

JAN.—25c

Weird Tales



The Red Knife of Hassan

a Jules de Grandin mystery-thriller

By SEABURY QUINN

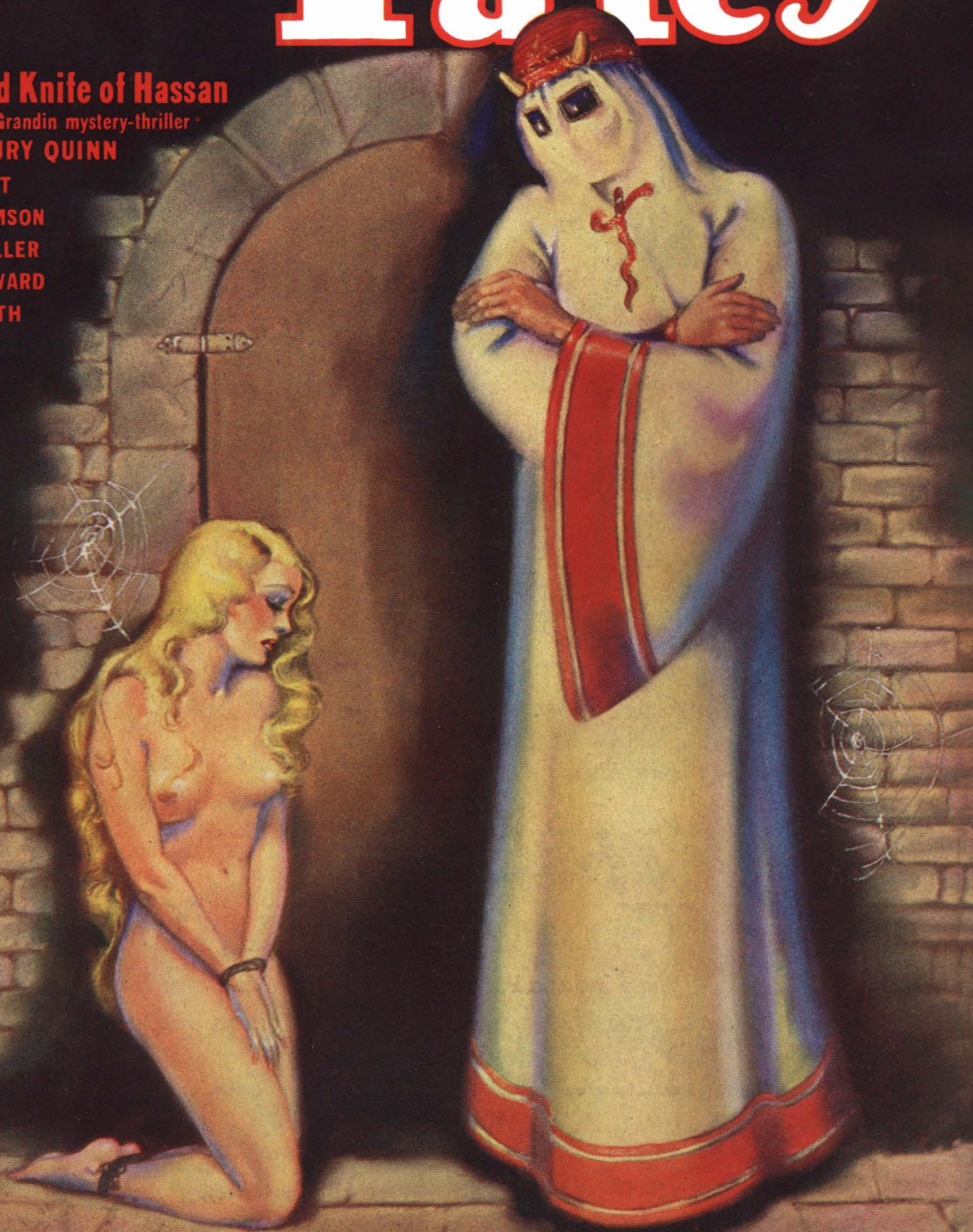
A. MERRITT

J. WILLIAMSON

D. H. KELLER

R. E. HOWARD

C. A. SMITH



A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL



Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 23 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY, 1934 Number 1

Cover Design	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "The Red Knife of Hassan"</i>		
The Solitary Hunters	David H. Keller	3
<i>A powerful story of the blood-freezing horror awaiting the men who were sent to a living death in the crater of an extinct volcano</i>		
The Red Knife of Hassan	Seabury Quinn	22
<i>A thrill-tale of the Assassins of Syria—an exploit of Jules de Grandin</i>		
Place Names	Katharine van der Veer	42
<i>Verse</i>		
Invaders of the Ice World	Jack Williamson	43
<i>A weird-scientific tale of the far-distant future, when the sun dims, and creatures spawned by the frost make war upon the survivors of the human race</i>		
Too Late	Alfred I. Tooke	58
<i>Verse</i>		
A Phantom in the Sky	Dale Clark	59
<i>A strange tale of an aviator's weird experience in a doomed airplane</i>		
Rogues in the House	Robert E. Howard	68
<i>A swift-moving tale of the squatting monstrosity that sat in the death-chambers of Nabonidus</i>		
The Weaver in the Vault	Clark Ashton Smith	85
<i>A story of the weird doom that came upon the searchers in the tombs of Chaon Gacca</i>		
The Vampire Master (conclusion)	Hugh Davidson	94
<i>A novel of corpses that would not stay dead, and a gruesome horror in the New York hills</i>		
In the Triangle	Howard Wandrei	109
<i>A brief, strange tale about a weird beast and an old man in gray</i>		
Candles	Dorothy Quick	113
<i>Verse</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Woman of the Wood	A. Merritt	114
<i>One of the most popular stories from WEIRD TALES of several years ago</i>		
The Eyrie		132
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		
Possession	Julius Long	136
<i>A short but intensely interesting weird tale</i>		

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3.00 a year in the United States, \$4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1934, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Red Knife of Hassan

By SEABURY QUINN



"Look, look—oh, dear God look!" rasped Margaret Dittmas.

A vivid thrill-tale of a weird murder-mystery, and the exploits of the fascinating little French detective, Jules de Grandin

"**M**ON DIEU, is it the—what do you call him?—pinch?" asked Jules de Grandin as the traffic policeman's white-rubber mitten rose before us through the driving rain.

"Askin' your pardon, sir, you're a doctor, ain't you?" The officer pointed to the green cross and caduceus of the medical association attached to my radiator.

"Yes, I'm Doctor Trowbridge——"

"Well, can you spare a moment to go

out to th' dredge?" the other interrupted. "One o' th' crew's hurt bad, an' while they're waitin' for th' amb'lance it might help if——"

"But certainly, assuredly; of course," de Grandin answered for me. "Lead the way, *mon brave*, we follow."

The grimy, oil-soaked launch which acted as the harbor dredge's tender was waiting at the pier, and within five minutes we were on the squat, ungainly craft

which gnawed unsurfeited at the ever-shifting bottom of the bay. The injured man, an assistant in the fire room, was suffering intensely, for an unattached steel cable had swung against him as he crossed the deck, smashing the tibia and fibula of his left leg in a green-stick fracture.

"*Non*, there is little we can do here," said the Frenchman as we finished our examination. "We have no proper fracture box, nor any instruments for cutting through the skin in order to secure the splintered bone, but we can ease his pain. Will you prepare the hypo, good Friend Trowbridge? I would suggest two grains of morphine; he suffers most intensely, and a smaller dose would scarcely help him."

Buttoned to the chin in oilskins and swearing like a pirate, the ambulance surgeon came out in the launch as we completed our administration of the anodyne, and rough but willing hands placed the injured man in the boat which bumped its prow against the dredge's side. Sheltered in the doorway of the engine room, we watched the great dredge at its work while we awaited the return trip of the launch. Like some voracious monster diving for its prey the great clam-shell scoop plunged from the tip of the forty-foot boom into the rain-beaten waters of the bay, disappeared amid a ring of oily bubbles, then emerged with water streaming from between its iron teeth, gaped like a yawning hippopotamus, and dropped a ton or more of sand and silt and sediment into the waiting barge.

