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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"In that instant pandemonium broke loose."

The Poltergeist of Swan Upping

By SEABURY QUINN

A brilliant exploit of Jules de Grandin, the mercurial little French scientist, occult detective and ghost-breaker—a story about a murderous elemental

DEAR TROWBRIDGE [read the letter from Scott Thorowgood]: As you know, I bought the old house at Swan Upping on the Mullica last July and at once set out to renovate it. Restoration was completed in October and we moved in the middle of that month. Almost immediately

things began to happen—unpleasant things. Servants swore they met with spectral persecutions in halls and on the stairs, bed-clothes were jerked off at night. Crockery and kitchenware fell from shelves and hooks without apparent reason, and last Wednesday morning a maid was set on as she went upstairs and thrown so violently that she sustained a broken collarbone. Neither my daughters nor I have seen anything nor been troubled in any way, and if it were not for the girl's injury I should say the whole thing is attributable to some malicious gossip; but her hurts are real enough—as I who pay her hospital bills can testify—and she persists in saying she was the victim of assault and not of accident.

Thus far it's been more annoying than frightening, but if things keep up this way we shall have to close the house for want of help, as we find it practically impossible to keep servants in the place. Do you think you can persuade Doctor de Grandin, of whose success with occult pests I've heard considerable, to come and "fumigate" Swan Upping for us? I shall, of course, be willing to pay whatever fee he asks.

"Well, can I persuade you?" I asked, passing the letter to de Grandin. "I know you're not much interested in the fee, but——"

"Who says so?" he demanded as he laid the letter down. "Why should I not be?"

"Why, I know you've turned down cases time and time again when the fees offered were almost fantastic——"

"*Précisément*. You have right, my friend. I reserve the right to take such cases as appeal to me, and to decline others. But in such cases as I take the laborer is worthy of his hire, and I think that your friend Thorowgood is

one who has respect for money, whether in himself or others. This letter has a tone of command in it. One assumes Monsieur Thorowgood is used to having what he pays for and paying well for what he gets. *Bien*. I shall serve him well, and he shall pay accordingly. I shall be interested in both the fee and this so snobbish ghost who gives attention only to the servants and leaves the master of the house alone. When do we leave?"

"He says to take the train to Upsam's Station, then wait for him to pick us up. There's only one train down a day in wintertime. We'll have to pack immediately."

JULES DE GRANDIN thrust his small pointed chin another inch into the collar of his fur coat, drove his hands into his pockets till his elbows all but disappeared, and eyed me with a stare as icy as the fading winter afternoon. "Me," he announced bitterly, "I am a fool of the first magnitude!"

"Indeed?" I replied. "I'm glad to hear you confess it. I've suspected something of the sort at times, but——"

"I am," he insisted, "the prize zany of the winter's crop. Five little hours ago we were warm and comfortable in Harrisonville. Now, if you please, observe us—marooned here in a trackless wilderness, retreat cut off, progress impossible. *Mon Dieu*, I perish miserably!"

"Oh, it's not that bad," I comforted. "Thorowgood will surely be here in a little while. If he can't come himself he'll send somebody——"

"*Mais oui*, and they will find our stiffening dead corpses on the station platform——"

"Maybe that's our man, now," I interrupted as an ancient car of the model which made Detroit famous in the days

before the war drew up beside the waiting-platform and an aged Negro wrapped almost to the eyes in a sheep-coat descended and ambled toward the stack of freight piled at the station's farther end.

"At any rate, it is a sign of rescue," de Grandin nodded and hurried toward the dusky motorist. "*Holà, mon brave,*" he greeted. "How much will it cost us to be conveyed to Swan Upping? You know the place, of course."

"Yassuh, Ah knows hit," the other answered with a marked lack of enthusiasm.

"Very well, my priceless Jehu. What is your price for transportation thither?"

The colored man spoke with a rich Virginia accent. Obviously, he was not indigenous to southern Jersey. Just as obviously, he was much impressed by the fur coat de Grandin wore. "Cap'n, suh," he answered as he touched his battered hat, "mah bizness ain't been good dese las' two months."

"Indeed? One grieves to hear it. But we shall pay you royally, reward you with a princeling's ransom for taking us to Swan Upping. We are thoroughly disgusted with the scenery hereabouts, and would away to bright new scenes. Accordingly——"

The Negro gazed at him with something close akin to rapture. With the uneducated man's love of large words he was entranced with Jules de Grandin's eloquence, yet . . . Regretful resolution hardened in his wrinkled face. "Con'ol, suh," he interrupted, "mah bizness has been pow'ful bad dis season. Folks ain't haulin' like dey uster."

"One gathered as much; and from these preliminaries one assumes your price will be enormous. Very well, then. A dollar each? Two dollars?"

"Naw, suh."

"*Grand Dieu*, a profiteer, a usurer, a *voleur de chemin!* How much, then, my grand rascal? Three dollars each? I swear we'll pay no more!"

"Doctah, suh" — such munificence seemed to warrant a new title of respect—"Ah'd suttinly enjoy to make me six dollahs, but you all cain't hire me to take yuh to Swan Uppin'. Not dis time o' day, suh."

"Eh, how is that? Surely it cannot be so far——"

"Hit ain't so far to go, suh. Dat ain't whut's worryin' me. Hit's de gittin' back dat counts. Ah ain't aimin' to go pesticatin' round no daid folks' bizness."

"I do not understand. What have the dead to do with taking us to Swan Upping?"

"Plenty, suh. Dey's got a plenty to do wid hit. Don't yuh know dat place is *hanted?*"

"Bosh!" I broke in. "You know there aren't such things as ghosts?"

"Yassuh. Ah knows hit right enough in daytime, but de sun is settin' fast, an' it'll be pitch-black befo' we gits dere. Ah ain't goin' nowheres *near* dat place in darkness, suh."

There the matter rested. Plead, argue and cajole as we would, we could not prevail on him to take us to Swan Upping. With a regretful look at us he re-entered his decrepit chariot, set his wheezing motor going and drove off into the lengthening shadows, leaving us as hopelessly cut off at the small way-station as survivors of *H.M.S. Bounty* were on Pitcairn Island.

The prospect was not too inviting. Festoons of dripping icicles hung from the platform's open-sided shelter, patches of half-melted snow alternated with still larger patches of foot-fettering mud, and a chill wind whipped the waters of the Mullica into angry little

whitecaps, then hurried on to howl a keening dirge around the corners of the boarded-up summer hotel. There was neither waiting-room nor ticket office, for the station consisted of a board platform roofed over at one end to afford temporary shelter to freight and such unfortunates as had to wait the trains that stopped on signal only. Nowhere, look as we would, could we descry a sign of anyone who might have been a messenger from Swan Upping. Meanwhile the sun was sinking steadily behind the western timberline, and long blue shadows reached out toward us like malignant fingers.

"We should have motored down," I said. "Railway service to this section of the state's not anything to brag about in winter, and——"

"*Morbleu*, we should have waited for the summer!" de Grandin interrupted. "Then, at least, we might have slept outdoors and sustained ourselves on berries. As it is, a gruesome death awaits us—*heurra*, it is a rescue!"

A STATION wagon pulled up alongside the platform, and Scott Thorowgood, wrapped to the heels in a chinchilla ulster, climbed from the driver's seat to wring my hand.

"Hullo, Trowbridge," he greeted heartily. "Mighty glad to meet you, Doctor de Grandin. Hope my little accident didn't inconvenience you too much. I got a flat just as I left the place and had to stop and change the wheel. Got your duffle ready? Fine, let's go."

"We were beginning to feel like orphans of the storm," I confessed as our vehicle got under way. "There was no way of telephoning you, and we thought there might have been some slip-up in train schedules. When we didn't find you here we tried to make arrangements with an old colored man to drive

us over, but the deal fell through. He not only wouldn't entertain an offer, but intimidated rather broadly that Swan Upping's——"

"I know, I know; don't tell me!" Thorowgood broke in. "It's all around the county, now. We just got a fresh staff from a New York employment office, but if they're here a week it'll set a record. Houseful of week-enders, too."

"You say these tales of haunting are all new, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked. "There is no legend of an ancient ghost?"

"No, our spook is this year's model, with all the late improvements," Thorowgood responded, swinging from the main road into a long private lane. "The original Swan Upping house dates back to Colonial days, and probably there's been enough deviltry pulled off there to warrant a battalion of ghosts moving in and making it a permanent headquarters, but as far as I can ascertain no one ever heard of any ghostly visitants till we moved in. Usually old deserted houses get an unsavory reputation, but in this case the rule's reversed. Everything was quiet as a Quaker meeting till we came here. The carpenters and plumbers had hardly moved out when the ghost moved in, and began scaring my cooks and maids and laundresses out of their wits. We've had about five hundred percent labor turnover since October, and if you can't rid us of the ghost we'll either have to close the house or do our own cooking and washing.

