how much I loved her."

The voice died away as the faint, rose-colored dawn climbed up behind the turrets of *Notre Dame*.

Late in the evening I awakened from the sleep of exhaustion. Haggard and unkempt though I was, I walked across the *Pont Neuf*. A suspicious taxi driver eyed me doubtfully as I gave him Fanchon's address on the *Champs Elysées*. Presently, I was admitted to the luxurious apartment. Fanchon himself met me in the drawing room. He gazed at me questioningly, amused by my appearance.

"You wish to see me, *Monsieur?*" His tone was cool, insolent.

"I have to ask you to my studio," I replied. "There is a certain document you should see. I am unarmed."

I flung my hands out from my sides offering him the opportunity to search me, for I could see that he thought me on the verge of madness.

"You may carry your own weapon. I mean you no harm," I added.

His expression changed. He studied me intently.

"A document," he repeated. "What interest can it have for me?"

"It will have, *Monsieur*."

"Very well, I will go."

We returned to my garret studio in Fanchon's car driven by his chauffeur. He would not trust himself with me alone. His coat pocket bulged sufficiently to indicate the outline of his pistol. We were silent on the journey. I could see that he was immensely curious and a little uneasy.

I PRECEDED him into my shabby quarters. Night had come and the room was in gloom. It smelled of stale tobacco and coffee. Fanchon paused at the threshold. His eyes traveled quickly about, making sure that we were alone. His chauffeur waited just outside, within easy call.

"This document," he demanded curtly.

"Yes," I told him, "in a moment."

He was gazing at the easel over which I had draped a faded shawl from the Orient. The voice of Bruce Glendon seemed to speak in my brain, though his shadowy image was nowhere to be seen.

"Pull down the rag, Paul. Show *Monsieur Fanchon* your masterpiece."

I moved involuntarily. Fanchon too, was startled, but his emotion was caused by my sudden gesture. Swiftly, I drew the shawl from the easel.

Fanchon stood before it transfixed. His body stiffened. For a long minute he stood tense like a carven image. I saw his gaze dart over the canvas from the high white light in the indigo sky down to the shadowed ground and at last to the crater that was a shell hole. As he stared at the faces of the figures there, pale in the greenish glow of that strange light, he gasped.

His eyes caught the scattered papers beside the kneeling figure. His hands clenched at his sides and his face became a mask of agony. He bent down to study the minute tracery of a map on one of the scattered sheets; my work had been that fine in detail. His mouth fell open as he gazed at the face of the kneeling soldier on which there was neither fear, nor pain, but only contempt.

Suddenly Fanchon raised a hand before his eyes. He staggered and with his other hand outflung, braced himself against the wall.

"It is—terrible," he cried. *Mon Dieu*—the thing is—hellish!"

"I thought it a very fine piece of work, *Monsieur*," I spoke quietly. "I had hoped that as a critic you might agree with me."

But Fanchon had no words for the moment. He leaned back against the wall and his little eyes fled from the canvas to my face.

He pointed suddenly to my signature.

"Glendon did this." His voice trembled.

"No," I told him. "It is mine."

"You!" His tone had a quavering note of anguish. "How could you—the likenesses—the scene—"

"But I assure you, *Monsieur*, it is mine."

His shoulders sagged and he clutched at a chair for support. His throat was working convulsively. I became aware again of Glendon's voice as though it spoke inside my brain.

"Warn him, Paul. Now is the time. Tell him he must never see Denise Latour again."

Fanchon was on his knees suddenly, staring at those weird figures in oils. He

raised one hand and shielded his eyes. I bent down and touched his quivering shoulder.

"*Monsieur*," I said quietly, "I have a warning for you."

He looked up at me without attempting to rise. I have never seen a human so abject.

"You must never see *Mademoiselle Latour* again. Have I your promise?"

A moment passed before he grasped the meaning of my words. Then he struggled to his feet.

"Will you then destroy this?" he pointed to the canvas I had just shown to him.

I hesitated.

"Yes," said the voice of Bruce Glendon.

I nodded.

Fanchon's hands clutched at mine. His face was working in a spasm of torture.

"Ah, *Monsieur*, I will do anything—anything—if you will destroy

this—thing!" he answered.

"You will let Denise Latour go her way forever?" I persisted.

"On my honor."

I smiled sardonically.

"Very well, go."

He continued to hold my hand.

"Now, *Monsieur*, now I beg of you, destroy—that thing."

"I have given you my word," I told him sternly. "Very well."

