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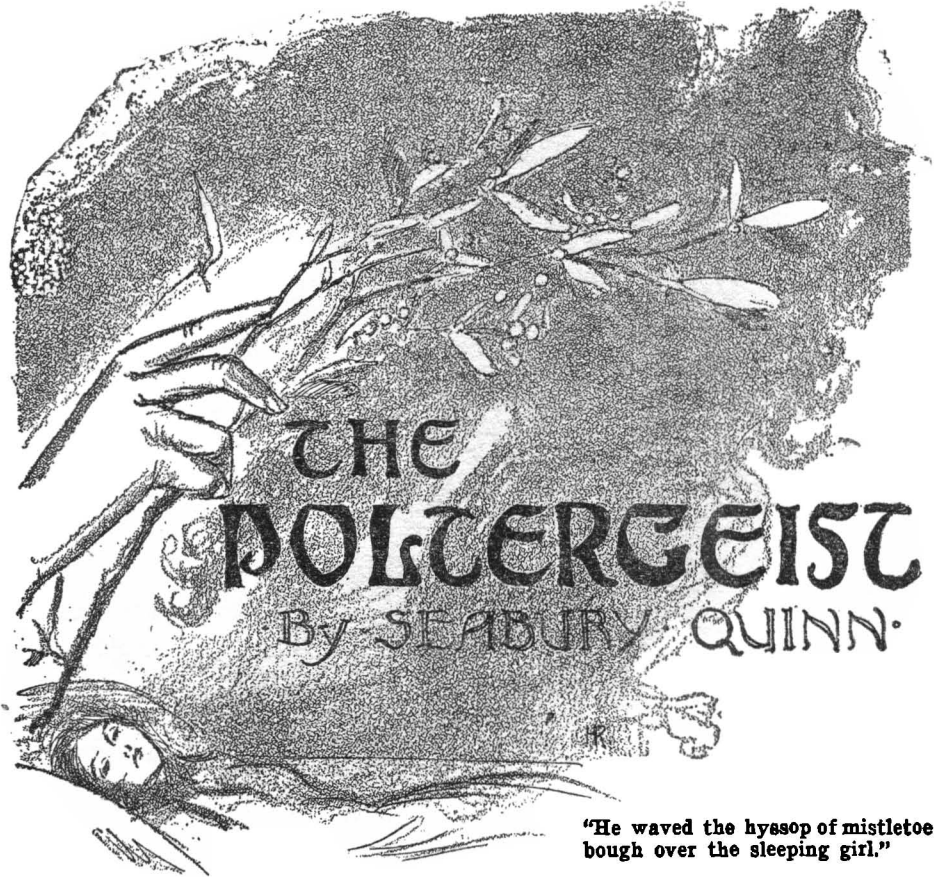
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"He waved the hyasop of mistletoe bough over the sleeping girl."

"AND so, Dr. de Grandin," our visitor concluded, "this is really a case for your remarkable powers."

Jules de Grandin selected a fresh cigarette from his engine-turned silver case, tapped its end thoughtfully against his well-manicured thumbnail and regarded the caller with one of his disconcertingly unwinking stares. "Am I to understand that all other attempts to effect a cure have failed, *Monsieur*?" he asked at length.

"Utterly. We've tried everything in reason, and out of it," Captain Loudon replied. "We've had some of the best neurologists in consulta-

tion, we've employed faith-healers, spiritualistic mediums, even had her given 'absent treatment', all to no avail. All the physicians, all the cultists and quacks have failed us; now——"

"Now, I do not think I care to be numbered among those quacks, *Monsieur*," the Frenchman returned coldly, expelling a double column of smoke from his nostrils. "Had you called me into consultation with an accredited physician——"

"But that's just it," the captain interrupted. "Every physician we've had has been confident he could work a cure, but they've all failed. Julia is a lovely girl—I don't say it because

she's my daughter, I state it as a fact—and was to have been married this fall, and now this—this disorder has taken complete possession of her and it's wrecking her life. Robert—Lieutenant Proudfit, her fiancé—and I are almost beside ourselves, and as for my daughter, I fear her mind will give way and she'll destroy herself unless *somebody* can do *something!*"

"Ah!" the little Frenchman arched the narrow black brows which were such a vivid contrast to his blond hair and mustache. "Why did not you say so before, *Monsieur le Capitaine?* It is not merely the curing of one nervous young lady that you would have me undertake, but the fruition of a romance I should bring about? *Bien*, good, very well; I accept. If you will also retain my good friend Dr. Trowbridge, so that there shall be a locally licensed and respected physician in the case, my powers which you have been kind enough to call remarkable are entirely at your disposal."

"Splendid!" Captain Loudon agreed, rising. "Then it's all arranged. I can expect you to——"

"One moment, if you please," de Grandin interrupted, raising his slender, womanishly small hand for silence. "Suppose we make a *précis* of the case before we go further." He drew a pad of note-paper and a pencil toward him as he continued:

"Your daughter, Mademoiselle Julie, how old is she?"

"Twenty-nine."

"A most charming age," the little Frenchman commented, scribbling a note. "And she is your only child?"

"Yes."

"Now, these manifestations of the *outré*, these so unusual happenings, they began to take place about six months ago?"

"Just about; I can't place the time exactly."

"No matter. They have assumed various mystifying forms? She has

refused food, she has had visions, she shouts, she sings uncontrollably, she speaks in a voice which is strange to her—at times she goes into a death-like trance and from her throat issue strange voices, voices of men, or other women, even of little children?"

"Yes."

"And other apparently inexplicable things occur. Chairs, books, tables, even such heavy pieces of furniture as a piano, move from their accustomed places when she is near, and bits of jewelry and other small objects are hurled through the air?"

"Yes, and worse than that, I've seen pins and needles fly from her work-basket and bury themselves in her cheeks and arms," the captain interrupted, "and lately she's been persecuted by scars—scars from some invisible source. Great weals, like the claw-marks from some beast, have appeared on her arms and face, right while I looked on, and I've been wakened at night by her screams, and when I rush into her room I find the marks of long, thin fingers on her throat. It's maddening, sir; terrifying. I'd say it was a case of demoniacal possession, if I didn't disbelieve all that sort of supernaturalism."