"I thought at first it might be someone trying to scare me into selling. I've put a lot of money in the place, and it would make an ideal summer boarding-house; so, fantastic as it sounds, I thought that maybe someone might have had a notion I could be scared

off and forced to sell out at a loss. That got my dander up, and I hired a crew of detectives to come and give the place a going over——”

“Indeed? And what did they discover?”

“Nothing. Not a blessed thing. The spook lay low while they were in the house, and we couldn’t have asked a quieter time. Then, the very day they left, Daisy Mullins, the only one of all the servants who’s been with us straight through, was set upon as she went up the stairs and thrown down the entire flight. She broke her collarbone and hurt her head, poor kid, but the harm it did her body isn’t half as serious as what her mind suffered. I was over to see her in the hospital this morning, and she’s almost a nervous wreck. The doctors tell me she may go into St. Vitus’ dance.”

“U’m? And what manifestations have you yourself observed?”

Thorowgood bit the end from a cigar and set it glowing with the dashboard lighter. “Nothing!” he exploded. “Neither my daughters nor I have seen anything out of the ordinary. No one but the servants has been troubled. That’s what made me think it might have been some malicious person, or perhaps a practical joker, behind it all. I’ve offered a thousand dollars reward for the arrest and conviction of anyone caught playing ghost, but thus far no one’s laid claim to it.

“Welcome to Spooky Hollow, gentlemen.” He brought the station wagon to a halt beneath the porte-cochère and slammed the front door open. “Want to question the servants before dinner?”

“No, thank you,” answered de Grandin. “I shall take the opportunity to look the terrain over before I form a plan of action, if you please.”

“Certainly, certainly. You’re the ghostologist on this case. It’s up to you to prescribe whatever treatment you think proper.”

WHEN he did Swan Upping over, Thorowgood had taken thought for his guests’ comfort. Our cozy room mocked at the winter darkness fingering at the window-panes. Bright curtains of glazed chintz hung at the casements, two fat armchairs had been drawn up to the blazing fire, a maple wall-case held a row of books—Heiser’s *American Doctor’s Odyssey*, Link’s *Return to Religion* and Madame Curie’s biography were three titles I saw at a glance. On the mantelpiece was a low bowl of Danish copper, jade-mellow with patina, in which a bouquet of flamboyant Cherokee roses was set. Immediately adjoining was a bathroom done in orchid tile with a deep, luxurious tub, a glassed-in shower and a row of great, fluffy towels warming themselves on a heated rack. “Name of a small green man,” de Grandin murmured as his little blue eyes lighted with appreciation, “food never tastes so good as when one has been fasting, *hein*, my friend? Stand aside and let me pass, if you will be so good. I desire to defrost my frozen bones.”

Half an hour later, shaved, showered, clothed and immeasurably cheered, we went out into the hall. “Now for dinner and the ghost of Monsieur Thorowgood!” announced Jules de Grandin.

It was a royal feast our host spread out that night. Besides de Grandin and me there were several people from New York and Philadelphia, a scattering of business associates from Newark and a little man whose name I understood was Bradley, but whose address I did not catch at introduction.

Wild duck, shot in the Jersey marshes ten days before and gamed to perfection, stewed green celery tops, quince jelly, spoon bread golden as new-minted coin, and burgundy as mellow as midsummer moonlight, combined to make the dinner a Lucullian banquet, and ten o'clock had sounded on the tall timepiece in the hall and echoed from the banjo clock in the library before the long Madeira cloth was cleared of silver and Wedgewood.

It was with something of the gesture of a prestidigitator ordering silence for his foremost trick that Thorowgood smiled at us benevolently as he turned to Perriby the butler. "Perriby," he ordered, slipping a small key from his watch-chain, "two bottles of the cognac de Napoléon, 1810."

"Mr. Thorowgood, sir, please"—Perriby returned to the dining-room, his florid face slightly paler than its wont, his long, smooth-shaven upper lip tremulous, and with no bottles in his hands—"may I speak with you a moment, sir, in private?"

"What's the matter?—where's that brandy?"

"If you please, sir, I'd rather not go into that smoke house. I thought I saw——"

"Oh, good Lord—you, too? Take a couple of the boys. Take half a dozen, if two aren't enough, and get that brandy."

"Yes, sir." The servant bowed with frigid respect and departed.

"He's brand-new here," Thorowgood half whispered to de Grandin. "I had to get a new outfit last week when Daisy Mullins took her tumble, and I've been as careful as I could to keep this gossip from reaching 'em, but—Lord! I hope the superstitious fools don't shy at their own shadows and drop a bottle of that cognac. That

stuff cost me eighteen dollars a fifth, and the only thing needed to set me staring mad would be——"

"Mr. Thorowgood, sir!" The butler was once more at his elbow, and his face was gray with fright.

"Eh? What's the matter now? Don't tell me that you saw——"

"Oh, sir," the servant interrupted, his thick, throaty voice gone high and almost squeaky, "it's Meadows, sir. Meadows, the stable boy. 'E's dead, sir!" Excitement had played havoc with his carefully acquired aspirates, and his h's feel like autumn leaves in Vallambrosa.

"Dead?" Thorowgood repeated.

"Yes, sir. Kilt. You see, I asked 'im and Smith and Little to accompany me to the smoke 'ouse, like you said, sir, hand they went, though most reluctantly. When I hunlocked the door somethink hinside 'issed at us, as hif it were a snyke, sir. I thought hit might be someone myking gyme of us, hif you don't mind me saying so, sir, and was about to hadmonish 'im, when Meadows, who always was a most wexatious little fighter, hif I may say so, sir, rushed right into the 'ouse, and next hinstant we 'eard 'im scream hand choke, and when I played the flashlight hinto the 'ouse, there 'e lay, all sprawled hout, as you might say, and directly I looked at 'im I knew 'e was——"

"Dead?"

"Quite so, sir. The hother boys are bringin' 'im back now. I ran ahead to tell you——"

"I'll bet you did!" his master cut in grimly. "All right. That'll do." To us:

"Will you examine him, please? It's probable he's only stunned or fainted. Perriby's such a hare-brained fool...."

But the butler's diagnosis was correct. Meadows, undersized and wiry

as a jockey or a flyweight fighter, was quite dead, and must have died instantly. His eyes were opened widely, almost forced from their sockets. His mouth gaped slightly and his tongue thrust forth between his teeth, as though death caught him in the act of gagging.

De Grandin took the dead boy's face between his palms and raised his head a little. It was as though the head were coupled to the body by a cord rather than a column of bone and muscle, for there was no resistance as it nodded upward. "*Le cou brisé*," he told me. "His neck is broken, as if he had been hanged."

"But he wasn't hanged," I insisted, "and there's no mark of violence. Might he not have fallen——"

"*Non*," he answered positively. "Those eyes, that tongue, the whole expression of his face bear testimony of throttling. Tremendous, sudden pressure was applied, making death almost immediate, and while there was undoubtedly a subconjunctival ecchymosis, it did not have time to show lividity before he died. In an hour, maybe two, we may find bruises. Certainly the autopsy will disclose a fractured hyoid bone as well as broken vertebræ."

"By heaven, this is too much!" Thorowgood stormed when he told him of our findings. "It was bad enough when this ghost hung round the place and scared my servants into fits, but murder is no joke, and murder has been done tonight. I suppose I'll have to notify the police and hold everybody here till they have finished their investigations. Meantime, I'm offering two thousand dollars, spot cash, to anyone who puts the finger on this murderer for me."

"Might as well get it over with, I suppose," he added as he squared his

shoulders and went to notify the guests that no one was to leave till given permission by the police.

IT WAS Doris Thorowgood who put the company's consensus into bald words. "Well," she announced, "I'm sorry for poor Meadows and all that, but we can't bring him back by being gloomy. I'm going to dance. Who's with me?"

Apparently they all were, for the radio was soon relaying latest swing selections from New York and Newark, and the faint *wisp-wisp* of thin-soled slippers on the polished floor mingled with the strains of syncopated music.

"Not dancing, gentlemen?" Little Mr. Bradley paused beside us.

De Grandin eyed him coldly. "I think the dead deserve some courtesy, even if he was no more than a mere stable boy," he answered.

"I agree with you, sir. It is an evil thing to dance in a house where death lurks. Indeed, I have a feeling we shall witness more misfortune."

"Specifically?" de Grandin raised his eyebrows quizzically.

"No, not specifically, but generally. The moment I came in this house I felt an atmosphere of menace."

"You are psychic, *Monsieur*?"

"Naturally." From his waistcoat pocket Bradley drew a card which he presented to the Frenchman. Leaning forward I read:

THADDEUS BRADLEY

Clairvoyant

He was a little man, not exactly dwarfish, but so well below the average stature that he scarcely reached de Grandin's chin. He was curiously stooped, too, whether as the result of a crippled shoulder or deliberate pose I

could not quite determine. By contrast, he had a large head with a shock of curling black hair, a wide forehead with delicately curved brows, a hooked, assertive nose and dark-brown eyes, set a thought too close together.