"Yes, sir, four times a minute, regular as clockwork, she fishes up a mouthful for us," the engineer informed us proudly. "At this rate we'll have this stretch o' channel all cleared out by—God a'mighty, what's that?"

Horribly reminiscent of an oyster im-

paled upon a fork it hung, feet gripped between the dredge's iron fangs, flaccid arms dangling pendulously, the nude and decomposing body of a woman.

"Easy, Jake, let her down easy!" cried the engineer to the man at the cable-drum. "Don't spring the scoop—we don't want 'er buried in that muck.

"Coming, Doctor?" he cast the question at us impersonally as he jerked the collar of his slicker up about his throat and dashed across the deck through the slanting sheets of winter rain.

"But certainly, of course we come," de Grandin answered as he followed close upon the other's heels, clambered across the rail and let himself almost waist-deep into the ooze which filled the mud-scow's hold. More cautiously, I followed; and as the cable man, with an art which was surprising, lowered the great iron shell, released the gripping metal teeth and let the body slide down gently in the mire, I bent beside the little Frenchman to examine the weird salvage.

"*Non*, we can not see her here," complained de Grandin irritably. "Lift her up, my friends, gently, carefully—so. Now, then, over to the deck, beneath the shelter of the engine-house. Lights, *pour l'amour de Dieu*, shine the light upon us, if you please!"

A big reflector-lamp was quickly plugged into a light-terminal, and in its sun-bright glare we bent to our examination. There was an area of greenish-gray about the face and throat, extending through the pectoral region and especially marked at the axillæ, but very little swelling of either abdomen or mammæ. As I lifted one of the dead hands I saw the palmar skin was deeply etched with wrinkles and slightly sodden in appearance. When de Grandin turned the body over we saw an area of purplish stain upon the dorsal section, but the shoulder-

blades, the buttocks, backs of the thighs, calves and heels were anemic-white in startling contrast.

"Drowned, of course?" the engineer asked jerkily with the layman's weak attempt at nonchalance before the unmasked face of death.

"No, *non*; by no means," returned the Frenchman shortly. "Observe him, if you please, *le fil de fer*, the—how do you say him?—wire." A slender, well manicured forefinger pointed to the slightly bloated throat just above the level of the larynx. I had to look a second time before I saw it, for the softened, sodden flesh had swollen up around it, but as his finger pointed steadily I saw, and as I realized the implication of the thing, went sick with shock. About the throat a length of picture-wire had been wound and re-wound, its ends at last spliced tightly in a knot, so there could have been no slipping of the ligature.

"Strangulation!" I exclaimed in horror.

"*Précisément; la garrotte*, the work of the *apaches*, my friends, and very well and thoroughly they did it, too. Had it not been for the dredge she might have lain upon the bottom of the bay for months and no one been the wiser. Observe, the coldness of the water has retarded putrefaction, and undoubtedly she was weighed down, but the iron teeth broke off the weights. One might suppose that——"

"What's that on the left cheek?" I interrupted. "Would you say it was a birthmark, or——"

The Frenchman drew a pocket lens from his waistcoat, held it at varying distances from the dead girl's face, and squinted through it critically. "*Grand Dieu*, a birthmark, a putrefactive stain? *Non!*" he cried excitedly. "Look, Friend Trowbridge, look and see for yourself. What is your opinion?"

I took the magnifying-glass and focused it till the blister-marked and scuffing skin enlarged in texture underneath my gaze, and then I saw, rising up from the discolored epidermis like a coat-of-arms emblazoned on a banner, the outline of a scar shaped something like a crescent standing on end, not marked upon, but deeply pressed into the flesh of the left cheek.

"H'm, no, it's not a natural mark," I commented. "Looks almost like a second degree burn or——"

"It is a second degree burn, by blue—a brand!" the little Frenchman broke in sharply. "And there is a line of blister round it, showing that it was made on living skin. *Parbleu*, I damn think we have work to do, Friend Trowbridge!

"Call the tender, if you will, *Monsieur*," he turned to the chief engineer. "We must notify the coroner, then see that an autopsy is made. This is a very evil business, *mes amis*, for that poor one was branded, strangled, stripped and thrown into the bay."

As we stepped into the launch which plied between the dredge and piers he added grimly: "Someone sits in the electric chair for this night's business, my friend."

CORONER MARTIN, Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello, Jules de Grandin and I faced each other in the coroner's private office. "The necropsy bears out my diagnosis perfectly, *Messieurs*," the little Frenchman told us as he helped himself to another glass of brandy from Mr. Martin's desk-cellar. "There was no trace of water in the lungs, showing that death could not have come from drowning, and even though dissolution had advanced, fractures of the larynx and the rings of the trachea were obvious, showing that death had come from

strangulation. Taking the temperature of the water into consideration, we may say with fair assurance that the state of putrefaction places her murder at about two weeks ago. Unfortunately the face is too much disfigured to help us with identification, but——"

"How about that scar?" I interjected.

"*Précisément*, how of it?" he rejoined. "Observe it, if you will." Unfastening a paper parcel he held out a little square of parchment-like substance stretched tightly on a wire hoop. "I took the liberty of clipping away the scarified skin and impregnating it with formaldehyde," he explained. "The scar which was so indistinct when viewed upon her face may easily be studied now. What do you make of it, Friend Trowbridge?"

I took the little drumhead of skin and held it underneath the light. The mark was not a crescent, as I had at first supposed, but rather a silhouette of a hiltless dagger with an exaggeratedly curved blade. "A knife?" I hazarded.

"*Précisément*, and that suggests——"

"You mean it might have been a sort of ritual murder?"

"It looks that way, my friend."

"Sure," Costello broke in, "I've heard about them things—ran into one of 'em, onct, meself. A dago case. This here now felly'd belonged to one o' them secret societies, an' tried to take a powder on 'em, or sumpin, an' they give 'im th' *sforza*, I think they called it; th' death o' th' seventy cuts. Doctor de Grandin, sor, he were more like a piece o' hamburger steak than annything human when they'd finished wid 'im. Are ye afther thinkin' this pore dame wuz mixed up in sumpin like that?"

"Something like that," the Frenchman echoed; then:

"Will you consult the files of the Missing Persons Bureau, Sergeant, and ascer-

tain if any young woman approximately the size of this one was reported missing in the last month? That may help us to identify her."

But the check-up proved useless. No record of a girl of five feet three, weighing a hundred and ten pounds, was in the missing persons file at headquarters, nor did communication with New York, Newark and Jersey City help us. Mr. Martin, as the keeper of the city mortuary, took charge of the body and buried it in an unmarked grave in the public plot of Rosevale Cemetery, the only record of its disposition being: "Mary Doe, Plot D, Sec. 54, West Range 1458."

Costello went about his duties of pursuing evil-doers with his customary Celtic efficiency, and dismissed the incident from his mind. I reverted to my practise, and thought but seldom of the poor maimed body; but Jules de Grandin did not forget. Several times at dinner I caught him staring sightlessly before him, neglecting the rare tidbits which Nora McGinnis, my highly gifted cook, prepared especially for him. "What's the matter, old chap?" I asked him one night when he seemed especially distraught.

He shook his head as though to clear his thoughts, and: "*Ab bah*," he answered in annoyance, "there is a black dog running through my brain. That *Mademoiselle l'Inconnue*, the poor nameless one whom we saw fished up from the bay, her blood calls out to me for vengeance."