"U'm," de Grandin looked up from the pad on which he had been industriously scribbling. "There is nothing in the world, or out of it, which is supernatural, my friend; the wisest man today can not say where the powers and possibilities of nature begin or end. We say, 'Thus and so is beyond the bounds of our experience,' but does that therefore put it beyond the bounds of nature? I think not. Myself, I have seen such things as no man can hear me relate without calling me a liar, and my good, unimaginative friend Trowbridge has witnessed such wonders as no writer of fiction would dare set down on paper, yet I do declare we have never yet seen that which I would call supernatural."

"But come, let us go, let us hasten to your house, *Monsieur*; I would interview Mademoiselle Julie and see for myself some of these so remarkable afflictions of hers.

"Remember," he turned his fixed, unwinking stare on our patron as we paused for our outdoor things in the hall, "remember, if you please, *Monsieur*, I am not like those quacks, or even those other physicians who have failed you. I do not say I can work a cure. I can but promise to try. Good, we shall see what we shall see. Let us go."

ROBERT BEAUREGARD LOUDON was a retired navy captain, a widower with more than sufficient means to gratify his rather epicurean tastes, and possessed one of the finest houses in the fashionable new west side suburb. The furnishings spoke of something more than wealth as we surveyed them; they proclaimed that vague, but nevertheless tangible thing known as "background" which is only to be had from generations of ancestors to the manor born. Original pieces of mahogany by Sheraton and Chippendale and the Brothers Adam, family portraits from the brush of Benjamin West, silver in the best tradition of the early Eighteenth Century smiths, even the dignifiedly aloof, elderly colored butler, announced that our patient's father was in every way an officer and a gentleman in the best sense of the term.

"If you will give Hezekiah your things," Captain Loudon indicated the solemn old negro with a nod, "I'll go up and tell my daughter you're here. I know she will be glad to——"

A clanking, banging noise, like a tin can bumping over the cobbles at the tail of some luckless terrier, interrupted his remarks, and we turned in amazement toward the wide, curving staircase at the farther end of the

long central hall. The noise grew louder, almost deafening, then ceased as abruptly as it began, and a young girl rounded the curve of the staircase, coming slowly toward us.

She was more than middle height, slender and supple as a willow with, and carried herself with the bearing of a young princess. A lovely though almost unfashionably long gown of white satin and chiffon draped its uneven hem almost to her ankles, and about her slender bare shoulders and over her arms hung a richly embroidered shawl of Chinese silk. One hand rested lightly on the mahogany rail of the balustrade, as though partly for support, partly for guidance, as she slowly descended the red-carpeted steps. This much we saw at first glance, but our second look remained riveted on her sweet, pale face.

Almost unbeautifully long it was, pale with the rich, creamy pallor which is some women's birthright and not the result of poor health, and her vivid, scarlet lips showed in contrast to her ivory cheeks like a rose fallen in the snow. Brows as delicate as those of a French doll, narrow, curving brows which needed no plucking to accentuate their patrician lines, dipped sharply together above the bridge of her small nose, and lashes which even at the distance we stood from her showed their vivid blackness veiled her eyes. At first I thought her gaze was on the steps before her, and that she made each forward movement with slow care lest she fall from weakness or nervous exhaustion, but a second's scrutiny of her face told me the truth. The girl walked with lowered lids. Whether in natural sleep or in some supernatural trance, she was descending the stairs with tightly closed eyes.

"*La pauvre petite.*" de Grandin exclaimed under his breath, his gaze fixed on her. "*Grand Dieu.* Friend Trowbridge, but she is beautiful! Why did I not come here before?"

Out of the empty air, apparently some six feet above the girl's proudly poised head, a burst of mocking, maniacal laughter answered him, and from the thick-piled carpet suddenly rose again the clang-bang racket we had heard before she came into view.

"*Hélas!*" De Grandin turned a pitying glance on the girl's father, then: "*Nom de Dieu!*" he cried, ducking his head suddenly and looking over his shoulder with rounded eyes. Against the wall of the apartment, some twenty feet distant, there hung a stand of arms, one or two swords, a spear and several bolos, trophies of the captain's service in the Philippines. As though seized by an invisible hand, one of the bolos had detached itself from the wall, hurtled whistling through the air and embedded itself nearly an inch deep in the white wainscoting behind the little Frenchman, missing his cheek by the barest fraction of a centimeter as it flew whirring past.

The clanking tumult beneath the girl's feet subsided as quickly as it commenced, she took an uncertain step forward and opened her eyes. They were unusually long, purple rather than blue in color, and held such an expression of changeless melancholy as I had never seen in one so young. It was the look of one foredoomed to inescapable death by an incurable disease.

"Why"—she began with the bewildered look of one suddenly roused from sleep—"why—Father! What am I doing here? I was in my room, lying down, when I thought I heard Robert's voice. I tried to get up, but 'It' held me down, and I think I fell asleep. I——"

"Daughter," Captain Loudon spoke gently, the sobs very near the surface, for all his iron self-control, "these gentlemen are Dr. de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge. They've come to——"

"Oh," the girl made an impatient

gesture which yet seemed somewhat languid, as though even remonstrance were useless, "more doctors! Why did you bring them, Father? You know they'll be just like all the rest. Nothing can help me—nothing seems any good!"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin bent forward in a formal, European bow, heels together, elbows stiffly at sides, "but I think you will find us most different from the rest. To begin, we come to cure you and give you back to the man you love; and in the second place, I have a personal interest in this case."

"A personal interest?" she inquired, acknowledging his bow with a negligent nod.

"*Morbleu,* but I have. Did not the—the thing which troubles you, hurl a bolo-knife at me? *Sacré nom,* no *fantôme,* no *lutin* shall throw knives at Jules de Grandin, then boast of the exploit to his ghostly fellows. *Nom d'un petit Chinois,* I think we shall show them something before we are finished!