The little Frenchman looked at him with increased interest. "Tell me," he asked, "do you know anything about this house, *Monsieur*? Did Monsieur Thorowgood tell you——"

"Yes, sir, he did. He told me he'd been troubled by some spirit entities which were frightening his servants and had injured one of them. He asked me to come up from Philadelphia and see what I could do to find the ghost, if——"

"Did he say it was a ghost?"

"Well, not exactly. He said the servants said it was a ghost, but he thought it was something human. However, I'm known to possess psychic powers, and if I think the house is haunted—which I do, most certainly——"

Anger kindled in de Grandin's small blue eyes. "When did he summon you?" he interrupted.

"This morning, Doctor. I arrived shortly before noon——"

"*Le cochon, porc!* Does he think he can do this to me?"

"Eh, what's that?"

"Did he not tell you I was coming, that he had engaged my services——"

"Well, now you mention it, he did. Yes, sir. He said you had a reputation as a ghost-breaker, but he wanted to have my opinion, too——"

"*Parbleu*, this is intolerable, this is monstrous, this is not to be endured! He has made me insulted. That I should be spied upon——"

"Oh, now, don't take it that way, sir. I'm sure Mr. Thorowgood meant nothing by it. Just wanted to be sure,

you know. It's just as if he called another doctor in for consultation in a case of illness. Anyway, what do we care? He's got to pay us each a fee. He doesn't think there are such things as ghosts. Let's convince him of his error. Maybe we could hold a *séance* for him, find the ghost and drive it out, then each collect his fee. That way everybody's satisfied——"

Before the rising fury in the Frenchman's eyes he quailed to silence. "Charlatan, impostor," de Grandin almost hissed, "you would involve me in a fraud? You would manufacture a ghost to put fear into Monsieur Thorowgood that you may collect a fee——*parbleu*, yes! Why not?"

"Wha—what is it?" stammered Bradley.

"You would hold a *séance*, *hein?* You would produce a rapping-of-the-table, perhaps go in a trance and relay messages from some defunct Indian sachem? *Très bon*. You shall conduct a *séance*, my fine friend, but it shall be genuine. Let us see if we can make this evil entity produce himself. Perhaps he will materialize——"

"No, no! Not that, sir. Not me; I can't do that! I'm not a spirit medium; I can contact controls and get through messages—I really can!—but when it comes to trying to materialize—I'm scared to monkey with it. I've seen some things——"

"*Corbleu*, my friend, as yet you have seen nothing. You have your choice. Either you will hold a *séance* here and now, or I denounce you publicly, tell everyone that you are an impostor who declared he would find a ghost here, whether it——"

"No, no, don't do that, sir; it would ruin me!"

"You are an apt pupil, *mon ami*; you apprehend my meaning perfectly.

Which is it to be, a séance or denunciation?"

THE guests were all enthusiastic. Dancing might be fun, but a séance, with a dead man practically in the next room . . . "My dear," I heard Letitia Thorowgood exclaim, "it's priceless—definitely! Maybe we can make poor Meadows tell who killed him, and why."

Every stage trick of the charlatan was evident as Bradley prepared for the séance. Lights were turned off in the drawing-room and the adjoining hall, the guests were seated round the wall in a wide circle, with hands joined, and Doris Thorowgood took her place at the piano, softly playing *Abide With Me*. Bradley seated himself at a small table with a nickel-plated paper-knife held upright in his hand. At his request de Grandin played a flashlight's ray upon the knife so that it stood out in the darkness like a lighted tower at night.

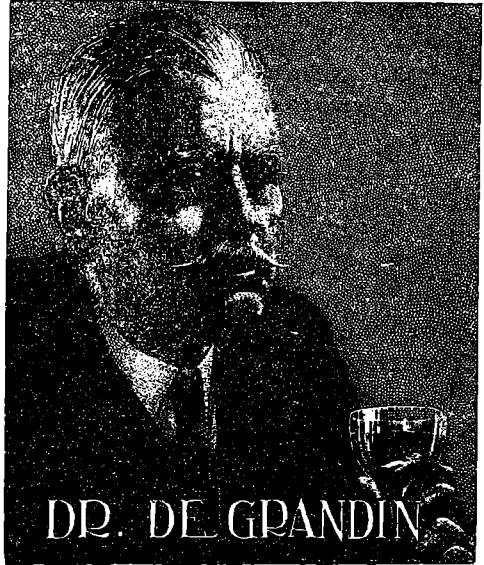
"No one is to speak or move until I give permission," cautioned Bradley, gazing fixedly at the knife-point gleaming in the dark.

Silence settled on the room. From the hall outside we heard the pompous, slow tick of the tall clock; softly, softer than the clock-tick, barely audible to us, came the piano's notes:

I fear no harm with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting, where, grave, thy
victory? . . .

The paper-cutter wavered, swayed from right to left, and dropped to the floor with a light tinkle. Bradley's eyes closed and his head, leaned back against the chair, fell a little sideways as the neck muscles relaxed.

And in that instant pandemonium



broke loose. The music from the hallway banged *fortissimo* in the syncopated strains of *Satan Takes a Holiday*, and from Doris Thorowgood there came a laugh as eery as the blind-fold-gropings of a lost mind; a wild, high-mounting burst of mirth that seemed to froth and churn and boil, then change from merriment to torture and geyser up into a stream that rose, flickered like a flame of torment, went up and up until it seemed no human throat could stand its strain, then dropped again until it was a chuckle of indecent glee.

Bradley was on his feet, hugging himself in sudden agony, his tortured face turned up to the groined ceiling, and with a crash as deafening as a thunder-clap every piece of fragile porcelain in a wall-cabinet was dashed down to the floor as though a giant broom had swept it from the shelves.

Then from the hall, foul as a suspiration from a charnel house, a gust of wind came sweeping, incredible, filthy, furious as a cyclone. I retched at it, I heard the man next to me give a gasp

and then a gagging choke. This was no mere fetor, it was the very noisome breath of Death, charged with the rotteness of putrefaction stored up since the first beginnings of mortality.

"Lights, lights, *pour l'amour d'un bouc!*" I heard de Grandin shout.

But there were no lights. When Thorowgood shook off his lethargy of disgust and pressed the wall-switch, a sharp *click* sounded, but the room remained as black as Erebus, and meanwhile filthiness unnamable, illimitable terror and disgust, filled the house to stifling overflowing. Coughing, strangling, almost fainting I stumbled to a window and wrenched at it. The sash was firmly set as if built in the masonry.

"*In nomine Domini conjuro te, sceleratissime, abire ad tuum locum!*" de Grandin's conjuration sounded, not loud, but with a force of earnestness more compelling than a shout. Then *crash!* he hurled a flower-bowl through the window. The shattered glass sprayed outward not more from his missile than from the pressure of the nameless, obscene filthiness that filled the house to inundation, and I gasped great lungfuls of revivifying air as a drowning man might fight for precious breath.

From the hallway the piano sounded, beating out its rhythm with the heavy, unaccented tone of an electric mechanism, and in accompaniment to the cacophony of beaten keys and tortured strings the wild, demoniac peals of laughter gushed from Doris' lips.

"Mademoiselle Doris, stop it, I command you!" de Grandin ordered sharply, but still the music sounded stridently, still she laughed like a witch-thing delighted at the success of some hell-brew she had concocted.

"Ha, so? Then this must be the way of it!" He gave her a resounding slap

on the right cheek, then turned his hand and struck the other cheek a stinging blow.

The treatment was effective, for she raised her hands from the piano and held them to her smarting face, hysteria gone before the stimulus of sudden pain.

"One regrets heroic measures," he apologized as she looked at him in hurt wonder, "but there are times when they are necessary. This was one of them."

Bradley had fallen on his back and lay quaking spasmodically, hands pressed against his midriff, little buzzing noises sounding from his throat, as though he breathed through some obstruction.

"Up, man, up!" de Grandin cried, seizing him beneath the arms and dragging him up to his feet. "So! Bend over!" He bent the choking fellow forward almost as if he were a swimmer overcome by water, signaled me to hold his head between my hands, and struck him sharply on the back between the shoulders with the heel of his left hand. With the first two fingers of his right hand he traced a cross against the man's bent back, and murmured something in swift Latin of which I caught but a few words: ". . . *Deus, in nomine tuo . . . exorcizo uos . . . uade retro, Satanas . . .*"

Bradley gave a tortured choke, like one about to strangle, and from his lips there came what seemed to be a puff of smoke. But it was no light ethereal vapor, for it plummeted to the floor and hit the polished oak with a soft slap, almost like the smacking of an open hand. For a moment it lay there like a little cone of swirling vapor, or, perhaps a pile of fine-ground powder, but suddenly it appeared to take on semblance of a shape not well defined, but vague and semi-formed, like a mass

of colloid substance, or a jelly-fish which had been brought up from the bay. It was hard to define it, for it seemed to shift its outline, flowing, quivering, ever changing, now resembling a splash of albumen, now drawing in upon itself until it was almost a perfect circle, then lengthening until it seemed to be an ovoid.