IT WAS a merry, though decidedly exclusive party Colonel Hilliston entertained at his big house down by Raritan. Why de Grandin had been so set on coming I had no idea, but from the moment he learned that Arbuthnot Hilliston, world traveler, lecturer and explorer, had returned from the Near East, he had given me no peace until I renewed old

acquaintance with the colonel, and obtained our invitation as a consequence. A hundred years and more ago some ambitious shipmaster had built this house, and built it solidly as the ships he sailed. Generations had gone by, the old blood thinned and finally trickled out; then Hilliston, weary of globe-trotting, had purchased the old place, rebuilt and modernized it, then with the restlessness of the born traveler had used it more as *pied-à-terre* than home, coming back to it only in the intervals between five-thousand-mile-long jaunts to write his books, prepare his lectures and foregather with his friends a little while.

"You've known Colonel Hilliston long, Doctor Trowbridge?" asked my dinner partner, a tall and more than ordinarily interesting brunette whose name, as I had caught it in the rite of presentation, was Margaret Ditmas.

"Not very, I'm afraid," I answered. "I knew his parents better. They were patients of mine when they lived in Harrisonville, and I attended Arbuthnot for the customary children's ailments, mumps and measles, chickenpox and whooping-cough, you know, but since he's been grown up and famous——"

"Did he ever strike you as a nervous child, or one likely to develop nerves?" she interrupted, and her large and rather expressionless eyes were unveiled suddenly by an odd raising of their upper lids.

"No-o, I can't say he did," I told her. "Just a normal boy, I'd say, rather fond of finding out the reason why for everything he saw, but scarcely nervous. Why do you ask?"

"Colonel Hilliston's afraid of something—terrified."

I glanced along the table with its priceless banquet cloth of Philippine embroidery, its gleaming silver and big, flat

bouquets of winter roses, till I saw our host's face in the zone of light which streamed from two tall candelabra. Plentiful dark hair, brushed sleekly back and growing low about the ears, framed a rather lean and handsome face, bronzed as a sailor's and with fine sun-lines about the eyes, a narrow, black mustache and strong, white teeth. A forceful, energetic face, this long-chinned countenance, hardly the face of a man who could be frightened, much less terrified. "What makes you think that Arbuthnot's developed nerves?" I asked.

"You see those doors?" she queried, nodding toward the triple French windows leading to the brick-paved terrace which skirted the seaward side of the house.

"Well?" I nodded, smiling.

"Their panes are set in wood, aren't they?"

"Apparently; but why——"

"They are, but every wooden setting has a steel bar reinforcing it, and the glass is 'burglar glass'—reinforced with wire, you know. So is every window in the house, and the doors and windows are all secured with combination locks and chains, while the outside doors are sheathed in steel. Besides, there's something in his manner; he's jumpy, seems almost listening for something, and acts as though he were about to turn round and look behind him every moment or so."

She was so serious and secretive about it all that I smiled despite myself. "And does he turn round?" I asked.

"No. I think he's like that man in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

"Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread."

"My dear young lady!" I protested, but

Jules de Grandin's voice cut through my words as he spoke jocularly to our host:

"And did you scale the Mount of Evil in Syria, *Monsieur le Colonel?*" he inquired. "The mountain where the ancient bad one dwelt, and sent his minions out to harry those who would not pay him tribute? You know, the Sheik Al-je-bal they called him in the ancient days, and he was head of the *haschisch*-eaters who for two long centuries terrified the world——"

Something flickered momentarily in our host's deep-set eyes, something which if it were not fear seemed very like it to me as I watched. "Nonsense!" he broke in almost roughly. "That's all damned poppycock, de Grandin. Those Assassins were just a lot of ordinary mountain bandits, such as Europe and the Near East swarmed with in those days. All this talk of their mysterious power is legendary, just as half the stories of Robin Hood—or Al Capone, for that matter—are the purest fiction." He gazed around the table for a moment, then nodded to the butler, a small, dark man with olive skin and big, Semitic features.

"Coffee is served in the drawing-room, please," announced this functionary, deftly bringing the meal to a close.

WE TROOPED into the big parlor, and I caught my breath in admiration of the place. The beauty of that room was a sort of mad, irrational loveliness, a kind of orderly arrangement of discordant elements which resulted in perfected harmony. A buhl table out of India, Fifteenth Century Italian chairs, Flemish oak, ponderous as forged iron and beautiful as carven marble, a Chinese cabinet which must have been worth its weight in solid gold, pottery, shawls and hangings from the near and farther East, carved jade, rugs so thick and soft it

seemed as though the floor were strewn with desert sand—a very art-museum of a place it was. Thick Turkish coffee and great squares of halwa were handed round by the stoop-shouldered butler, and presently long cigarettes, almost the size of a cigar, were lighted, and I caught the faint, elusive perfume of ambergris as the smoke-wreaths spiraled upward in the dim light sifting through the perforated bronze shades of the lamps.

"Ambergris — for passion," quoted Margaret Ditmas as she lolled beside me on the divan with a cat-like grace of utter relaxation. "You've heard the Easterners believe that, Doctor Trowbridge?"

I turned and studied her. Her hair was very black and glossy, and she wore it smoothly parted and drawn low above her ears. Her eyes were large, dark, queerly unmoving under thin-arched brows. Her mouth was wide, thin-lipped, very red, and her teeth were small and white. Beneath the hem of her black-satin gown there showed an inch or so of gray-silk stocking, and underneath the meshes of the silk there shone a gleam of platinum where a thread-thin anklet encircled her slim leg. I sensed a hard shell over her almost feline suppleness, as though she wore defensive armor against the world. "Where does she fit in?" I asked myself. "And why should she be so attentive to a bald, bewhiskered medical practitioner when there are young and handsome men around? Our host, for instance——"

Colonel Hilliston's voice broke through my ruminations. "Anybody like to play roulette?" he asked. "I've got a set-up here, so if you wish——"

A chorus of enthusiastic assent drowned out his invitation, and in a minute a roulette wheel and cloth were spread across the beautiful buhl table, and Hilliston took his place as croupier. Plaques were placed upon the numbered squares,

and: "*Le jeu est fait, messieurs et dames, rien ne va plus,*" he sang out nasally.

The little ball clicked round the spinning wheel, and: "*Vingt-deux, noir, messieurs et dames*——" he chanted.

The play was rather high. My American conscience and Scottish ancestry revolted at the sums I lost, but my losses were as nothing beside those of Miss Ditmas. She hung in breathless interest above the table, her dark eyes dilated, her small, white teeth clamped sharply on her carmine lower lip.

"*Le jeu est fait, messieurs et dames*—— what the devil?" Colonel Hilliston broke off his nasal chant as the lights winked out and the room was drenched in sudden, utter, blinding darkness.

"Nejib, Nejib—lights!" It seemed to me there was a thin, hysterical quality in Hilliston's voice as he called the butler.

A soft hand clasped on mine with a grip so strong it startled me, and Miss Ditmas' low-breathed whisper fluttered in my ear. "Doctor Trowbridge, I—I'm afraid *it got in!*"

There was a gentle whistling sound and a gentle draft of air swept on my face, as though an open hand had fanned swiftly past my features, and I thought I heard someone move past me in the dark and stumble clumsily against the roulette table.

"Lights, 'illiston *effendi?*" murmured the butler, appearing at the doorway with a silver candelabrum in each hand.

No answer came from Colonel Hilliston, and the fellow moved silently across the room, the aura of luminance from his burning tapers preceding and surrounding him.

"Look, look—oh, dear God, *look!*" rasped Margaret Ditmas in a choking whisper, then broke off in a wail of mortal terror. It was a terrifying sound, a little, breathless squeak of mortal fear

that thinned into a sick, shrill wail of horror. It seemed to hang and linger in the air like the tintinnabulation of a softly beaten gong, until at last I did not know if I still heard it or only thought I did—and would go on thinking that I heard that dreadful, shrilling cry of agonizing panic ever after.