"**N**ow, *Mademoiselle,* we must ask your pardon for these questions," he began when he had reached the drawing room. "To you it is an old and much-told tale, but we are ignorant of your case, save for such information as your father has imparted. Tell us, if you please, when did these so strange manifestations begin?"

The girl regarded him silently a moment, her brooding, plum-colored eyes staring almost resentfully into his agate-blue ones.

"It was about six months ago," she began in a lifeless monotone, like a child reciting a rote-learned but distasteful lesson. "I had come home from a dance in New York with Lieutenant Proudfit, and it must have been about 3 o'clock in the morning, for we had not left New York until midnight, and our train was delayed

by a heavy sleet-storm. Lieutenant Proudfit was stopping overnight with us, for we are—we were—engaged, and I had said good-night to him and gone to my room when it seemed I heard something fluttering and tapping at my window, like a bird attracted by the light, or—I don't know what made me think so, but I got the impression, somehow—a bat beating its wings against the panes.

"I remember being startled by the noise, at first, then I was overcome with pity for the poor thing, for it was bitter cold outside and the sleet was driving down like whiplashes with the force of the east wind. I went over to the window and opened it to see what was outside. I"—she hesitated a moment, then went forward with her narrative—"I was partly undressed by this time, and the cold wind blowing through the open window cut like a knife, but I looked out into the storm to see if I could find the bird, or whatever it was."

"Ah?" de Grandin's little eyes were sparkling with suppressed excitement, but there was neither humor nor warmth in their flash. Rather, they were like two tiny pools of clear, adamant-hard ice reflecting a cloudless winter sky and bright, cold winter sunshine. "Proceed, if you please," he commanded, his voice utterly toneless. "You did open your window to the tapping which was outside. And what did you next?"

"I looked out and said, 'Come in, you poor creature!'" the girl replied. "Even though I thought it was a bat at the pane, my reason told me it couldn't be, for bats aren't about in the dead of winter, and if it had been one, much as I hate the things, I couldn't have slept with the thought of its being outside in my mind."

"Ah?" de Grandin repeated, his voice raised slightly in interrogation. "And so you did invite what was outside to come in?" Level as his tone

was, there was a certain pointedness in the way he spoke the words, almost as though they were uttered in faintly shocked protest.

"Of course," she returned. "I know it was silly for me to speak to a bird that way, as if it could understand, but, you know, we often address animals in that way. At any rate, I might have saved myself the chilling I got, for there was nothing there. I waited several minutes till the cold wind almost set my teeth to chattering, but nothing was visible outside, and there were no further flutterings at the window."

"Probably not," the Frenchman commented dryly. "What then, please?"

"Why, nothing—right away. It seemed as though the room had become permanently chilled, though, for even after I'd closed the window the air was icy cold, and I had to wrap my dressing gown about me while I made ready for bed. Then——" She stopped with an involuntary shudder.

"Yes, and then?" he prompted, regarding her narrowly while his lean white fingers tapped a devil's tattoo on his chair arm.

"Then the first strange thing happened. As I was slipping my gown off, I distinctly felt a hand grasp me about the upper arm—a long, thin, deathly cold hand!"

She looked up defiantly, as though expecting some skeptical protest, but: "Yes," he nodded shortly. "And after that?"

The girl regarded him with a sort of wonder. "You believe me—believe I actually felt something grasp me?" she asked incredulously.

"Have you not said so, *Mademoiselle*?" he returned a thought irritably. "Proceed, please."

"But every other doctor I've talked to has tried to tell me I didn't—couldn't have *actually felt* such a thing," she persisted.

"*Mademoiselle!*" the little man's annoyance cut through the habitual courtesy with which he treated members of the gentler sex as a flame cuts through wax. "We do waste time. We are discussing you and your case, not the other physicians or their methods. They have failed. We shall give them none of our valuable time. *Bien*. You were saying——"

"That I felt a long, cold hand grasp me about the arm, and a moment later, before I had a chance to cry out or even shrink away, something began scratching my skin. It was like a long, blunt fingernail—a human nail, not the claw of an animal, you understand. But it had considerable force behind it, and I could see the skin turning white in its wake. Dr. de Grandin"—she leaned forward, staring with wide, frightened eyes into his face—"the welts *formed letters!*"

"U'm?" he nodded unexcitedly. "You do recall what they spelled?"

"They didn't spell anything. It was like the ramblings of a Ouija board when the little table seems wandering about from letter to letter without spelling any actual words. I made out a crude, printed *D*, then a smaller *r*, then an *a*, and finally a *c* and *u*—*D-r-a-c-u*. That was all. You see, it wasn't a word at all."

De Grandin was sitting forward on the extreme edge of his chair, his hands grasping its arms as though he were about to leap from his seat. "*Dracu*," he repeated softly to himself, then, still lower, "*Dieu de Dieu!* It is possible; but why?"

"Why, what is it?" the girl demanded, his tense attitude reflecting itself in her widened eyes and apprehensive expression.

He shook himself like a spaniel emerging from the water. "It is nothing, *Mademoiselle*," he assured her with a resumption of his professionally impersonal manner. "I did think I recognized the word, but I

fear I must have been mistaken. You are sure there were no other letters?"

"Positive. That was all; just those five, no more."

"Quite yes. And after that?"

"After that all sorts of terrible things began happening to me. Father has told you how chairs and tables rise up when I come near them, and how little objects fly through the air?"

He nodded, smiling. "But of course," he returned, "and I, myself, did see one little thing fly through the air. *Parbleu*, it did fly unpleasantly close to my head! And these so strange sleeps you have?"