The thing disgusted me. It seemed like some great spider tentatively stretching out its claws in search of prey. De Grandin seemed to realize its potency for evil, too, for while he kept the beam of the flashlight upon it and muttered Latin conjurations at it through clenched teeth, I noticed that he stood well back from it, as though he feared that it might spring at him. But it did not spring. Rather, it seemed at somewhat of a loss which way to go or what to do until, as if it formed quick resolution, it rolled as swiftly as a drop of mercury released from a thermometer to the shattered window, mounted to the sill so quickly that we had difficulty following its movement, and disappeared into the night.

"What was it?" I asked rather shakily. "I never saw a thing like that before——"

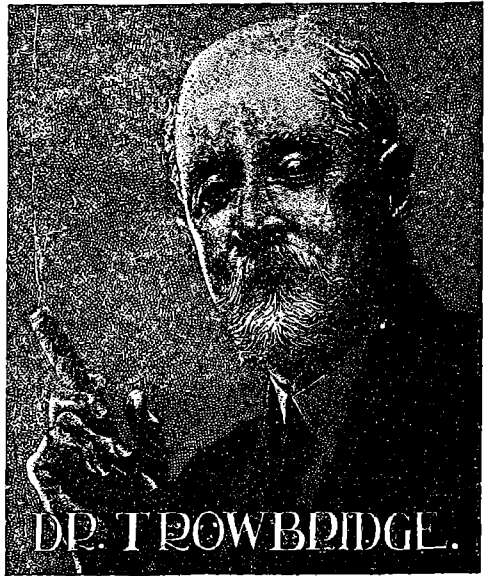
"*Parbleu*, you have not missed much amusement!" the Frenchman answered. "I cannot tell you what it was, my friend, but I know that it was very evil. It was that which killed the poor young Meadows—I would not give a centime for the life of anyone whom it attacked."

"It seemed to come from Bradley's throat——"

"Perfectly. Had we not acted quickly—and been lucky—it would have possessed him completely."

"Possessed? You mean in the Biblical sense?"

"*Précisément*, nothing less; our insti-



tutions for the insane are filled with people similarly afflicted."

"Something's choking me," moaned Bradley. "It's in my throat——"

"*Non*, it is no longer there," de Grandin soothed. "You feel the secondary pains, my friend. You fainted but you are all better, now. I should prescribe a glass of brandy. Indeed, I think that I shall join you in the medicine."

"**T**HEN you've no idea what it could be?" I asked as we prepared for bed.

"On the contrary, I have several. When I first heard *Monsieur* Thorogood's account of these strange happenings I was inclined to think he might be right in attributing the so-called phenomena to the servants' superstition or to human agencies. Even the murder of the stable boy might fit in with such a theory. Then this Thaddeus Bradley one accosted us, and I had the idea. 'This person doubtless is a charlatan,' I tell me, 'but he has played at spiritism for a long time. The claims of spirit-

ualism are debatable, to say the least. I have had a wide experience with the occult, but I would not say that it is possible for so-called mediums to get in contact with the spirits of the dead at will. On the other hand, I am convinced that there are many entities, both formed and unformed, who wish to break the barriers between the human and the super-human, or sub-human. For such as these the average medium is a gateway to desire. When he or she is entranced and off guard they enter through the breach left by his absent consciousness, usually with dire results to mankind. Also, although the usual medium is an arrant fraud, the very atmosphere in which he lives is favorable for such spirit-raids. I had no idea this Bradley could evoke the spirit which has worked his mischiefs in this place, but if I could make him go into the mummery of a séance we could get, perhaps, a glimpse of what we are opposed to. Conditions were ideal. Bradley focused all attention on himself, and every mind was intent on some manifestation of the other-worldly. The bars were down, the frontier was unguarded—if some malignant spirit hovered round the house and sought to force an entrance, this was his ideal opportunity. *Eh bien*, he recognized it!

“By his force he made Mademoiselle Doris pliant to his will. By the psychoplasm generated by the concentrated thought of all the company he assumed a sort of form and solidarity, and forced himself right into Bradley’s throat. Had we not expelled him he would have found asylum there, fed and fattened on the poor man’s psychophysical substance, gained strength, and, like the fever germ which generates in one body, kills its host, then fares forth for more killing, would in time have

issued from poor Bradley’s corpse to wreak more havoc in the world.”

“You think we’ve overcome it—whatever it is?”

“That would be a foolish boast at this time. I fear we have but started our campaign. We have balked, but not defeated it. Tomorrow, or the next day, or perhaps the next, we shall come to grips with it.”

“You think it may be a malignant ghost, a murderer’s, perhaps?”

“It may be, but I do not think so. I have met with such as that upon occasion, and usually they have a sort of pseudo-substance of their own. This one had not, but had to build himself a form of psychoplasm. As yet he is not very strong. He has not the staying power. His strength, by which his capacity for evil is bounded, flows and ebbs, like the tides. Whether he will grow too swiftly for us——”

“Then you think that it’s an——”

“An elemental? *Bien oui*. I think that this is what for want of better nomenclature we call a ‘spirit,’ but it has never lived in human form. Evil, spiteful and dangerous it unquestionably is, but as yet it is evil discarnate. Should it become completely carnate our work will be that much more difficult.”

“You’ve referred to psychoplasm several times. Just what is it?” I asked.

“*Tiens*, what is electricity? We know how to produce it, we can harness it to our needs, we recognize its results when we see them, but we have no definition for it. So with psychoplasm. It is something like the animal magnetism to which Mesmer attributed his success at hypnotism. It seems to be of nervous origin and physiologically connected with the internal secretory organs. As nearly as we can define it, it is an all-penetrating, imponderable emanation

which normally is dissipated quickly, but under certain conditions can be stabilized and energized by the intelligence of the living, or by discarnate intelligence. Often, but not always, it is luminous, the spirit-light we see at séances. Less often—*grâce à Dieu!*—it can in favorable conditions be made the vehicle to transmit force. It was through concrescence of this emanation that they which attacked Bradley became visible. But one wonders——”

He broke off, staring straight before him.

“What is it?”

“Where, by what means, did it get the necessary force to kill the Meadows boy?”

“Why——”

He waved my suggestion aside, and continued, speaking slowly, as though he thought aloud. “*Tenez*, we have more cause for worry. The psychoplasm which is loosed at every séance is the product of the minds of everybody present. It is put forth as a force.

“It leaves the body and the mind. Then what becomes of it? Is it reabsorbed? Perhaps. But does one reabsorb the very psychoplasm he put out? There is the question. We cannot surely say. Once it leaves its power house, or reservoir, it is beyond control of him from whom it emanated. It is quite likely to be seized and directed by”——he checked the possibilities off on his fingers——“stronger wills in the circle at the séance, lower, baser forms of discarnate intelligence, or by true ghosts, the spirits of ex-humans. Mademoiselle Doris was intent upon her music; she was also in a neutral state of mind, half doubting, half expecting something, though she knew not what. Certainly she was not intent on guarding from outside assaults. Thus she

was an ideal prey for some mischievous thought-form.”

“Great heavens, you think she was possessed, then?”

“No-o, neither possessed nor obsessed.”

“What’s the difference? I always thought the terms synonymous.”

“By no means, not at all. In possession the demon steals the possessed’s mind and personality. It is like vampirism, except the vampire animates a corpse; the possessing demon takes a living body from which he has forced its rightful occupant, and uses it for his own ends. In obsession the malignant spirit uses both mind and body of his victim, crippling or misdirecting the mentality, but not entirely ousting it.

“Mademoiselle Doris is nervous and high-strung, selfish, emotional, shallow, inclined to be erratic. When the spirit form attempted to invade her consciousness she gave way physically at once, and played a strain of wild and mocking music, as it bade. Mentally, she closed the bulkheads of her consciousness by going off into hysteria. Obsession has this much in common with hypnotism, it must have a mind on which to operate. No one can hypnotize an idiot or lunatic, neither can an idiot be obsessed. A person in the grip of hysteria is practically insane; therefore she was safe for the time being. But if he comes back to attack her while her mind is off its guard in sleep, or when she is controlled by evil thoughts, as in a fit of anger—*eh bien*, we may find our task a more complex one.”

“But do we know it was hysteria and not possession?” I persisted. “That awful, ghoulisn laugh and the expression on her face seemed scarcely human——”

He nodded thoughtfully. “Your

question is well put, my friend. But did not you notice how she came back to her senses when I slapped her in the face?"