And well she might cry out, for in the center of the roulette table stood the head of Colonel Hilliston. It stood there upright on its severed neck, white eyeballs glaring at us in the flickering candlelight, mouth gaping open as though to frame a cry.

Beneath the table lay the headless trunk, half sprawled, half crouched, one hand extended on the Turkey carpet, the other clasped about the table-leg, as though it sought to drag the body upward to the missing head. Blood was gushing from the severed jugulars and carotids, blood stained and soaked the carpet at our feet and splashed the tip of Jules de Grandin's patent-leather evening pump, and, amazingly, a tiny drop of blood hung like a jewel from the crystal prisms of the ceiling chandelier which swung above the table whence the head stared at us with a sort of silent accusation.

"**B**UT, my dear man!" Captain Chenevert of the state constabulary, who had come dashing from the Keyport barracks with two troopers in answer to de Grandin's call, hooked his thumb beneath his Sam Browne belt and gazed at us in turn with something like the look he might have given to a romancing child. "You tell me you were all assembled in the drawing-room when suddenly the lights went out and when that heathen butler—what's his dam' name? Nejib?—came in with candles, there was Hilliston without his head? Absurd! Preposterous!"

"*Parbleu*, you are informing us?" de

Grandin answered with elaborate sarcasm. "Nothing more utterly bizarre was ever fished up from the vapors of an opium-smoker's dream—but there it is. Including Doctor Trowbridge and myself and the late Colonel Hilliston, there were eight persons in that room. You have heard the evidence of seven, while the eighth bears mute but eloquent testimony of the murder. We are all agreed upon what happened: There is light, there is sudden darkness, then there is light again—and there is Colonel Hilliston without his head. Name of a devil, it is crazy; it is impossible; it does not make sense, but there it is. *Voilà tout!*"

"See here, you fellows," I put in; "Maybe this may have some bearing on the case, though I don't see how." Then, briefly, I told them of my conversation with Miss Ditmas at the table, her hand-clasp in the dark and her terrified declaration: "I'm afraid *it got in!*"

"By George, that is interesting; we'll have her in again," said Captain Chenevert; but:

"*Non*, not yet; one little moment, if you please," objected Jules de Grandin. "Me, I have what you call the hunch."

Crossing to the *secrétaire*, he tore a sheet of note-paper across, then with a match sopped up a little drying blood from the sodden carpet and traced the silhouette of a curved, sharp-pointed dagger on the paper. "Delay your summons for a little while, if you will be so kind," he urged, waving the paper back and forth to hasten drying. "Now, call her in, if you will."

He laid the gruesome picture face-downward on the table beside the objects taken from the dead man's pockets, and lit a cigarette as a trooper ushered Margaret Ditmas in.

"*Mademoiselle*," he began as she looked at us inquiringly, "we have made

an inventory of *Monsieur le Colonel's* effects, the little things he carried in his pockets. Perhaps you can identify them. Here are his keys: you recognize them? No?"

"No," she replied, scarcely glancing at the thin gold chain with its appended key-ring.

A little wad of crumpled banknotes followed, a cigarette lighter, knife, card case, cigarette case, and always, "No, I do not recognize it," she returned as each was shown to her.

Then: "Last of all, we came on this," de Grandin told her. "A strange thing, surely, for a gentleman to have," he turned the sheet of writing-paper with its scarlet dagger up, and held it toward her.

Her face went ghastly at the sight. "You—you found *that* on him?" she exclaimed. "The Red Knife of Has——"

Like a football player tackling an opponent, de Grandin launched himself upon her, grasping her about the knees and hurling her backward several feet before they fell together in a heap upon the floor. And not a fraction of a second had he been too soon, for even as he threw her back, the ceiling chandelier dropped downward like a striking snake, there was a gleam of steel and the *click* of closing metal jaws; then up the fixture leapt again and was once more the harmless glass-hung thing which it had been before.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle*, I did forget that you were standing where the colonel stood," de Grandin told Miss Ditmas as he helped her to her feet. "I hope you are not hurt—but if you are, your injury is slighter than it would have been had I not acted roughly."

"Shaunnessy, Milton!" shouted Chenevert. "Did anybody move?"

"Sir?" asked Trooper Shaunnessy. "Did the captain call?"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world he did," the captain answered angrily. "You were on guard in the library, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did anybody leave the room?"

"No, sir."

"Anybody get up, press a button or lean against the wall, or anything like that?"

"No, sir. Everyone was seated. No one moved until you called."

"All right. How about you, Milton?"

"Sir?"

"You were in the hall outside this room. See anybody?"

"No, sir; not a soul."

"Bring that butler to me, and bring him *pronto*."

A moment later Trooper Milton came back with the butler, who, arrayed in rubber apron, his sleeves rolled to the elbows, had obviously been engaged in the matter-of-fact occupation of washing the silver when summoned.

"Where were you just now?" the captain asked.

"In the pantry, please," the other answered. "Me, I always wash the silver after dinner. The kitchen maids the dishes wash when they come in the morning."

"Humph; you were the only one of the help here tonight?"

"Tonight and every night, please. The cook, the chamber maids, the kitchen girls, they all go home at sundown. Only I remain to serve the dinner and to close the house at night. Me, I sleep here."

"Know the combinations of those door-and window-locks?"

"No, please. 'Illiston *effendi*, he knows them only. You shut them so—they lock. But only he can open them."

"U'm; how long have these locks been here?"

"I not knowing, Captain *effendi*. I come here from Damascus with Colonel 'illiston when he come here. He engage to hire me there. I verree good butler and valet, me; serve in the finest English families, and——"

"All right; we'll look into your references later. What are you, an Arab or a Turk or——"

"Captain *effendi*!" the butler's protest was instinct with injured pride. "Me, I am Armenian. I very good Christian, me, I go to Christian school at——"

"All right, go back to the pantry now, and see you don't leave it unless you have permission."

"Hearing and obeying," replied the other, and turned with a deep bow.

"Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle," Captain Chenevert declared. "I sure will. This dam' case gets tougher by the minute. Now we know how Hilliston was killed, but who the devil worked that guillotine, and who installed it, and—say, Doctor de Grandin, d'ye suppose——"

A crash of breaking crockery, a wild, despairing scream and the noise of heavy objects crashing into one another drowned his question out.

"It's in th' pantry!" Trooper Milton shouted and raced down the long hall with the captain, de Grandin and me at his heels.

"Can't budge th' door!" he grunted as we stopped before the pantry entrance. "Seems like something's wedged against it——"

"Here, let me help," Chenevert cut in, and together they threw their shoulders against the white-enameled door.

It gave slowly, inch by stubborn inch, but at last they forced it back enough to let them in.

The pantry was a ruin. Across the

door a heavy table had been pushed, the china closet had been overturned, and scattered on the white-tiled floor were bits of Colonel Hilliston's choice silverware. Also upon the tiles there spread a great red stain, growing fainter and more faint as it approached the window, which, to our surprize, was open.

"Good Lord," the captain muttered, "they—whoever it was got Hilliston with that infernal beheading-machine — got that poor Armenian, too! Run outside, Milton; see if you can find any trace of the body."

De Grandin stooped and scooped a little of the blood from the floor into a bit of envelope he drew from his pocket; then, surprizingly, he fell to examining the pantry walls, completely ignoring the blood train leading to the window.

"Not a chanst o' findin' anything out there, sir," Trooper Milton reported. "It's rainin' cats an' dogs, and any trail they mighta left when they drug 'im away's been washed completely out."

"I was afraid of that," Chenevert responded with a nod. "What's next, Doctor de Grandin?"

"Why, I think we might as well go home," the little Frenchman answered. "You have the name and address of every person present; besides, I am quite sure the murderer has gone. I have made memoranda of some things you might investigate tomorrow, and if you'll kindly give them your attention we shall see each other here tomorrow afternoon. Possibly we shall know more by then."