"They come on me almost any time, mostly when I'm least expecting them. One time I was seized with one while on the train and"—her face flushed bright coral at the recollection—"and the conductor thought I was *drunk!*"

"*Bête!*" de Grandin murmured. "And you have not heard the voices—the noises which sometimes accompany you, *Mademoiselle?*"

"No, I've been told of them; but I know nothing of what occurs while I'm in one of these trances. I don't even dream; at least, I have no dreams I can remember when I wake up. I only know that I am apt to fall asleep at any time, and frequently wander about while unconscious, waking up in some totally different place. Once I walked half-way to the city while asleep, and narrowly escaped being run down by a taxicab when I came to in the middle of the street."

"But this is villainous!" he burst out. "This is infamous; this must not be allowed. *Mordieu*, I shall not permit it!"

Something of the girl's weary manner returned as she asked, "How are you going to stop it? The others all said——"

"*Chut!* The others! We shall not discuss them, if you please, *Mademoi-*

selle. Me, I am not as the others; I am Jules de Grandin!

"First, my friend," he turned to me, "I would that you obtain a competent nurse, one whose discretion is matched only by her ability. You know one such? *Très bien*. Hasten, rush, fly to procure her at once. Bid her come to us with all celerity and be prepared to serve until relieved.

"Next"—he seized a pad and scribbled a prescription—"I would that *Monsieur le Capitaine* has this filled and administers one dose dissolved in hot water at once. It is somnol, a harmless mixture of drugs, pleasant to the taste and of undoubted efficacy in this case. It will act better than chloral."

"But I don't want to take chloral," the girl protested. "I have enough trouble with sleep as it is; I want something to ward off sleep, not to induce it."

"*Mademoiselle*," he replied with something like a twinkle in his keen little eyes, "have you never heard of combating the devil with flames? Take the medicine as directed. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall return soon, and we shall not rest until we have produced a cure, never doubt it."

"THIS is the strangest case I ever saw," I confided as we drove toward town. "The girl's symptoms all point to hysteria of the most violent sort, but I'm hanged if I can account for those diabolical noises which accompanied her down the stairs, or that laugh we heard when she reached the hall, or——"

"Or the knife which nearly split the head of Jules de Grandin?" he supplied. "No, my friend, I fear medical science can not account for those things. Me, I see part of it, but not all, *parbleu*, not near enough. Do you recall the ancient medical theory concerning icterus?"

"Jaundice?"

"But of course."

"You mean it used to be considered a disease, rather than a symptom?"

"Precisely. One hundred, two hundred years ago the craft knew the yellow color of the patient's skin was due to diffused bile in the system, but what caused the diffusion? Ah, that was a question left long unanswered. So it is with this poor girl's case. Me, I recognize the symptoms, and some of their cause is plain to me, but—ten thousand little red devils!—why? Why should she be the object of this persecution? One does not open a window in the wintertime to bid a non-existent bat or bird enter one's house, only to fall victim to such tricks as have plagued *Mademoiselle Loudon* since that winter's night. No, *morbleu*, there was a reason for it, the thing which tapped at her pane, being outside that night, Friend Trowbridge, and the writing on her arm, that too, came not without cause!"

I listened in amazement to his tirade, but one of his statements struck a responsive chord in my memory. "You spoke of 'writing' on her arm, de Grandin," I interposed. "When she described it I thought you seemed to recognize some connection between the incomplete word and her symptoms. Is 'dakboo' a complete word, or the beginning of one?"

"*Dracu*," he corrected shortly. "Yes, my friend, it is a word. It is Rumanian for devil, or, more properly, demon. You begin to see the connection?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do," I retorted.

"So am I," he replied laconically, and lapsed into moody silence from which my best attempts at conversation failed to rouse him.

LULLED into counterfeit rest by the drug de Grandin prescribed, Julia Loudon passed the night comfortably enough, and seemed brighter

and happier when we called to interview her next morning.

"*Mademoiselle*," de Grandin announced, after the usual medical mummery of taking temperature and pulse had been completed, "the day is fine. I prescribe that you go for a drive this morning; indeed, I strongly urge that you accompany Dr. Trowbridge and me forthwith. He has a number of calls to make, and I would observe what effect the fresh air has upon you. I venture to say you have had little enough of it lately."

"I haven't," the girl confessed. "You see, since that time when I wandered off in my sleep, I've been afraid to go anywhere by myself, and I've even shrunk from going out with Father or Rob—Lieutenant Proudfit. I've been afraid of embarrassing them by one of my seizures. But it will be all right for me to go if you and Dr. Trowbridge are along, I know," she smiled wistfully at him.

"Of a surety," he agreed, twisting the ends of his trim little blond mustache. "Have no fear, dear lady; I shall see no harm comes to you. Make haste, we would be off."

Miss Loudon turned to mount the stairs, a suggestion of freedom and returning health in the spring of her walk, and de Grandin turned a puzzled countenance to Captain Loudon and me. "Your daughter's case is far simpler than I had supposed, *Monsieur le Capitaine*," he announced. "So much I have been accustomed to encountering what unthinking persons call the supernatural that I fear I have become what you Americans call 'hipped' on the subject. Now, when first *Mademoiselle* detailed her experiences to me, I was led to certain conclusions which, happily, have not seemed justified by what we have since observed. Medicine is helpful in most cases of the kind, but I had feared——"

A perfect pandemonium of cacophonous dissonances, like the braying of half a dozen jazz bands suddenly gone crazy, interrupted his speech. Clattering tin cans, jangling cowbells, the wailings of tortured fiddles and discordant shrieks of wood-wind instruments all seemed mingled with shouts of wild, demoniac laughter as a bizarre figure emerged in view at the turn of the stairs and half leaped, half fell to the hall.

For an instant I failed to recognize patrician Julia Loudon in the grotesque thing before us. Her luxuriant black hair had escaped from the Grecian coronel in which she habitually wore it and hung fantastically about her breast and shoulders, half veiling, half disclosing a face from which every vestige of serenity had disappeared and on which a leer—no other word expresses it—of mingled craft and cunning and idiotic stupidity sat like a toad enthroned upon a fungus. She was barearmed and barelegged; indeed, the only garment covering her supple, white body was a Spanish shawl wound tightly about bust and torso, its fringed ends dragging over the floor behind her flying feet as she capered like a female satyr across the hall drugget to the bedlam accompaniment of infernal noises which seemed to hover over her like a swarm of poisonous flies above a wounded animal struggling through the mire of a swamp.