"Yes, but——"

"No buts, if you will be so kind. In the possessed state the victim is unconscious of deeds done and words said. Thus far your case is good, but it is also true that one possessed is markedly insensitive to pain. The demon sitting at the wheel can feel no pain inflicted on the body he possesses; *alors*, we find a state of anesthesia in the possessed or obsessed. Hot objects may be handled with impunity, electric shocks are not felt.

"But was it so with Mademoiselle Doris? *Non*. I did not strike her hard, although I struck her sharply. Had she been truly possessed I might have beat her till her face was bloody, yet she would not have ceased her playing or her diabolic laughter. You see?"

"Yes, I suppose so. What's our next move?"

He patted back a yawn. "At present, *mon vieux*, I have a rendezvous with Morpheus. *A bientôt*."

BEACHWOOD HOSPITAL where Daisy Mullins' broken clavicle was mending was a private institution with no wards and only about a hundred beds. As we strode along the corridor amid the faint but all-pervading atmosphere of antiseptics, drugs and shut-in humanity, I reflected Thorowgood had not been niggardly in providing treatment for his injured maid.

"Queer thing about that girl," said Doctor Broemel as he piloted us down the hallway, "she's not in much pain—it's just a simple fracture and it's healing beautifully—but her nerves are shot to pieces. She hardly speaks except to keep imploring us for a night

nurse. That's absurd, of course. She doesn't need a night nurse any more than I need feather dusters on my heels. Of course, a tumble down a flight of stairs is quite a shock, but she should be well out of it by now. She's been here five days, and besides the broken clavicle and some slight contusions on the head she's as sound as a nut."

"Does she give reasons for desiring a night nurse?" de Grandin asked.

"No, she doesn't. Just keeps saying she's afraid to be left alone—with four nurses within twenty feet of her! Queer things, women patients."

"You are imparting information to us?" de Grandin answered as we stopped before the door to Daisy's room.

The place was all white tile and white enamel, with a narrow bed of spotless white. Daisy Mullins was half propped to a sitting posture, one hand strapped across her chest, a band of white gauze wound around her injured head, another bandage drawn beneath her chin to hold the first one firm. Somehow, with the wimple-like white cloths about her head and face, she had the look of a young nun, a nun carved out of tallow. Her cheeks seemed absolutely bloodless, so did her lips; her eyes seemed far too large for her countenance, and though they were light blue they seemed dark and cavernous against the pallor of her face. She glanced at us without interest. Indeed, I could not say she looked at us at all. Rather, it seemed, she was trying to see something just beyond her range of vision, and feared with desperate fear that she might sight it. It would be hard to make her tell us anything, I thought.

De Grandin laid the flowers and the huge box of bonbons he had brought

upon the bedside table, and stood gazing at her for a moment. Then, with his quick, infectious smile, "*Mademoiselle*, we have come to ask your help in fighting it," he announced.

The fear in her was suddenly a live thing, writhing like a wounded snake behind her eyes. "It?" she echoed in a whisper.

"Precisely. It. We cannot call it him or her; it is a thing — a very naughty thing, but we shall beat it, with your help."

"You can't fight it, it's no use. How can you fight a thing that you can't even see?"

"Ah, that is what you think, but you do not know me. I am a very clever person. I have neither fear of it nor doubt that I can conquer it, but I need your help. Will you not give it to me?"

"What d'ye want me to do?"

"Only tell us all about your accident — *non*, I mean your injury. Precisely how did it happen? We must know about this thing we are to fight, how it looked——"

"I tell you it didn't look at all. I couldn't see it. Only feel—and smell—it!"

"But if you could not see it, *Mademoiselle*, is it not possible that you fell down the stairs——"

"I didn't trip, I didn't fall; it threw me." The dammed-back memories of her ordeal flooded to her lips and she spoke rapidly, as if she had to finish in a given time. "It was last Wednesday morning, when I was takin' Miss Doris' breakfast tray up. I was goin' up the back stairs, and had reached the landin' on the second floor when it set on me. I didn't see nothin', there wasn't anything to see; but all at once I felt a pair o' hands about my throat, shakin' me till I dropped the tray, and then it threw me down the stairs so hard I

tumbled half a dozen somersets as I went down, and then I must 'a' fainted, for the next thing I knew——"

"Quite yes, we know what happened next, but what of your assailant? Is it dark at the hall landing?"

"No, sir. It's quite light, for there's a window at the stair turn, and the sun was shinin'. If anything had been there I'd 'a' seen it, but there wasn't nothin' there, just an awful smell and then the hands around my throat——"

"Hands, *Mademoiselle*?"

"Well, no, sir, not exactly hands. It was more like someone wrapped a loop o' Turkish towel around me, and drew it tight an' sudden. A wet, cold towel, sir."

"And what kind of smell was it?"

"Dreadful, sir. It like to smothered me—like sumpin dead."

"Which did you notice first, the smell or the choking sensation?"

She wrinkled her smooth bandaged brow a moment, then: "I think it was the smell. I remember thinkin' that a rat must 'a' crawled into the walls and died, and just then it grabbed me."

De Grandin tweaked the waxed ends of his mustache. "A frightful smell, a choking grasp upon your throat, a blow that knocked you down the stairs," he recapitulated. "It was a most unpleasant experience——"

"An' that's not all, sir."

"No? What then?"

"It was here last night!"

"Name of a small blue man! Herc, you say?"

"Yes, sir, that it was. I woke up last night about half-past nine, and smelt it in the room. Then, just as I was fixin' to cry out it snatched the bed-clothes off'n me an' piled 'em on my face. I know I wasn't dreamin', sir. How could I pull my covers off and put 'em on my face? They're tucked in at the foot

and sides, and I'm that helpless with my arm strapped up against me——"

"It is because of this you want a night nurse?" he broke in.

"Yes, sir. I'm scared. I'm terrible scared o' it."

"Very well, then you shall have one. I shall speak about it as we leave, and see you have a nurse with you all night."

"Oh, gee, thanks, sir!" The tired blood washed back in her wan cheeks. "I'll feel lots safer, now."

"THIS is the craziest business I ever heard of," I declared as we drove from the hospital. "There's no sense to any of it. Swan Upping's never had the reputation of being haunted, and certainly there's nothing about the Thorowgoods to attract ghostly visitants. Scott's as pragmatic as the iron pipe he manufactures, and from what I've seen of them I'd say that neither of his daughters is interested in anything appertaining to spirits, except the kind cocktails are made of. Why should a ghost move in on them?"

He nodded. "Why, indeed?"

"And it's such a silly, clownish sort of ghost. Scaring servants, snatching blankets off the beds, smashing crockery——"

"And killing people," he put in.

"Exactly. And killing people. If it confined itself to buffoonery or to malignancy I could understand it, but it seems like a peevish child turned loose in a toy shop. First it plays stupid, prankish tricks; then it kills as ruthlessly as a spoiled child might smash a toy; then goes back to silly, beetle-headed capers. Sometimes it's good-natured, sometimes vicious——"

"*Non*. There you make the mistake, *mon vieux*. It is never good-natured; always it is malignant."

"Why, but——"

"Consider, if you please: everything it does brings some measure of discomfort to someone, whether it be but the annoyance of knocking pots and pans and plates off of the kitchen shelves, tweaking bed-clothes off of sleepers, throwing a poor, frightened girl downstairs, or breaking the neck of a stable boy. You have compared it to a naughty child. *A juste titre*. Have you ever seen a small, dull-witted, rather vicious child play with a fly? Have you observed how he pulls off its wings, then watches it intently as it crawls in agony, thereafter pulling off its legs, one at a time, and pausing between torments to observe its helpless antics? Finally, you will recall, he kills it; not to put a period to its sufferings—oh, no—merely because he has grown tired of the cruel sport and can think of nothing else to do. There is playfulness of a sort in such actions, but there is a viciousness and cruelty, too. Does not all this remind you of the harmless pranks, as you have called them, of this poltergeist?"

Little chills of apprehension had begun to chase each other up my spine as he talked. To be confined in a house with an unseen but powerful malignancy, to be the subject of oafish experiments of a thing with the mentality of a four-year-old moron and the strength of a gorilla . . . "Is there any way for us to overcome this thing?" I asked.

For several seconds he did not reply, gazing straight before him, thoughtful-eyed, tapping out a devil's tattoo on the silver handle of his cane. At last: "The thing confronting us is technically a poltergeist, though it displays some aspects I have not seen in such phenomena before. The distinguishing characteristics of polter-

geist hauntings are aimless violence unaccompanied by materialization of the manifesting entity. Generally these mischievous phenomena are associated directly or indirectly with children, adolescents, old, fragile people or those whose strength has been reduced by long illness. The skeptic's explanation is to attribute mischief or a desire to mystify or to be revenged on someone by the child, the invalid or the old one. However, it has been demonstrated that if the child or invalid suspected be removed and an accredited medium substituted, the disturbing manifestations will be continued as effectively as ever." He paused a moment, as if reaching out for loose thought-threads, and:

"Let's see if I understand you," I broke in. "A child, or someone in poor health, is generally associated with the antics of a poltergeist. Is there any explanation?"