"O. K., sir. How about that Ditmas dame? Think we'd better give her another going over? She's hiding something, and unless I miss my guess, she knows plenty."

The Frenchman pursed his lips and raised his shoulders in the faint suspicion of a shrug. "I do not think that I would

question her tonight," he answered. "Her nerves are badly out of tune, and she might easily become hysterical. Tomorrow evening, I think, we may learn something of real value from her."

"O. K.," the other repeated. "We'll do whatever you say, but I'd put her on the griddle *now* if it were left to me. See you about three o'clock tomorrow? Right-o."

"WELL, I checked up on those matters, sir," the captain told de Grandin when we met in the Hilliston drawing-room next afternoon. "It seems the work was done by a Greek or Armenian, or some kind of Syrian named Bogos; he installed the electrical fixtures, and, of course, this chandelier, along with all the other paraphernalia——"

"And how much more? one wonders," de Grandin interjected in a whisper.

"What's that?"

"Nothing of importance. You were saying——"

"This Bogos chap put in all the fixtures on Colonel Hilliston's orders, written from abroad, but when we went to Harrisonville to interview him, he'd skipped."

"Decamped?"

"Evaporated. Left with no forwarding address, you might say. Indeed, when we got to running over his activities, it appears that Hilliston's was the only job he ever did, and he left as soon as it was finished."

"U'm? This is of interest."

"You bet your neck it is. Looks as though this Bogos guy—his name shoulda been spelled 'bogus'—installed a lot of stuff not in Hilliston's specifications. What d'ye think?"

"I think it very likely," returned the Frenchman. "Now, if your men are ready, let us inspect Exhibit A of the machinery of murder."

With hammer and cold chisel two mechanics attacked the frescoed ceiling of the drawing-room, twenty minutes' work bringing the diabolical device to light. Concealed behind the innocent-looking mask of a prism-hung chandelier was a pair of strong steel jaws, razor-sharp, and working on oil-bathed bearings. How it was actuated there was no means of telling without tearing down the entire wall and ceiling of the room, but a single glance was sufficient to tell us that when the thing was dropped and the jaws sprung, it was powerful enough to bite through anything less resistant than a bar of iron. Measuring the cable on which it operated, we determined that it was designed to fall and gnash its metal jaws at a height of five feet from the floor.

"Colonel Hilliston was six feet one," Chenevert commented. "Allowing for an inch or so of neck, it was just made to slice his head off right below the chin. And say, wasn't that Ditmas girl lucky when you barged into her? The thing woulda bitten the top right off her head."

He took a turn across the room; then: "She was about to spill something when it started to drop on her, too," he added. "Something about some sort o' knife when you showed her that picture you'd made. Now, how the devil was it timed so nicely, and who worked it?"

"Let us inspect the butler's pantry," answered Jules de Grandin irrelevantly.

"Last night," he told us as we halted in the room from which the butler had been taken, "I made an examination of these walls while you were looking at the blood stains on the floor. Do you observe that clock?" He pointed to a small electrical chronometer set in the wall.

"Yeah, I see it. What about it?"

"Look closely at it, *Monsieur le Capitaine*. Does not it seem unusual?"

Chenevert examined the timepiece

from several angles, tapped it tentatively with his forefinger, finally compared it with his watch. "It's half a minute fast, that's all I see," he answered.

"*Ab bah*, you are like the idols of the heathen who having eyes see not!" de Grandin told him irritably. "See how it has been fastened to the wall? Screwed? *Non*. Cemented? Again *non*. Riveted? *Mais non*—it hangs on hinges. Now see." With a quick jerk he drew the time-piece forward like a door, disclosing a small cavity beneath it. In this there hung a little disk of hard black rubber, like a telephone lineman's ear-piece, and in the very center of the hole there was a circular lens, shaded by an apron of black metal.

"Look into it," he ordered, and hold the 'phone against your ear."

I gazed across the captain's shoulder as de Grandin left the pantry. In a moment I beheld him, as though seen through the large end of a pair of opera glasses, standing by the table where Hilliston had met his death.

"It is a kind of periscope," he told us as he re-entered the pantry. "Could you hear me when I spoke to you?"

"Yes, distinctly," answered Chenevert. "You said, 'Do not press the button at the bottom, if you please.'"

"*Exactement*. Now do you and good Friend Trowbridge go into the drawing-room and see what happens."

Obediently we walked to the parlor, and as Chenevert hailed, "All right, Doctor," we heard a sharp and wasp-like buzzing in the ceiling whence the men had moved the hidden guillotine.

"It is as simple as the alphabet when once one masters it," the Frenchman told us. "One in this ninety-times-cursed pantry sees what happens in the drawing-room. Also, he hears the conversation there. Now, if you look there by that

china closet, you will see a little metal door. What does it hide?"

"I'll bite," said Chenevert.

"A fuse-box, by blue! You see? Standing here, before this spy-hole, one can reach out and disconnect the lighting-wires from the drawing-room, from that whole section of the house, indeed, at a single motion. Then, when darkness falls upon the parlor, one does but press this button, and *pouf!* someone has his head decapitated with neatness and dispatch. Not only that, by the motion of the guillotine, the head is placed upon the table for all to look at when the lights go on again. Ingenious; ingenious as the schemes of Satan, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Why, then, that's what caused the little breath of air I felt against my face," I told him. "It was the guillotine dropping within an inch or so of me. Great heavens——"

"*Ab bah*, an inch was quite enough to spell the difference between life and death for you, my friend," he told me with a grin.

"But who the devil operated it?" Chenevert demanded. "Of course, the butler might have been back here when Hilliston was killed, but they bumped him off, too; so——"

"You are positively sure of that?" de Grandin interrupted.

"Well, nothing's sure but death and taxes, but when we heard him yell, then found this place all smeared with blood——"

"The liquid which you found upon the floor, by example?"

"Yeah, sure; what else?"

"Oh, I thought perhaps you might have found some blood," the little Frenchman answered with an elfin grin. "Last night I took precaution to soak some of that liquid into a piece of paper. Today I analyzed him. He is an exceptionally

fine specimen of—red ink, *mon Capitaine.*"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"One hopes sincerely otherwise, though undoubtedly you would lend a touch of *savoir faire* to hell, my friend."

"So that butler guy did it, after all! H'm. Now, how're we going to put the finger on him? That Ditmas girl——"

"*Précisément, mon Capitaine.* You have said it."

"Eh? Said what?"

"The pretty Mademoiselle Ditmas, she shall be our stalking-horse."

"**T**IENS, the threads begin to join together in a single cord," he told us as we drove toward Harrisonville.

"I can't see it," I responded. "It seems the most mixed-up hodgepodge I ever heard of. Nothing seems related to anything else, and——"

"You have wrong, my friend," he contradicted. "The relationship is clear, and growing clearer every minute. Consider——" he checked the items off upon his fanned-out fingers: "Last month we saw a poor dead girl fished up from the bay. Upon her cheek was burned the picture of a knife. Me, I do not know why this should be, but that picture is not merely the representation of a dagger, it is a dagger of one specific kind. The simplest form of dagger-picture is a cross, two straight lines crossing at right angles. Not this one, though. But no, certainly not. It is the carefully prepared picture of a Tripolitan throwing-knife—which may also be conveniently used as a hand-weapon.

"What should such a picture be doing burned on an American young lady's cheek? I want to know. This business smells strongly of the East, even to the manner of her killing. Then *zut!* through the so thick head of Jules de Grandin

comes a thought. I was in the Service of Intelligence in the War, my friends; besides I have done some service for the *Sûreté*, and I have friends around the world. One of them, serving with our forces in Syria, wrote me but recently of a revival of that sect once called *les Assassins*—the almost mythical but very potent followers of Hassan ibn Sabbah, who from their fortress at Aleppo had terrorized two continents for near three hundred years. Not like a plague, but rather like an epidemic sickness the chapters of this most abominable sect were springing up, now here, now there, throughout the country near Damascus, even as far as Jerusalem and Bagdad. The French had met them with repressive measures, and, believe me, Frenchmen entertain no silly sentimental notions of conciliating native prejudice where law and order are involved. However, we digress.