"*Ai, ai, ai-ee!*" she cried in a raucous voice, bending this way and that in time to the devilish racket. "Behold my work, foolish man, behold my mastery! Fool that you are, to try to take mine from me! Today I shall make this woman a scandal and disgrace, and tonight I shall require her life. *Ai, ai, ai-ee!*"

For a fleeting instant de Grandin turned an appalled face to me, and I met his flying glance with one no less

surprized, for the voice issuing from the girl's slender throat was not her own. No tone or inflection of it was reminiscent of Julia Loudon. Every shrilling syllable spoke of a different individual, a personality instinct with evil vivacity as hers seemed instinct with sweetness and melancholy.

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin exclaimed between set teeth, springing toward the girl, then halting in horrified amazement as though congealed to ice in his tracks. From every side of the room, like flickering beams of light, tiny bits of metal flew toward the girl's swaying body, and in an instant her arms, legs, throat, even her cheeks, were encrusted with glittering pins and needles buried point-deep in her creamy skin like the torture-implements driven into the bodies of the pain-defying fakirs of India. Almost it seemed as though the girl had suddenly become a powerful electro-magnet to which every particle of movable metal in the apartment had leaped.

For an instant she stood swaying there, the cruel points embedded in her flesh, yet seemingly causing no pain, then a wild, heart-rending shriek broke from her lips, and her eyes opened wide in sudden terror and consternation. Instantly it was apparent she had regained consciousness, realized her position, her almost complete nudity and the biting, stinging points of the countless needles all at once.

"Quick, Trowbridge, my friend!" de Grandin urged, leaping forward. "Take her, my old one. Do not permit her to fall—those pins, they will surely impale her if she drops."

Even as I seized the fainting girl in my arms, the Frenchman was furiously garnering the pins from her flesh, cursing volubly in mingled French and English as he worked.

"*Parbleu,*" he swore, "it is the devil's work, of a surety. By damn, I shall have words to say to this ac-

cursed *dracu* who sticks pins in young ladies and throws knives at Jules de Grandin!"

Following him, I bore the swooning girl up the stairs, placed her on her bed and turned furiously in search of the nurse. What could the woman have been thinking of to let her patient leave her room in such a costume? "Miss Stanton," I called angrily. "Where are you?"

A muffled sound, half-way between a scream and an articulate cry, and a faint, ineffectual tap-tap on the door of the closet answered me. Snatching the door of the clothes-press open, I found her lying on the floor, half smothered by fallen dresses, her mouth gagged by a Turkish towel, wrists tied behind her and ankles lashed together with knotted silk stockings.

"A-a-ah, oh!" she gasped as I relieved her of her fetters and helped her, half fainting, to her feet. "It took me, Dr. Trowbridge. I was helpless as a baby in its hands."

De Grandin looked up from his ministrations to Julia Loudon. "What was the 'It' which took you, *Mademoiselle?*" he inquired, folding back the shawl from the girl's injured limbs and deftly showing her beneath the bedclothes. "Was it *Mademoiselle Loudon?*"

"No!" the nurse gasped, her hands still trembling with fright and nervousness. "Oh, no, not Miss Loudon, sir. It was—I don't know what. Miss Loudon came upstairs a few moments ago and said you and Dr. Trowbridge were taking her motoring, and she must change her clothes. She began removing her house dress, but kept taking off her garments until she was—she was——" she hesitated a moment, catching her breath in long, laboring gasps.

"*Mordieu,* yes!" de Grandin cut in testily. "We do waste time, *Mademoiselle*. She did remove her cloth-

ing until she was what? Completely nude?"

"Yes," the nurse replied with a shudder. "I was about to ask her if she needed to change *all* her clothes, when she turned and looked at me, and her face was like the face of a devil, sir. Then something seemed to come down on me like a wet blanket. No, not like a blanket, either. It clung to me and bore me down, and smothered me all at once, but it was transparent, sir. I could feel it, but I couldn't see it. It was like a—like a terrible, big jelly-fish, sir. It was cold and slimy and strong, strong as a hundred giants. I tried to call out, and it oozed into my mouth—choked me; ugh!" She shuddered at the recollection. "Then I must have fainted, for the next thing I knew everything was dark, and I heard Dr. Trowbridge calling me, so I tried to call out and kicked as hard as I could, and——"

"And *voilà*—here you are!" de Grandin interrupted. "I marvel not you are *nerveuse*, *Mademoiselle Cordieu*, are we not all so?"

"Attend me, Trowbridge, my friend," he commanded, "do you remain with *Mademoiselle Stanton* and the patient. Me, I shall go below and procure three drinks of brandy for us—yes, *morbleu*, four I shall obtain, for one I shall drink myself immediately, right away, at once, before I return. Meantime, watch well *Mademoiselle Julie*, for I think she will require much watching before all is done."

A moment later the clatter of his heels sounded on the polished boards of the hall floor as he hastened below stairs in search of stimulant.

"IT IS damnable, damnable, my friends!" the little Frenchman cried a few moments later as he, Captain Loudon and I conferred in the lower hall. "This *poltergeist*, it has complete possession of the poor

Mademoiselle Julie, and it has manifested itself to *Mademoiselle Stanton*, as well. *Pardieu*, if we but knew whence it comes, and why, we might better be able to combat it; but all, all is mystery. It comes, it wreaks havoc, and it remains. *Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" He strode fiercely back and forth across the rug, twisting first one, then the other end of his diminutive mustache until I thought he would surely drag the hairs from his lip.

"If only we could——" he began again, striding across the hall and bringing up before a buhl cabinet which stood between two low windows. "If only we could—ah! What—who is this, *Monsieur le Capitaine*, if you please?"

His slender, carefully manicured forefinger pointed to an exquisite little miniature which stood in a gold easel-frame on the cabinet's top.