"We cannot say, exactly. On a few occasions people in poor health, especially sufferers from enervating fevers or chronic disorders, have been seen to glow with, or exude, faint luminosity. This is scientifically attested. The haloes traditionally associated with the saints were not due to artists' whims, nor, as has sometimes been suggested, to poetic reference to the Pentecostal flames which shone on the Apostles. The records of the early and mediæval church testify that people noted for their piety and asceticism were often seen to radiate luminous auras. What the connection between bodily frailty and the emanation of this light may be we do not know; we only know there seems to be some. But may we not assume this luminosity is akin to astral light, psycho-physical in origin, and identical with psychoplasm? I think so. *Très bon*. The weakling child, the frail old man or woman, the

invalid, can supply this force, then—"

"What about the adolescents? They are not often very frail——"

"*Précisément*. But they are peculiar people. We might almost say they are a third sex. As a physician you know of the derangement of the mind and body which accompanies adolescence; no one knows better that 'the long, long thoughts of youth' are often thoughts of suicide. The powerful derangements of our complex human organism accompanying adolescence make the boy or girl at that stage an ideal source of psychoplasm."

"But why the spiritualistic medium? They're mostly grown men and women; childish-minded, often, and sometimes rather frail, but——"

"Quite yes. But the medium who does not exude psychoplasm is no medium at all. Whether one is mediumistic because he is supplied with superabundant psychoplasm, or whether he is thus well stocked with it because he is a medium is as profitless to discuss as the question of priority between the chicken and the egg. *En tout cas*, mind cannot affect matter without the intervention of a human intermediary, whether it be a child, an invalid, an adolescent or a medium. One of these is always present. He supplies the needed psychoplasm to make the manifestation possible, serves as dynamo to generate the necessary energy——"

"But you just said that poltergeists do not materialize."

"*Bien oui*. Ordinarily they do not; also ordinarily they are harmless, though annoying. This one is very far from harmless, this one has partially materialized, and may succeed in doing so entirely. *Alors*, we can but reason by analogy. We cannot treat this as an ordinary poltergeist, nor can we look on it as a malignant strangler merely.

We must adapt our strategy to meet unusual conditions, and proceed most carefully."

A NOTE lay on de Grandin's dressing-table:

Dear Doctor: After what occurred in this house last night I do not dare stay here another minute. I am convinced the whole place reeks with evil and probably is haunted by a savage elemental which has but one desire, to work harm to humanity. Only fire can cleanse a place so fearfully attainted, and I have advised Mr. Thorowgood to burn the whole place, house, furniture and furnishings, without delay. Only by so doing can he hope to rid the neighborhood of a deadly peril, and it is my opinion that if he remains here with his family or permits this house to be inhabited, dreadful tragedy will result. For Mr. Thorowgood's sake, as well as your own, I hope you will add your advice to mine, and urge on him the need for acting quickly.

Yr. obt. svt.

THADDEUS BRADLEY.

"Well, what about it?" I demanded as I passed the letter back to him. "I've always heard that fire's a cure for hauntings."

His thrifty Gallic soul was horrified at the suggestion. "Burn this fine house, this so exquisite furniture? But no, I will not hear of it. We do not know just how this thing came in, nor why, but if it entered it can leave. Our problem is to provide an exit."

"Do you think it's an elemental?"

"*Je ne sais pas*. It may be so. The aimlessness of its violence indicates a very low mentality, and yet——" He broke off, staring into space.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"Have you not noticed an increasing method in its acts? At first it seemed experimenting, trying out its power; then when it had thrown the Mullins girl downstairs it murdered Meadows, then sought to give itself a ponderable form, to force an entrance into Monsieur Bradley's body. What will its

next move be, more killing or a fresh effort to materialize? Which would you do, were you a poltergeist?"

"If I were a polt— don't be absurd!"

"I was never more serious, my friend. Conceive yourself as evil, infinitely evil, loving wickedness for its own sake and desiring above everything to gain strength that you might work more harm. What would you do?"

"Why, I suppose I'd try to draw vitality from some fresh victim. There's no strength to be had from the dead——"

"*Par la barbe d'un bouc vert!* Why had I not considered that? Come, my friend, let us hasten, let us rush, let us fly!"

"Where, in heaven's name——"

"To the hospital. At once. And we do go in heaven's name, too.

"You are invaluable, incomparable, my-old one," he assured me as the big car gathered speed. "Had you not given me the suggestion——?"

"Whatever are you talking of?"

"Of you, my priceless old one, and the hint that you let fall unwittingly. Did not you say, 'There's no strength to be had from the dead'?"

"Of course. Is there?"

"How do we know it? Who can say? In common with all discarnate intelligences, this thing we are opposed to gains strength from body emanations. Someone in that house had furnished these until it found itself sufficiently supplied with force to throw the poor young Mullins person down the stairs, to kill the so unfortunate young Meadows, finally to brave us all at the séance and make a bold attempt to take the Bradley person's body by assault. Is that not so?"

"Why, I suppose so, but——"

"No buts, I do entreat you. Where

else had it been yesternight? At half-past nine, to be specific?"

"Why, you can't mean the——"

"By blue, I do. I do, indeed! At half-past nine the Mullins girl was wakened by its noisome stink and felt it snatch the covers from her. She was its point of contact. It had handled her before, had overcome her. Is it not probable it had its motivating psychoplasm from her at the first?"

"*Bien*. Let that question pass. We can return to it anon. What interests us immediately is that in a place devoted to the sick, the dying and the dead it would have found a feast of strength-imparting emanations, and that within half an hour of its visit there it returned to Swan Upping to do the poor young Meadows man to death.

"Now, attend me: Granted that such things thrive on vital force exuded from the human body, can we say with certainty—can we say at all, indeed—the flow of such force stops with death? Certainly, it continues during sleep. Is it not possible that the very process of disintegration of the body strengthens it? We know there are two kinds of death, somatic and molecular. A man 'dies' legally and perhaps medically when his respiration ceases and his heart stops beating. But though the man is dead his individual cells live on for varying periods. The brain, for instance, lives in this way for a possible ten minutes, while the muscle of the heart may survive twice that long. As for the hair-roots and the nails, they are the same a week succeeding death as they were when it occurred. Why should these emanations stop at death? The graves of saints become the shrines where miracles are wrought; many of the most revolting vampire phenomena are associated with unhal-

lowed tombs. Why could not this thing have stored up energy from the sick, the dying and the dead in that hospital, then, after killing Meadows, used the vital force set free by him as rigor mortis crept upon him——"

"That's too fantastic——"

"*Parbleu*, the whole thing is fantastic! The fantastic seems to be the commonplace. Should things keep on as they are going, only the commonplace will be fantastic, I damn think!"

"**I**S THERE good reason for retaining the young Mullins woman here, *Monsieur*?" he questioned Doctor Broemel.

"Actually, there isn't, Doctor," Broemel answered. "Naturally, she's more comfortable here with our facilities than she would be at home, but she's certainly sufficiently advanced to go, if you desire it."

"*Merci beaucoup*," de Grandin smiled.

Five minutes later, as we entered Daisy's room:

"*Mademoiselle*, we have the pleasant tidings for you. It has been decided that you leave the hospital——"

"But I can't do that, sir. I have no home. I'd been livin' in a furnished room in New York before I came down here in October, and I don't think Mr. Thorowgood will want me round the place, unable to 'dress myself, and everything——"

"*Ah bah*, you make the mistake. It is not to Swan Upping that you go, nor to a furnished room, but to an hotel at Asbury Park. A nurse will go with you to see that you are taken care of; arrangements will be made with a physician at the shore to inspect the progress of your healing fracture, and you shall stay there as the guest of *Monsieur* Thorowgood until you are all

well. Are not those joyous tidings?"

The girl burst into tears. "Y-you mean he's doing all this just for me—and my salary goes on, too, just like he said it would?"

"Indubitably, *Mademoiselle*."

"When do I leave?"

"At once. As soon as you can get your clothes on. A motor is waiting to convey you to the shore."

"Oh, sir," she sobbed happily, "I'll never be able to tell him how delighted and surprized I am——"

"*Corbleu*," de Grandin chuckled as we left the hospital, "I damn think he will be the surprized one, although, perhaps, he will not be delighted, when he learns what I have done in his name."

"What's our next move?" I asked as we drove back to Swan Upping.

"To ask some questions of Monsieur Thorowgood. One part of my surmise has proved correct. Undoubtlessly it was the Mullins girl from whom this haunting thing drew strength. You heard her say she came here in October. That must have been soon after Monsieur Thorowgood moved in. She is the perfect type, thin, inclined to anemia, undernourished. It was from her he drew his first vitality. Yes, certainly."