"The blood-red dagger, exactly like the one burned on that poor girl's face, was the official badge of Hassan's minions in the days of old. 'Now, can it be——' I ask me, and even as I ask, along comes Colonel Hilliston, the soldier and explorer, the *beau sabreur* among the travelers, and providentially, he is back from the Near East. 'This one will surely know of what is which,' I tell me confidently. 'He will have surely poked beneath the rubbish-heaps of gossip and found the truth. He is a learned man, a fearless man; best of all, he is a curious and most inquisitive man.'

"And so I plague my good Friend Trowbridge till he secures an invitation for us to the colonel's house, and while we all make merry at a most exquisite meal I bring the subject of the Haunted Mountain of the hashish-eaters up; I ask our host if he, by any happy chance, has scaled it for a look around. And does he tell me that he has? Damn no. He shies

away from such talk as a nervous horse goes dancing when a piece of paper blows across the road. Ah, but Jules de Grandin is no simpleton. Not he! He can read the signs in people's faces as he reads the print upon the page. And what does he see in the face of Colonel Hilliston? What does he see, I ask it?" He paused dramatically; then:

"Fear!" he said.

"Yes, *mes amis*, most certainly, it was fear I saw shine in his eyes, a fear that might be classified as terror; the terror of the hunted deer when, thinking herself safely hid, she hears the baying of the hounds upon her trail. Yes, certainly.

"*Et puis*—and then? Meantime my good Friend Trowbridge, with a manner highly unbecoming to his eminent respectability, has become most friendly with a pretty little lady who, if ever woman had it, contains a large-sized portion of the devil in her make-up. But do they talk of moonlight kisses and the scent of twice-crushed rose leaves in a lady's flowing hair, or tender nothings spoken underneath the twinkling stars? Damn no, they do entirely otherwise. They talk of Colonel Hilliston and of something which he fears, of the iron reinforcements of his doors and windows, of the locks and bars and bolts which make his house secure. Secure against whom—or what? What is the terror which pursues him night and day?

"And then, when all the lights go out, and we are plunged in darkness deeper than the blackness of the devil's lowest cellar, what does this pretty lady say to Doctor Trowbridge? 'I'm afraid *it got in!*'

"And next we see *Monsieur le Colonel* wholly headless, lying on the floor of his own house; yet no one knows who struck him down, or how, or why.

"'Oh, do they not, indeed? We shall inquire as to that,' I tell me when I am in-

formed of Miss Ditmas' conversation, and so I make a picture of a dagger. Not *any* dagger, but the kind of dagger which was burned upon the dead girl's face. And when I show it to Miss Ditmas and tell her we have found it on the colonel's body, what does she say? *Cordieu*, she starts to say it is the Red Knife of Hassan, but she does not finish saying it, for from the ceiling falls the guillotine which almost shears her head away, and thereafter she is speechless as an oyster.

"*Tiens*, we are gathering up the threads, my friends. This Mademoiselle Ditmas, Colonel Hilliston and the dead girl in the bay, they are three corners of a square."

"And the fourth?" I asked.

"Is Nejib, Colonel Hilliston's ex-butler."

"But he's an Armenian, a Christian," Captain Chenevert objected. "Those Assassins you're telling of are Turks or Arabs, or something like that, aren't they?"

"Can you distinguish between a Japanese and Filipino?" de Grandin countered. "Eh?"

"*Précisément*. They look alike; it would be easy to mistake one for the other. So with the peoples of the nearer East—Turks, Armenians, many of the Arabs, they are so much alike to outward seeming that one might easily pass muster for the other. No, this Nejib-butler, he is no Armenian; neither was the Bogos person who did the colonel's electrical work; they may not be Turks, I strongly doubt they are, but certainly beyond a doubt they are Assassins. Yes, of course."

"And you think Miss Ditmas can enlighten us?" I asked.

He raised shoulders, hands and eyebrows in a shrug. "Undoubtedly she can, but will she?" he replied.

THE early winter dusk was falling as we stopped before the house where Margaret Ditmas lived. "I'm not sure Miss Ditmas is in," said the attendant at the switchboard; "I'll ring her apartment——"

"Excuse me, you will do nothing of the kind," de Grandin interrupted. "Ringing telephones and sending in cards are only temptations to weak-souled ones to lie. We shall go ourselves to see if she is in, and—do not ring that telephone."

"You heard him, feller," Captain Chenevert added. "If anybody tips Miss Ditmas off we're on our way to see her, you're going to know what the inside of a nice, home-like jail looks like, and I don't mean maybe. See?"

Apparently the operator saw, for it was with an expression of surprize that the trim colored maid met us at the door of the apartment and ushered us in.

Miss Ditmas leant back in a wing chair, a gown of clinging gray swathing her lissome form from throat to insteps. A string of pearls hung round her neck, pearl studs were in her ears, a great pearl solitaire gleamed on the third finger of her right hand, upon her feet were sandals clasped about her ankles with pearl catches, and the little thread of platinum encircling her left ankle shone glimmeringly in the candlelight against her bare, pale-ivory skin. She lay back in the chair like one who slept, or rested after illness, and from the long, thin cigarette which dropped from her right hand a twisting trail of smoke went up, and as I caught its scent I thought of her quotation of the night before: "Ambergris—for passion."

She turned her head listlessly as we appeared, her clear white profile and night-black hair standing out in charming silhouette against the elfin candlelight, and a faint, wan smile stole across her face

like the smile of one who sleeps and dreams a sweetly melancholy dream.

"No, Doctor de Grandin, I haven't the faintest idea what it was that Colonel Hilliston feared," she replied in a low, sleepy voice. "Yes, I'd noticed how he'd reinforced his doors and windows, but the house stands in a lonely location, and he had many beautiful and expensive things in his collection. I suppose he wanted to make sure the place wouldn't be burglarized; don't you?"

Once more she smiled that slow, disinterested smile, and inhaled deeply from her amber-scented cigarette.

"I really don't know what I meant by what I said to Doctor Trowbridge when the lights went out," she answered his next query. "What does anybody mean by such hysterical statements? I was startled, terrified, when we were plunged in sudden darkness, and—do you know, I believe I'd taken too much wine at dinner! How I came to say anything about something getting in is more than I can imagine. Nothing got in really, did it? Unless it were the person who made off with poor Nejib just after my escape from that dreadful thing which dropped out of the ceiling?"

"*Mademoiselle*," de Grandin told her sternly, "this is not a *salle d'armes*."

"Really, Doctor, I don't quite understand."

"Very well, let us be frank as friends are frank. This is no place for fencing. We are come to ask you certain questions, it is true; but we have also come to warn you and protect you."

"Warn? Protect me? Whatever from?"

"From the Brethren of the Knife, *Mademoiselle*; from the wielders of the Scarlet Knife of Hassan!"

Her face went blank, then gray-white as a corpse's countenance, as he shot out

the bald statement, but she took a sudden grip upon herself, and:

"I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about," she told him.

"*Au 'voir, Mademoiselle, even le bon Dieu* is powerless to help those who will not help themselves," he answered tonelessly, and made her one of his stiff, Continental bows, that straight-backed bow which always suggested uniform and corset to me.

"Come, my friends, we have important duties to perform," he told Chenevert and me as he led us from the room.

"**N**ow where?" the captain asked as we waited for the automatic elevator.

"Upstairs," the Frenchman answered. "The flat above is vacant."

"What the devil——"

"*Tiens*, not the devil in his proper person, perhaps, but certainly his myrmidons," replied de Grandin with a grin. "Come, hurry; we waste our precious time in argument."