Looking over his shoulder, I saw the picture of a young girl, black-haired, oval-faced, purple-eyed, her red lips showing against the pallor of her face almost like a wound in healthy flesh. There was a subtle something of difference—more in expression than in feature—from the original, nevertheless I recognized the likeness as a well-executed portrait of *Julia Loudon*, though it had been made, I imagined, several years earlier. "Why," I exclaimed in astonishment at his question, "why, it's *Miss Loudon*, de *Grandin!*"

Ignoring my remark, he kept his fixed, unwinking stare upon the captain, repeating, "This lady, *Monsieur*, she is who?"

"It's a picture of my niece, *Julia's* cousin," Captain Loudon returned shortly; then: "Don't you think we could occupy our time better than with trifles like that? My daughter——"

"Trifles, *Monsieur!*" de Grandin cut in. "There are *no* trifles in a case such as this. All, all is of the

importance. Tell me of this young lady, if you please. There is a so remarkable resemblance, yet a look in the eyes which is not the look of your daughter. I would know much of her, if you please."

"She was my niece, Anna Wassilko," the captain replied. "That picture was made in St. Petersburg—Petrograd—or Leningrad, as it is called now—before the World War."

"Ah?" de Grandin stroked his mustache gently, as though making amends for the furious pulling to which he had subjected it a moment before. "You did say 'was', *Monsieur*. May I take it, then, that she 'is' no more?" He cast a speculative glance at the portrait again, then continued: "And her name, so different from yours, yet her appearance so like your daughter's. Will you not explain?"

Captain Loudon looked as though he would like to wring the inquisitive little Frenchman's neck, but complied with his request instead. "My wife was a Rumanian lady," he began, speaking with evident annoyance. "I was stationed for duty at our legation at Bukharest in 1895, and there I met my wife, who was a Mademoiselle Seracki. I was married before returning to floating service, and my wife's twin sister, Zoë, married Leonidas Wassilko, a young officer attached to the Russian embassy, about the same time.

"Things were beginning to move a little, even in those days. One or two near-quarrels with European nations over the Monroe Doctrine had warned even the lunkheads at Washington that we'd best be getting some sort of navy in the water, and there was no time for a protracted honeymoon after our marriage. I had to leave my bride of two months and report for duty to the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. Anna, my wife, stayed on at Bukharest for a time, then moved from one port to

another along the European coast so as to be fairly near me when I could get infrequent furloughs. Finally I was moved to the China station, and she went to live with her sister and brother-in-law at St. Petersburg. Our baby Julia and their little girl, Anna, were born on the same day and resembled each other even more than their mothers did.

"Following the Spanish War and my transfer to home service, my wife divided her time between America and Europe, spending almost as much time in Russia as she did in Washington. Julia and Anna were educated together in a French convent and later went to the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg.

"Anna joined up as a nurse in the Russian Red Cross at the outbreak of the World War, and was in Franco when the Revolution broke. That probably saved her life. Both her parents were shot by the Bolsheviks as reactionaries, and she came to live with us after the Armistice.

"Somehow, she didn't take very well to American ways, and when Robert—Lieutenant Proudfit—came along and began paying court to Julia, Anna seemed to take it as a sort of personal affront. Seems she had some sort of fool idea she and Julie were more than cousins, and ought to remain celibate to devote their lives to each other. To tell the truth, though, I rather fancy she was more than a little taken by Proudfit herself, and when he preferred Julia to her—well, it didn't please her any too much."

"Ah?" de Grandin breathed, a trace of the heat-lightning flash which betokened excitement showing in his cool eyes. "And Mademoiselle Anna, she is——"

"She—died, poor child," Loudon responded.

"She did commit suicide?" the Frenchman's words were so low we could scarcely hear them.

"I didn't say that," the captain returned coldly.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur le Capitaine,*" the other shot back, "but you did not say otherwise, and the pause before you mentioned her death—surely that was something more than a tribute of momentary regret?"

"Humph! Yes, you're right. The poor youngster committed suicide by drowning herself about six months ago."

"Six months, did you say?" the little Frenchman's face was so near his host's that I feared the spike of his waxed mustache would scratch the captain's cheek. "Six months ago she did drown herself. In the ocean? And Mademoiselle Julie's engagement to Lieutenant Proudfit, it was announced—when?"

"It had just been announced—but look here, I say, see here——" Captain Loudon began violent protest, but de Grandin was grinning mirthlessly at him.

"I look there, *Monsieur,*" he replied, "and I see there. *Parbleu,* I see far past! Six months, six months, everything, it dates from six months of yore! The death of Mademoiselle Anna, the engagement of Mademoiselle Julie, the tapping at her window, the beginning of these so strange signs and wonders—all are six months old. *Grâce à Dieu,* my friend, I begin to see the light at last. Come, Trowbridge, my friend, first for the information, then the action!"

Turning on his heel, he mounted the stairs, three at a time, beckoning me violently as he did so.

"**M**ADemoiselle — Mademoiselle Julie!" he cried, bursting into the patient's room with hardly a perceptible pause between his knock and the nurse's summons to enter. "You have not told me all, *Mademoiselle,* no, nor near all! This

Mademoiselle Anna, who was she, and what relation was there between you and her? Of haste, speak quickly, it is important that I should know all!"

"Why," Miss Loudon looked at him with startled eyes, "she was my cousin."

"But yes, that much I know. What I desire to learn is if there was some close bond, some secret understanding between you."

The girl regarded him fixedly a moment, then: "Yes, there was. Both of us were in love with Lieutenant Proudfit; but he seemed to prefer me, for some reason. When Anna saw he was proof against all her wiles—and she was an accomplished coquette—she became very morose, and talked constantly of suicide. I tried to laugh her out of the idea, but she persisted. Finally, I began to believe she was serious, and I told her, 'If you kill yourself, so will I, then there'll be two of us dead and nobody any the happier.'"

"Ah?" de Grandin regarded her intently. "And then?"