"Then why did he turn on her——"

"*Tiens*. He had no further use for her. He had gained sufficient strength from her to go about his own nefarious business; accordingly, he cast her away, literally."

"**Y**ES," Thorowgood told us, "the house was practically rebuilt, but we used old material as much as possible. The addition to the north wing where the servants' quarters are, and the smoke house which we use for wine cellar, were entirely built of old red brick and old timber. They've pre-

served the weathered colors beautifully, haven't they? No one would guess they weren't a part of the original house——"

"By blue, my friend, you would be surprized at things which people guess!" de Grandin interrupted. "Can you tell us where these bricks and timbers came from?"

"Why, yes. I picked 'em up at Blakeley's lumber yard at Toms River."

"Ah-ha, we make the progress. Excuse us, if you please. We go to interview this Monsieur Blakely."

His little round blue eyes were dancing with excitement; every now and then he gave a chuckle as we drove pell-mell toward Toms River.

"What are you so pleased about?" I asked. "You look like the cat that's just dined on the canary."

"Not quite, my friend," he answered with an impish grin. "Say rather that I look like one about to dine upon roast poltergeist." He raised his hands before him and brought them slowly toward each other. "We have him in a vise. Why did he trouble no one but the servants? Why was it that he failed to annoy guests or family until last night? Because he was a snob? *Mais non*. Because the servants' quarters and the smoke house where the so unfortunate young Meadows met his death were built of olden brick and timber——"

"What has that to do with it? The bricks and timbers of the main house are old as those they built the north wing and the smoke house with——"

"*Mais certainement*, but of a different origin undoubtlessly. Regard me, if you please:

"Thoughts are things. We cannot see or touch or weigh them, but they are things. They have the power to

impress themselves upon inanimate objects, on sticks and stones and bricks, and like wheat buried with the mummy they may lie dormant for an age, then sprout to life when given new and favorable environment. The sorcerer who treasures earth from an unhallowed grave or the rope which hanged some master criminal is practising more than mere symbolism, I assure you.

"Again: In every case of poltergeist activities we find that two things are essential, physical limits, as of walls, and some mediumistic person to transform the stored-up evil force from static to dynamic. Here we have the ideal combination, bricks and boards and timbers which undoubtedly have been in contact with some evil-living, evil-thinking persons, and a source of psychoplasm—Daisy Mullins—to energize the accumulated force, to focus it and make it possible for it to have a physical and fulminant effect."

"Aren't you taking a lot for granted?"

He fairly glowered at me. "When you see a patient with high temperature, nose-bleed, abdominal tenderness and distension and an inclination toward profound lethargy, do you have to take a blood test, must you see the typhosus bacillus in your microscope before you decide he is suffering from enteric fever and begin appropriate treatment? Of course not. So in this case. So many diagnostic factors are apparent that I have no hesitancy in predicting what we shall learn when we speak with the peerless lumberman at Toms River."

"SURE, I remember that junk," the Blakeley foreman said. "It lay around our yard ten years. I thought that we were stuck with it for keeps till Mr. Thorowgood saw it."

"Ah, yes, and could you tell us where it came from?"

"Sure. Centermead, Doc Bouton's sanitarium. The old man ran a private bughouse there for close on thirty years, and went crazy as a basketful o' eels before he finally killed himself. Say, how'd you 'a' liked to be shut up in a nut college with the doctor loony as a chinch-bug, beatin' up an' torturin' the patients, an' even killin' 'em, sometimes?"

Jules de Grandin drew a deep breath. "By damn, I can inform the cross-eyed world such treatment would have driven off my goat," he answered solemnly.

The foreman was still gaping when we drove away.

"YOU see, it matches perfectly," he said triumphantly. "Every necessary element is present. The long association with the mad—the living dead—the lustful cruelty of a doctor who had yielded up his sanity through contact with the sick in mind, the suffering, the torture, the despair. . . . But yes, could these bricks and timbers speak they would relate a tale to give us nightmare of the soul for many years to come. It is small wonder that the haunting influence acts with low intelligence; it is the tincture, the very distillate of compressed madness with which these bricks are saturated to the overflowing point. All that was needed was the energizing force supplied by Daisy Mullins."

"And what do we do next?"

"*Mais cela parle tout seul*—the thing speaks for itself. We have but to demolish that north wing and smoke house, remove the source of the infection, and the hauntings will be cured. My friend, this Jules de Grandin is one devilish clever fellow. Is he not?"

"I've heard you say so," I returned.

A wrecking-crew was already at work when we caught the solitary east-bound train for Harrisonville next morning.

"DOCTOR DE GRANDIN?" a Western Union messenger accosted us as we drew up before my house. "I have an urgent message for you."

The missive was brief with telegraph terseness, but imperative: "Men unable to continue work because of accidents stop need your advice immediately."

"Take the extension and listen as we talk, if you please," he asked me as he rang up Thorowgood. "I should like to have you hear the conversation.

"Allo?" as the connection was made. "It is I, de Grandin. What seems to be the matter, if you please?"

"Plenty," Thorowgood answered tersely. "You'd hardly left when things began to happen. A workman fell off the roof and broke his leg. He swore somebody pushed him, but I smelled liquor on his breath, so I can't be sure o' that. Then another man got a broken arm when half a dozen bricks fell on him; one of 'em hit his foot with a pick-ax and nearly cut it off. The place looked like a battlefield, and the men quit cold. Told me to go jump in the lake when I offered double time if they'd stay on the job. What're we going to do?"

"*Eh bien*, he is of the obduracy, this one. He does not take his ouster calmly."

"See here, this is no time to wise-crack. This thing has hurt a girl, killed a man and injured half a dozen others. Now it takes possession of my house. How're we going to get rid of it?"

"I would suggest you leave him in possession overnight. Move your en-

tourage to an hotel, and come back tomorrow morning with a fresh crew of workmen prepared to dynamite the walls. Also, bring back the young Mullins girl. I have need of her. Doctor Trowbridge and I will motor down and meet you at Swan Upping in the morning. *Au 'voir*, my friend.

"You will excuse me?" he asked as he put the monophone back in its cradle. "I have work to do. There are authorities to be consulted and *matériel* to be collected. I shall be back for dinner."

It was not until dessert that he spoke concerning his work of the afternoon. Then, irrelevantly: "You know the works of Judge Pursuivant?" he asked.

"Who?"

"The very learned, very able, very well-informed Keith Hilary Pursuivant. What a scholar, what a man! His book *The Unknown that Terrifies* is worth the ransom of an emperor to any occultist. I read him this afternoon, and in him I found comfort. Silver, says the learned Judge, is specific protection against every form of evil. You apprehend?"

"Was that bundle you brought home some magic formula of his?"

"Not precisely," he grinned. "*Monsieur le Juge* supplied the thought, I follow his suggestion. I secured a supply of silver wire and netting."

"Silver wire—for goodness sake!"

"*Précisément, mon vieux*. For goodness' sake, no less."

"But why silver? Wouldn't any other metal do as well?"

"By no means. Silver, as the learned judge has pointed out, with a number of citations, is a potent force against all evil. Iron, most earthly of all metals, is abhorrent to the ghostly tribe, so much so that when Solomon King of Israel reared his temple to the Most

High God with the help of Hiram King of Tyre and that great architect Hiram the Widow's Son, no tool of iron was heard to ring throughout the building operation, since they were helped by friendly *djinn* who could not have abided in the neighborhood of sharpened iron. But for discarnate evil, evil vague and without definition, silver is the better metal. Ghostly foes incapable of being killed to death with leaden bullets, witches, werewolves and vampires, all are vulnerable to silver shot. Does not your own Monsieur Whittier, who was a very learned man as well as a great poet, mention it? But certainly. In his narrative of the garrison beleaguered by a phantom foe he relates:

"Ghosts or witches," said the captain, "thus I foil the Evil One!"

And he rammed a silver button from his doublet down his gun.

"And you expect to overcome this powerful thing with silver netting and some wire?" I asked incredulously.

"I expect to overcome him in that manner," he replied in a flat, toneless voice, fixing an unwinking stare of challenge on me.

THE scene which greeted us at Swan Upping was reminiscent of a circus about to strike camp. Two trucks stood idling on the rear driveway; a crew of wreckers waited to commence work; back and to one side was a small red wagon with the word EXPLOSIVES lettered ominously on its sides and front.

"*Très bon*. All is prepared, I see," de Grandin smiled. "Where is the Mullins girl, if you please?"

"Waiting there with the nurse," Thorowgood waved toward a limousine.

"Ah, yes. Will you excuse me while I persuade her?" For some five min-

utes he engaged her in a whispered conversation, then came hurrying back to us. "She has consented, it is well," he told us as he cut the wrappings of his parcel.

His preparations were made quickly. A bed of blankets was laid in the partially demolished smoke house and Daisy Mullins lay on it. Working deftly he enveloped her in length on length of silver-wire gauze, laminating each fold on the next until she was encased in the light netting like a mummy in its wrappings. Only at her mouth did he permit an opening, and over this he hinged a little door of netting and tied a length of thread to it.