Arrived one story up, he tried the handle of the entrance to the suite directly above Miss Ditmas', found it locked, and as matter-of-factly as though setting a broken arm, set to picking the lock with scientific neatness and dispatch.

"Softly, if you please," he cautioned as we entered the vacant rooms; "I would not have our footsteps heard below."

Tiptoeing to the window, he inspected the fire escape which zigzagged down the building's side, nodded with a smile of satisfaction and turned again to us. "In half an hour they should come," he whispered. "Do you compose yourselves to wait, my friends; smoke, if you like, but do not speak above a whisper, and keep back from the window. We do not know where they may lurk or how thoroughly they may be watching."

The minutes dragged away and I was getting stiff from sitting on the floor with my back against the unupholstered wall when: "*P-s-st!*" de Grandin's sharp, admonitory hiss attracted my attention.

"*La fenêtre*—the window; look!" he ordered softly.

I looked up just in time to see a shadow, but a faint shade darker than the outside gloom, go floating downward past the casement, and half rose with an exclamation when his warning, upraised finger and another hiss arrested me. One, two, three times the window was blocked out by downward-drifting shadows, then de Grandin crept across the room, swung the casement back with slow and wary care, thrust his head forth and glanced quickly up and down, then motioned us to follow him.

"What——" Chenevert began; but:

"*S-s-sh*, great stupid one, be quiet!" the Frenchman warned him sharply. "This is no parade we make; leave the music home."

Step by cautious step we clambered down the fire escape, de Grandin in the lead, Chenevert and I nearly treading on his toes.

No sound reached our ears as we came opposite Miss Ditmas' open window. The room was dark as Erebus.

"Silence!" warned the Frenchman; then, his hand upon his pistol, "Follow me." He stepped through the open window, sweeping the room with his flashlight.

The place was in disorder, showing signs of recent struggle, but was empty of human life.

"*Nom d'un coq!*" exclaimed de Grandin sharply. "After them! We must find them, right away, at once; immediately! God grant that we come not too late!"

The door communicating with the hall was locked, and: "Burst it open," he ex-

claimed; "we have no time to pick the lock."

Suiting action to his words, we put our shoulders to the panels. It held us back a moment, but at the third rush it gave way, precipitating us into the hall.

"This way!" He hurried down the passage to a glazed door marked "Freight Elevator." He pressed the button savagely, but the automatic lift failed to respond.

"Ha, *par la barbe d'un poisson*, undoubtedly they took her down that ninety-times-damned lift," he panted as we hastened down the winding stairs. "They have wedged the lower door ajar to shut off our pursuit, for the mechanism will not lift unless all shaft-doors have been closed. But we have nimble legs, *parbleu*, and follow fast upon their heels!

"Outside, quickly!" he commanded as we reached the bottom floor. "They have secreted her within the basement, I damn think, but they are no fools, those ones. They will have locked the door behind them, and they would murder her while we were breaking through. This way!"

We burst into the outer air, and de Grandin ran fleetly out into the alley.

"Ah! God be thanked!" he exclaimed, pointing to a row of narrow windows set flush with the ground. "There *is* an entrance from outside. They are small, these windows, but not too small for Jules de Grandin, I damn think."

Cautiously, treading lightly as a cat, he examined each of the windows in turn. They were grimy, and impossible to see through clearly, but through the glass of one a light could be dimly seen. Just as he knelt in an attempt to peer through, a voice came thickly from the room inside.

"Oh, God!" a woman moaned despairingly. "Have pity on me, Hassan! I didn't tell them anything, I wouldn't—*oh!*" The exclamation cut her speech in half.

"No, you did not tell them—yet," the butler answered in a low and oddly hissing voice. "Nor will you tell, my pretty. The brand, the bowstring and the bay await you, even as they did that other who——"

"Oh, no—*no!* Not that, for pity's sake!" the tortured girl entreated. "I tell you I had no intention of disclosing anything! The Frenchman and the others came to call this evening, but I told them nothing—nothing! I swear it; I——"

The crashing of glass and tearing of rotten wood cut short her plea as de Grandin kicked in the window-frame and launched himself through the narrow opening.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle*, one dislikes to contradict a lady, but you told us much this afternoon," he interrupted as he landed, cat-like, on his feet.

Chenevert and I were close behind him, and our flashlights, stabbing through the cellar's light, disclosed a startling tableau. Upon the rug, birth-nude, knelt Margaret Ditmas. Her ankles were bound beneath her, her wrists were tightly lashed together; her face was a picture of utter despair. Two men stood near her, one slowly whipping a long, thin cord—picture-wire!—back and forth before him, the other heating something in a little charcoal brazier such as plumbers used to carry before the days of the gas-torch. But it was the one who stood with folded arms before her that drew and held my gaze as a magnet draws a needle.

The figure was clothed in a long white robe, with a curious head-piece that completely veiled the face except for two large, square eye-holes covered with gauze that hid the eyes behind them. On the front of the robe a dagger was embroidered in vivid red thread—the red knife of the Assassins, of whom Miss Ditmas had told us.

For an instant the tableau held. Then: "*Non*, do not move, *Messieurs*, or—*eh bien*, since you request it!"

Three knives flashed from their hidden sheaths even as he spoke, but quicker than the knives were Jules de Grandin's shots. So fast he fired it seemed as if a single line of flame were flashing from the muzzle of his automatic pistol, and the man above the brazier toppled over with his hands clasped to his stomach, while the fellow with the picture-wire hunched his shoulders forward as though about to sneeze, emitted a soft hiccup and fell face-downward on the rug, a spate of blood spilling from his gaping mouth.

The masked figure in front of Margaret Ditmas stood unmovable, swaying slightly, like a person seized with vertigo; then, like a tree which woodsmen have sawn through, his swaying motion quickened, and he toppled sideways, crashing down upon the floor, his long, curved knife still grasped within his hand. It was not till later that I learned de Grandin had shot the butler through the brain (for Nejib, the "Armenian," it was). He must have died upon his feet a full ten seconds before he fell.

"*EH BIEN*, she has had a shock, that one," de Grandin murmured as he looked in Margaret Ditmas' still, set face. "Cut the cursed cords off her and bear her to her bed, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I shall call police and coroner. Her story can await on our convenience, now."

The girl seemed curiously light in my arms as I carried her into the garish modernistic bedroom with its chromium-plated furniture and laid her on the big, flat bed, drawing a down-stuffed comforter over her. In the black-and-silver bathroom I found smelling-salts and a bottle of aromatic bromides, and I brought her from her faint with wet towels and

the salts, then gave her thirty grains of bromide. Presently she slept.

I sat beside her, hours, it seemed, while de Grandin and Chenevert moved round the room beyond, inspecting the three bodies, 'phoning to the coroner, examining the branding-iron, shaped like a hiltless knife with exaggeratedly curved blade, attending to the hundred and one things which policemen have to do in such a case.

Day came without dawn. The somber winter blackness of the night faded imperceptibly to smoky gray, at last to something like full daylight, but there was no sun, and in the sky the snow-clouds hovered threateningly.

"She is better? She has slept?" de Grandin asked as he and Chenevert came in quietly.

"Yes," I answered to both questions. "She should be all right, now, though I think a period of rest would do her good."

"Undoubtedly," he acquiesced, "but she has all her life to rest if she is so disposed, while we are very busy.

"*Mademoiselle* — *Mademoiselle* Margot!" he called softly.

She turned restlessly, muttering inaudible words, then, childishly, reached out and took my hand, cuddling it against her cheek, and smiled. A fierce, protective tenderness surged up in me. "For heaven's sake, de Grandin, let the child rest!" I urged him; but:

"*Mademoiselle*, it is morning!" he persisted.

A KIMONO draped around her shoulders, Margaret Ditmas sat in bed sipping at the tea de Grandin had prepared for her. "You're sure they're dead?" she asked him with an apprehensive look.