"She gave me one of those queer, long looks of hers, and said, 'Maybe I hold you to that promise, cousin. *Jizn kopyeka*—life is but a kopeck—maybe we spend him, you and I.' And that was all she said at the time. But two months later, just before Lieutenant Proudfit and I announced our engagement, she left me a note:

Have gone to spend my kopeck. Remember your promise and do likewise.

"Next morning——"

"Yes?" de Grandin prompted.

"Next morning they took her from the bay—drowned."

"A-a-h!" he let the single syllable out slowly through his teeth with a sort of hissing finality. "A-a-ah, at last, *Mademoiselle,* I do understand."

"You mean——"

"*Parbleu,* I mean nothing less. Tonight, she did say? *Morbleu,* to-

night we shall see what we shall see!

"Stay you here, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "Me, I go to procure that which is necessary for our work this night!"

He was through the door like a shot, rushing down the stairs three steps at a stride, banging the front door behind him without a word of farewell or explanation to his astounded host.

DARKNESS had fallen when he returned, a small black bag in his hand and an expression of unbridled excitement on his face. "Any change in our patient?" he demanded as he entered the house. "Any further manifestations of that accursed *poltergeist*?"

"No," I reported, "everything has been singularly calm this afternoon."

"Ah, so? Then we shall have the harder fight tonight. The enemy, she does marshal his forces!"

He tiptoed to the sickroom, entered quietly, and took a seat beside the bed, detailing his experiences in the city with lively interest. Once or twice it seemed to me the patient's attention wandered as he continued his recital, but his conversation never faltered. He had seen the beautiful flowers in Fifth Avenue! The furs in the shops were of the exquisite-ness! Never was there such a parade of beauty, culture and refinement as could be found in that so wonderful street!

I listened open-mouthed with wonder. Time given to extraneous matters when he was engaged in a case was time wasted according to his ideas, I knew, yet here he sat and chattered like a gossiping magpie to a girl who plainly took small interest in his talk.

Eight o'clock struck on the tall clock in the hall below, still he related humorous incidents in his life, and described the chestnut trees and

the whistling blackbirds at St. Cloud or the students' masked balls in the Latin Quarter. "What ails the man?" I muttered to myself. "He rambles on like a wound-up phonograph!"

It must have been about a quarter of 9 when the change began to show itself in our patient. From polite inattention her attitude toward the Frenchman became something like open hostility. In another five minutes she seemed to have lost all remembrance of his presence, and lay with her eyes turned toward the ceiling. Then, gradually but surely, there came into her already too thin face a pinched, drawn look, the sure sign of physical and nervous exhaustion.

"Ah-ha, we do begin to commence!" de Grandin exclaimed exultantly, reaching beneath his chair and opening the little black bag he had deposited there.

From the satchel he produced an odd-looking contrivance, something like the toy rotary fans to be bought at novelty shops—the sort of fan which consists of three twisted blades, like reversed propeller wings, and which is made to whirl by the pressure of the thumb against a trigger fitted in the handle. But this fan, instead of having blades of colored metal, was supplied with brightly nickeled arms which shone in the lamplight like a trio of new mirrors.

"Observe, *Mademoiselle*; behold!" de Grandin cried sharply, signing to me to turn the electric bulbs on full strength at the same time.

The girl's languid gaze lowered from the ceiling a moment and rested on the little Frenchman. Instantly he advanced the mirror-fan to within six inches of her face and began spinning it violently with quick, sharp jerks at the rotating loop. "*Regardez, si'l vous plaît*," he ordered, spinning the whirling mirrors faster and faster.

The three bright pieces of metal seemed to merge into a single disk, but from their flying it seemed that countless tiny rays of light fell away, like water scattered from a swiftly-turning paddle-wheel. For an instant the girl regarded the bright, whirling mirrors without interest, then her eyes seemed gradually to converge toward the bridge of her nose as they sought to follow the fan's rotations, and a fixed, rapt expression began to steal over her features.

"Sleep, sleep and rest. Sleep and hear no orders from those who wish you ill. Sleep, sleep—*sleep!*" de Grandin commanded in low, earnest tones.

Slowly, peacefully, her lids lowered over her fascinated eyes, her breast rose and fell convulsively once or twice, then her gentle breathing told us she had obeyed his command and lay fast in quiet sleep.

"What——" I began, but he waved me back impatiently.

"Another time, my friend," he promised with a quick gesture of warning. "At present we must not talk; there is too much at stake."

All through the night he sat beside the bed, raising his whirling mirrors and commanding sleep in tones of suppressed fury each time the girl stirred on her pillow. And each time his order was implicitly obeyed. The patient slept continuously till the first faint streaks of dawn began to show against the eastern sky.

"Now, then," he cried, springing from his chair, reopening his black bag and bringing forth—of all things!—a hyssop of mistletoe bough. Around and around the room he dashed with a sort of skipping step, for all the world like a country woman fanning flies from the house in summertime.

"Anna Wassilko, Anna Wassilko, who has wandered beyond the bounds

of the tomb," he ordered as he waved his little brush-broom, "I command that you return whence you came. To Death you have said, 'Thou art my lord and my master,' and to the Grave, 'Thou art my lover and my betrothed.' Your business in this world is done, Anna Wassilko; get you to the world you chose for your dwelling place when you cast your body into the sea!"

Near the window, where the dimming electric bulbs' light mingled with the beams of the waning moon and the flushing rays of the coming morning, he repeated his command three times, waving his brush forward and outward toward the ocean which surged and boomed on the beach a quarter-mile away.

Something seemed to brush by him, something invisible, but tangible enough to stir the white scrim curtains trailing lazily in the still air, and for a moment I thought I caught the faint penumbra of a shadow east against the ivory wall. A monstrous thing it was, large as a lion, yet like nothing I had ever seen or imagined, for it seemed to resemble both a bat and fox, with long, pointed snout, claw-armed forepaws and great, spike-edged wings extending to each side from close behind the head.

"Get you gone, unfortunate one," de Grandin cried, striking directly at the shadow with his sprigs of mistletoe. "Poor soul who would collect the wager of a thoughtless promise, hie you back to your own place and leave the ordering of other lives to God."