"*Bien*," he patted her encouragingly. "I shall be but little longer, *Mademoiselle*."

With heavier silver wire he wove a basket-like covering for her, leaving something like six inches between her body and the cage.

"You are quite comfortable?" he asked. She nodded, looking at him with wide eyes in which her confidence in him was struggling with abysmal fear. From the pocket of his jacket he drew a little mirror to which a string had been attached. This he twisted round his left forefinger, permitting the glass to hang pendulumwise. "Eyes upon the mirror, if you please," he ordered, as he began to swing it slowly back and forth.

"Tick—tock; tick—tock!" he recited in a monotone, keeping time to the slow oscillation of the glass. "The clock is ticking, *Mademoiselle*, slowly, slowly, ver-ry slowly. Tick—tock; tick—tock; you are ver-ry tired. You are so very weary you must sleep; sleep is the thing you most desire. Sleep and rest, rest and sleep. Tick—tock; tick—tock!"

The girl's eyes wavered back and

forth, following the gleaming arc the mirror marked, but as he droned his monody they became heavy-lidded, finally closed. "Sleep—sleep," he whispered. "Tick—tock; sleep—sleep!"

"Now what——" I began, but he silenced me with a fierce gesture and stood looking at the sleeping girl intently.

For perhaps two minutes he stood statue-still regarding her; then carefully, like one who tiptoes through a room where a restless sleeper lies, he bent down, took a length of silver wire in his right hand, and grabbed the thread attached to the hinged door above her mouth. "*Regardez, s'il vous plaît!*" he whispered almost soundlessly.

I started, but kept silent. From between her lightly parted lips a little thread of vapor issued. "Breath," I told myself. "It's cold today. . . ."

But it was not breath. Scarcely thick enough for liquid, it was yet too ponderable to be called vapor, and seemed to have a semi-solid, gelatinous consistency. Too, it flowed in quasi-liquid fashion across her lower lip, but with a quivering instability, like quicksilver. Then it seemed to lighten and assume a gaseous buoyancy and hover in mid-air above her. It was taking form, too, of a sort, not definite, but shifting, changing, seeming to flow and melt upon itself and, ameba-like, to put forth gastropodal extensions of its substance. Like an animalculum in tainted water it floated driftingly above the girl's lips, joined to her lightly opened mouth by a ligament of smoky-seeming semi-fluid; waxing larger every second. In the quarter light of the smoke house it gleamed and glistened with a putrid phosphorescent glow. Gradually, insensibly at first, but growing stronger every instant, the foul effluvium of its

overpowering stench spread through the place, fulsome, nauseous, sickening.

"I think that is enough, me," de Grandin said, and gave the string he held a sharp pull. The hinged deadfall above the girl's face-covering dropped, shearing through the foggy wisp that issued from her lips. The inchoate, amorphous thing that floated over her suddenly contracted, bent its finger-like extensions in upon itself, like a spider curling up when sprayed with an insecticide. Then it bounced toward de Grandin as surely and purposefully as though it saw him and intended to attack him.

He raised his two-foot length of silver wire like a sword, but its protection was unneeded. The almost shapeless mass of foulness that rushed at him struck full against the silver cage that he had woven over Daisy, and, as if it struck a spring, bounced back again.

There was something fascinating, and revolting, in its antics. It was like one of those toys of the physical laboratory called Cartesian devils which, as the membranes of their bottles are pressed down or released, rise, sink or float according to the pressure. Up it surged until it struck the wire cage; then down again it recoiled till it touched the silver netting which he had wrapped round the girl. Then up it rushed again, only to be driven back by contact with the silver cage.

"*Dans les mâchoires de l'étau!* I have you in the vise, my most unpleasant one!" de Grandin cried triumphantly. "Take her up, Friend Trowbridge; help me with her, if you will."

Carefully we lifted the unconscious girl and bore her to the waiting car. As we came out into the light I noticed that the foul thing hovering over her became transparent, almost invisible.

But its overpowering stench remained to tell us it was there.

ELECTRIC drills worked furiously, dynamite was placed at proper intervals, and at a signal battery plungers were thrust down. There was a detonation and a rumbling roar, and walls and roofs of servants' quarters and smoke house came toppling down in ruins.

The wreckers worked with methodical speed. Load after load of shattered brick and timber was piled upon the trucks and hustled to the river, dumped into the turbid, frosty water, and replaced by other loads. By noon the wreckage had been cleared away, and only empty gaping cellars and a brash of broken bricks and mortar told where the structures had been.

"Stand back, my friends!" de Grandin ordered. "I am about to liberate him!"

Holding a lash of wire defensively, he bent and wrenched an opening in the cage above the sleeping girl.

"Begone, avaunt, aroint thee, naughty thing!" he commanded, switching vigorously at the almost invisible globular shape that hovered in midair above her body.

There was a flicker, as of unseen lightning, and a southing *whish!* as if a sudden strong wind blew past us. In a moment the foul odor faded, growing fainter every instant. Before five minutes had elapsed it had disappeared.

"And that, my friends," he told us, "is indubitably that."

THE dinner had been perfect as only the inspired chef of the Reading Club could make it. Oysters and champagne, turtle soup with dry sherry, sole with chablis, partridge with Château Lafite . . . de Grandin passed a lotus-bud shaped brandy sniffer back and

forth beneath his nose and turned his eyes up to the ceiling with a look of ecstasy. "*What is it that the vintners buy one-half so precious as the stuff they sell?*" he misquoted Omar Khay-yám.

"Never mind the poetry," Thorowgood commanded. "How'd you do it? I know you put it over, but——"

"But it was so simple, *Monsieur*," supplied Jules de Grandin. "Simple like the binomial theorem or the hypothesis of the Herr Professor Einstein. Yes." He warmed the glass between his cupped palms, inhaled again, then drank as if it were a solemn rite he practised.

"My friend Judge Pursuivant gave me the necessary hint," he added. "Granted silver would repulse this thing, we were enabled to confine it while we wrecked the buildings from which it emanated. So we put the Mullins girl in his way, enabled him to half-materialize, and then—*eh bien*, he was excessively annoyed when he found what we had done to him, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"It required but a brief investigation to find that these bricks and timbers came from an old house where evil had run riot. Evil thoughts, evil sentiments, evil instincts, despair and violent death had washed those bricks like ocean waves. They were saturated with it. They were very reservoirs of wicked power, waiting only for some mediumistic help to bring them into focus, just as sunlight needs a burning-glass to enable it to start a fire. This focussing-medium was supplied—all unconsciously—by the poor Mullins girl. The static power of evil became dynamic force by use of psychoplasm which it stole from her. You thwarted it when you removed her to the hospital, but it pursued her thither, renewed its strength, killed the stable boy and almost took

possession of the Bradley person's body. When we removed her from the hospital its source of energy was weakened, but it still had strength enough to fight the wreckers off.

"Then I took counsel with myself. We would bring the Mullins girl to it. We would place her in a deep, hypnotic sleep. There was its chance. It could not resist the opportunity of strengthening itself from her. Ha, but it did not take me into its calculations! I had made arrangements, me. Her I enclosed in silver netting, so it could not do her injury. Only her mouth did I leave unprotected, and as soon as it had partially materialized so we could see it, I dropped the trap across its source of energy, and left it high and dry, unable to retreat, unable to go forward, hemmed in on every side by silver. Then while we held him incommunicado we pulled down his nest about his ears. We robbed him of his power house, his source of potency.

"Experience has taught us that a poltergeist cannot operate without material limits, such as walls, and neither can he operate without an energizing medium. We may compare him to gunpowder. Drop it loose upon the earth and nothing happens. Touch fire to it and it goes up in harmless flame and smoke. But confine it in a twist of

paper, and touch fire to it, and *pouf!* we have the grand Fourth of July explosion. So with the poltergeist. The walls are to him as the paper covering is to the squib, *le pétard*, the—how do you call him?—the cracker-of-fire? Very well. It needs then but the medium to set him off, and there he is. Unconfined, he is harmless. Remember how those bricks lay for ten years in Monsieur Blakeley's lumber yard and nothing untoward happened? That was because they lay in the open. But when you built them into solid walls——"

"D'ye think it'll be safe to have that Mullins girl around the house? She's been a faithful little thing, standing by me when the other servants ran out, but——"

"You need not distress yourself, *Monsieur*. The evil-saturated bricks have been dumped in the river. They are no longer a potential source of harm. Just as the poltergeist could not function without her, she cannot energize a power which is not present."

"Where do you suppose that poltergeist force went?" I put in.

"*Tenez*, who can say? Where does the flame go when one blows the candle out? He is obliterated, dispersed, swallowed up—*comme ça!*"

He raised the brandy sniffer to his lips and drained it at a gulp.