"As dead as forty herring—dead as mutton," he assured her. "Me, I made

them so, and I am most particular about my killings, *Mademoiselle*."

Reassured, she went on with her narrative: "I met Arbuthnot Hilliston in Jerusalem when Helen Cassaway and I were touring through the Orient last year," she told us.

"He was a fascinating man, and our acquaintance quickly became an intimate friendship. He knew a lot of places which no tourist ever sees, and the more we went about with him, the more his fascination seemed to grow on us. One day, as we were riding toward the site of the old Joppa Gate, he asked us how we'd like to witness the secret rites of the Assassins. Neither of us had ever heard of them, but the name sounded thrilling, and, of course, we agreed enthusiastically.

"From what he told us it seemed they were a revival of an ancient secret order founded by some old Persian in the Eleventh Century, and in their heyday they were more powerful even than the orders of military knights of the Crusades. They'd exacted tribute from the mightiest, and when the tribute wasn't paid, they killed. The Sultan Malik-Shah, the Califs Mostarshid and Rashid, fell beneath their daggers, as did Count Raymond, Christian ruler of Tripoli. Would seeing a lodge meeting of such an order, even though it were only a sort of pale modern copy of the flamboyant ancient original, be a thrill to any girls? You know the answer.

"Arbuthnot took us to the place. The night was dark, and we went in closed carriages; so neither of us knew where we were going, but when we got there we had to take our Western clothing off and put on long white gowns of some sort of heavy muslin with a scarlet dagger embroidered on the left breast. Then capveils were brought us, and we put them on. Not network veils, such as we have

here, but heavy cotton *baiks*, which were fastened over our faces just low enough below the cap-like head-dresses to let our eyes look out. Then we put about a dozen silver bracelets on each arm and two or three heavy silver rings about our ankles so that we clanked like moving hardware stores at every step, and went barefoot into the big, bare hall where a lot of veiled women and masked men sat round the wall and stared at us.

"The head Assassin—I suppose you'd call him the high priest?—met us in the center of the hall and held out his hands to us. We knelt and put our folded hands between his and he repeated some sort of welcome in Arabic, and when the right times came Arbuthnot told us to nod, and we nodded. That was all—we thought.

"A little later, though, they brought out cups of sherbet spiced with some strong, bitter drug—I learned later that it was hashish!—and it made us crazy as fishes out of water. I remember swaying back and forth in my seat, and having a queer feeling as though the air about me were dissolving; as though I were in a rarer and clearer atmosphere, something like the feeling when you inhale nitrous oxid in the dentist's chair, you know. When some queer-sounding music started I felt I simply had to dance, and I got up, ripped the smothering veil away from my face and did the best imitation of an Oriental dance I could. Suddenly a masked man leaped up from his seat against the wall, seized me in his arms, and——" She paused, and a dull, red flush came to her face.

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle*, one understands," de Grandin told her evenly. "And later——"

"Next day we learned that we'd been through the ceremony of initiation and were duly enrolled members of the sect, or order. We'd sworn to do the will of

the society without question, and—well, it didn't take us long to get away from there.

"WE CAME home, and here, in peaceful, matter-of-fact America, it seemed as though it were all part of some wild and rather unpleasant dream. Then, one afternoon, Helen called me up from her home in Paterson. 'Daisy,' she said, 'something terrible has happened.'

"Helen Cassaway was the kind of person to whom something 'terrible' was always happening; so I wasn't particularly impressed, even though her voice seemed charged with terror.

"'What is it this time?' I asked her. 'Has the boy friend found another girl?'

"'Daisy!' she replied reproachfully, 'please listen. You remember that dreadful lodge we joined with Arbuthnot Hil-liston in Jerusalem?'

"You may be sure I began to pay attention then. 'Well?' I asked.

"'Today an Armenian rug-peddler came to our house, and asked for me. I hadn't the faintest idea how he knew my name, but I was interested; so I saw him. Daisy, he was from the Assassins' lodge! He held out a little card with the picture of a red dagger on it—just like the daggers embroidered on the gowns we wore when we joined the society—and said it was the Knife of Hassan. When I asked him what he meant, he said it was the sign of the Assassins, and he had come to demand my services. He wanted me to go downtown with him tonight and help him in a *badger game*. He's got the man all picked out, and all I have to do is obey his orders.'

"'What in the world's a badger game?' I asked.

"'It's a sort of blackmail scheme. A woman flirts with a man, and then goes somewhere with him, and when they're

there alone another man who pretends to be the woman's husband comes rushing in, and threatens to make a scandal unless the poor dupe who's fallen for the woman's charms pays him hush money, and——'

"'Did you send him packing?' I asked.

"'I most certainly did, and he was furious—told me that no one could refuse to serve the Red Knife of Hassan, and that the branding-iron, the bow-string and the bay awaited all who were disobedient.'

"'Well,' I told her, 'you'd better go to the police. It may not be very easy to confess that you're mixed up with such a gang of scoundrels, but it'll be a lot easier than trying to dodge their persecutions on your own account. Besides, that fellow ought to be locked up. He's a dangerous character.'

"'I'm going right now,' she told me as she hung up, and——"

"'Yes, *Mademoiselle*, and——"

"'She walked out of her house on the way to the police and no one ever saw her again.'"

"'And how long ago did all this happen, if you please?'"

"'About two months.'"

"'U'm, one understands. And then——'"

"'Arbuthnot Hilliston came home, and I got in touch with him at once. 'You got me into this,' I told him; 'now you've got to get me out. Helen Cassaway's disappeared as though she'd fallen in the bay, and I don't know what minute they'll be putting the finger on me.'

"'My dear girl,' he answered, 'I'd be pleased to help you, but they're after me, too. I was told to do some spying on the French high command in Syria, but I've no desire to be stood up against a wall at sunrise; so I put for home. They tried to get me twice, and nearly succeeded

each time, but I think I'm safe, for a while at least. I've got an Armenian servant—they hate the Moslems like sin, you know—and at his suggestion he got in touch with an Armenian workman here who's made my house over into a veritable fortress. If you're game to defy the conventions, you're welcome to come out and stop with me. Nejib, my servant, will attend to everything for us, and we'll have only some local help come in by the day, so there'll be no suspicious characters entering the house. If we play lost for a while, maybe the whole business will blow over.'

"'The very night I went to stay at his house, you and Doctor Trowbridge came to dinner. I'd heard of you, of course, Doctor de Grandin, and thought that you could help us if anybody could. I drew Doctor Trowbridge as my dinner partner, and was beginning to lead up to asking him to ask you to help us when we went into the drawing-room. Then Arbuthnot was killed so terribly, and when you showed me the Red Knife of Hassan you'd found on his body, and they almost got me with their infernal machine, I knew that it was hopeless. If they could get into that steel-barred and double-locked house of Arbuthnot's, there wasn't any safety for me anywhere.

"'I thought they'd killed poor Nejib when I heard him scream out in the pantry, but this afternoon he called me on the 'phone and said he had managed to escape, though they were hunting for him. He warned me not to tell you anything if you came to see me, and said he and two Armenian friends would come secretly to take me to a place of safety tonight. I was to let Lily, my maid, go home early, and leave the window by the fire escape unlatched, so they could come in without being seen.

"'So I pleaded ignorance when you ar-

rived, and waited in a perfect fever of apprehension till Nejib and the others came—and when they did, I found *they* were Assassins, and Nejib's real name was Hassan. Then——”

“*Précisément, Mademoiselle*, the rest we know,” de Grandin interrupted with a smile.

“You have, perhaps, a—how do you

call him, little cellar? — cellarette? — around?”

“Why, yes, over in that cabinet you'll find some Scotch and rye, and some brandy, too, if you prefer.”

“Prefer? *Mon Dieu*,” he looked at her reproachfully, “who would drink whisky when brandy is available, *Mademoiselle*?”