He bowed his head and drew himself up. He started heavily toward the door.

"It is ungodly," he muttered. "It is Glendon's—detail."

I stood alone. The strange glow of the painting seemed to cast a vague unholy radiance. A dank breath of air struck my face. I stared into the shadowed depths and once again was gazing into the brooding eyes of Glendon.

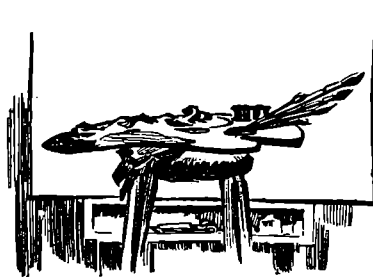
"PAUL," the voice drifted thinly, "you have done well. I shall be in peace now—forever."

"Will he keep his word?" I asked wearily, too exhausted for emotion.

"Yes," there was conviction in the tone. "He will—this time."

I leaned against the wall as Fanchon had done, not entirely certain that I myself was not the victim of some awful nightmare.

"I promised to reveal the story," the voice added. "the story of—our painting."



"Yes," I breathed as I sank into a chair. There was a lingering silence before he spoke again.

"You knew, of course, that Fanchon was a lieutenant in my regiment?"

"Yes." I recalled that Bruce had become a sergeant in the French infantry early in 1914.

"Naturally," he resumed in a reminiscent tone, "we had a great deal in common. He knew everything about art. I had high hopes, if I got out of the mess with my hands and eyes unmarred. That was before the States came into the war at all."

I WATCHED his face in the shadows. His head was bowed and he seemed old and worn by the memory.

"I was at a listening post alone." He seemed to be back again in the rumble of artillery, the harsh rattle of machine guns and the hell of the front line.

"You remember how it was out there, Paul. Anything that crawled got your attention instantly."

I nodded swiftly, remembering.

"Well," he resumed, "I heard something crawling. I watched in the 'Very' lights and directly I saw it."

The air in the studio was vibrant as I waited for him to go on.

"The fellow was crawling on his belly like a lizard. He was going toward the enemy lines. In the mud and slime he was coated so thickly that I couldn't make out his uniform. He might have been a German getting back to his trench—or one of our men reconnoitering."

Again he paused.

"Anyway," he resumed, "the thing was taken out of my hands. A light flared up and a sniper caught him. He rolled over in the mud and squealed. I went out to get him—to make sure."

I stared up to find those burning eyes on mine.

"It was Fanchon. I managed to drag him into a shell-hole. But a sniper got me while I was doing it. Not bad, though. I tore Fanchon's blouse away to examine his wound. It was in his chest. Some papers fell from his pocket."

I saw the shoulders beneath the filmy cov-

ering move in a contemptuous shrug. The voice resumed.

"He was babbling—in German. Thought he was in their lines. I looked at the papers under a 'Very' light. There was a map of our sector. Figures on our strength and all that. For a moment I thought of letting him have another bullet—but I didn't. I destroyed the papers."

Now the ghostly voice came in broken jerky sentences, staccato and harsh.

"After all—he had been my friend. I started back—dragging him. We got across finally. I fainted as we fell over the sand-bags."

I stared at him in shocked realization.

"Fanchon and I landed in the same base hospital," he added. "Denise Latour," he halted over the name, "was a student nurse."

He shrugged again.

"The rest you know, Paul. I've never told anyone. You see now, why Fanchon was so anxious to put me out of the way."

"*Mon Dieu!*" The exclamation burst from my lips. "But tell me," I begged, "why have you protected him these ten years—and before?"

"Because, my friend, it was a slip. He was never a traitor again. And I thought, at first, that he loved Denise—purely. I knew, you understand, that I could never have her. I did not wish to betray him and ruin her. Do you understand?"

Slow comprehension flooded my brain.

"Then only when you knew that he was evil—that he meant to harm her—you did this?" I indicated the canvas.

"Exactly, Paul. And that is why Fanchon will keep his word. He knows I did it."

There was silence.

"And that," said the voice wearily, "is all. You have done me a great service, Paul. And now, *mon ami*—farewell. . . ."

I was staring into the blank gloom. I tried to speak, but words choked in my throat. My eyes were blinded with sudden tears. The phantom figure had vanished.

Very deliberately, then, I picked up a scalpel knife from the tray. Its glittering blade reflected the greenish light that flooded from the painting. I ran the steel through the canvas and struck downward.

I have done no painting since.