The terrible shadow rested against the pale wall another fraction of a second, then, like smoke borne away in a rising breeze, it was gone.

"Gone," de Grandin repeated softly, closing the window and shutting off the lights. "Call the nurse, I pray you, Friend Trowbridge. Her duties will be simpler hereafter. A little medicine, a little tonic, and

much rest and food will see Mademoiselle Julie as well as ever."

Together we tiptoed into the hall, roused the sleeping nurse and turned the patient over to her care.

"AND now the other time you spoke of last night has come, I suppose?" I said, rather huffily, as we drove home. "You were close-mouthed enough about it all while it was happening. Will you explain now?"

"Most certainly," he returned in high good humor, lighting a cigarette, breathing in a great lungful of smoke, then discharging the vapor with a sigh of gusty content. "It was most simple—like everything else—when once I knew the answer.

"To begin: When first Captain London explained his daughter's case, it seemed like one of simple hysteria to me, and one which any capable physician could cure. 'Why, then,' I ask me, 'does *Monsieur le Capitaine* seek the services of Jules de Grandin? I am not a great physician.' I have no answer, and at first I decline the case, as you know.

"But when we go to his house and behold Mademoiselle Julie all unconscious as she wandered about, I was of another mind; and when I hear the noises which accompanied her, I was of still a third mind. But when that evil one hurled a knife at my head, I said to me, '*Parbleu*, it is the challenge! Shall Jules de Grandin fly from such a contest?'

"Now, across the Rhine from France, those *boches* have some words which are most expressive. Among them is *poltergeist*, which signifies a pelting ghost, a ghost which flings things around the house. But more often he is not a ghost at all, he is some evil entity which plagues a man, or more frequently a woman. Not for nothing, my friend, did the ancients refer to Satan as the Prince of the Powers of the Air, for there are

many very evil things in the air which we can no more see than we can behold the germs of disease. Yes." He nodded solemn affirmation.

"But when Mademoiselle Julie tells me of the mark which came on her arm, and I recognized the Rumanian word for demon, I think some more. And when she tells me of the bird or bat which fluttered at her window and yet was not there, I recognize many things in common with other cases I have observed.

"Foolish people, my friend, sometimes say, 'Come in,' when they think the wind has blown their door ajar. It is not well to do so. Who knows what invisible terror awaits without, needing only the spoken invitation unthinkingly made to enter? For attend me, my friend, very rarely can the evil ones come in unless they are first invited, and very rarely can they be gotten out once they have been bidden to enter. So all these things fit together in my mind, and I say to me, '*Morbleu*, we have here a *poltergeist*, and nothing else. Certainly.'

"But why should a *poltergeist* attach his evil self to that sweet Mademoiselle Julie? True, she are very pretty, but there are other pretty women in the world of whom the *poltergeister* do not seek shelter.

"Then when the demon tell us he hold her completely in his power and makes her to dance almost nude in her father's house and sticks pins and needles in her, I hear something else. I hear him promise to take her life.

"Why? What have she done that she must die?

"Then I see the picture of Anna Wassilko. Very like Mademoiselle Julie she was, but there was a subtle something in her face which makes me know she was not the same. And what story does *Monsieur le Capitaine* tell when I ask about her? Ah, now we begin to see the light! She

were Rumanian by birth and partly by ancestry. Very good. She had gone to school with her cousin, Mademoiselle Julie. Again good. She had lived in the same house here, she had loved the same man, and she had committed suicide; best of all. I need now only a little reassuring as to the reason why—the result I already know.

"You know what Mademoiselle Julie told us; it all fitted in well with the theory I had formed. But there was work to be done that night.

"The demon which made Julie do all kinds of things she knew not of had promised to take her life. How to circumvent her? That were the question.

"I think. 'This young woman goes off into trances, and does all manner of queer things without knowing of them,' I inform me. 'Would she not do much the same in a state of hypnosis?' Assuredly. Very well, then.

"I procure me a set of whirling mirrors, not because there is any magic in them but because they are the easiest thing to focus the subject's attention. Last night I use them, and hypnotize Mademoiselle Julie before the *poltergeist* has a chance to conquer her consciousness. Hypnotism, when all is said and done, is the rendering of a subject's objective mind passive while the mind of the operator is substituted for that of the subject. The *poltergeist*, which was really the *revenant* of Anna, had substituted her mind for Julie's on former occasions; now I get there first, and place my mind in her brain. There is no room for the other, and Mademoiselle Julie can not take suggestions or brain-hints from the ghost and destroy herself. No, Jules de Grandin is already in possession of her brain-house, and he says 'No Ad-

mission' to all others who try to come in. Mademoiselle Julie slept peacefully through the night, as you did observe."

"But what was all that monkey business with the mistletoe?" I demanded.

"*Tiens*, my friend, the monkey's business had nothing to do with that," he assured me. "Do you, perhaps, remember what the mistletoe stands for at *Noël*?"

"You mean a kiss?"

"What else? It is the plant held sacred to lovers in this day, but in the elder times it was the holy bush of the Druids. With it they cast many spells, and with it they cast out many evil-workers. Not by mistake is it the lover's tree today, for it is a powerful charm against evil and will assuredly lay the unhappy ghost of one who dies because of unfortunate love. *Voilà*—you do catch the connection?"

"I never heard that before——" I began, but he cut me short with a chuckle.

"Much you have never heard, Trowbridge, my friend," he accused, "yet all of it is true, none the less."

"And that hideous shadow?"

He sobered instantly. "Who can say? In life Mademoiselle Anna was beautiful, but she went forth from the world uncalled and in an evil way, my friend. Who knows what evil shape she is doomed to wear in the next life? The less we think on that subject the better for our sleep hereafter.

"Come, we are at your house once more. Let us drink one glass of brandy for luck's sake, then to sleep. *Mordieu*, me, I feel as though I had been stranger to my bed since my fifth birthday!"

