

STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Volume 2

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Number 2

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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portraits by

The September 1937 issue of *WEIRD TALES* presented these two portraits of Mr. Quinn's popular characters, and they appeared regularly thereafter. The pictures are copyright 1937

The White Lady Of The Orphanage

by *Seabury Quinn*

(author of *The Mansion of Unholy Magic*, *The Druid's Shadow*, etc.)

And on the nights that a child disappeared, a figure in flowing white robes was seen . . .

Virgil Finlay

by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, and we thank Mr. Finlay for his kind permission to run them here, as we bring these old favorite stories to you.



Of the six adventures of Drs. Jules de Grandin and Samuel Trowbridge that we have formerly presented in *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, four have been voted "best in the issue" by a clear majority of you, the active readers who vote; and in each instance, Mr. Quinn has had respectable competition. And for the sake of those of you who are new to us: twelve more stories of the bizarre adventures of de Grandin and Trowbridge appear in the Arkham House book, *The Phantom Fighter*, (263pp; \$5.00); none of these have appeared in SMS, nor will any of them be reprinted here so long as the book is in print. Nor would we suggest waiting for the edition to sell out, for we cannot promise to bring these particular tales thereafter, either!

"DR. TROWBRIDGE? Dr. de Grandin?" Our visitor looked questioningly from one of us to the other, that night in 192-.

"I'm Trowbridge," I answered, "and this is Dr. de Grandin. What can we do for you?"

The gentle-faced, white-haired little man bowed rather nervously to each of us in turn, acknowledging the introduction. "My name is Gervaise,

Howard Gervaise," he replied. "I'm superintendent of the Springville Orphans' Home."

I indicated a chair at the end of the study table and awaited further information.

"I was advised to consult you gentlemen by Mr. Willis Richards, of your city," he continued. "Mr. Richards told me you accomplished some really remarkable results for him at the time his jewelry was stolen, and suggested that you could do more to clear up our present trouble than anyone else. He is president of our board of trustees, you know," he added in explanation.

"U'm?" Jules de Grandin murmured noncommittally as he set fire to a fresh cigarette with the glowing butt of another. "I recall that Monsieur Richards. He figured in the affair of the disembodied hand, Friend Trowbridge, you remember.* *Parbleu*, I also recall that he paid the reward for his jewels' return with very bad grace. You come poorly introduced, my friend"—he fixed his uncompromising cat-stare on our caller—"however, say on. We listen."

Mr. Gervaise seemed to shrink in upon himself more than ever. It took small imaginative powers to vision him utterly cowed before the domineering manner of Willis Richards, our local nabob. "The fact is, gentlemen," he began with a soft, deprecating cough, "we are greatly troubled at the orphanage. Something mysterious—most mysterious—is taking place there. Unless we can arrive at some solution we shall be obliged to call in the police, and that would be most unfortunate. Publicity is to be dreaded in this case, yet we are at a total loss to explain the mystery."

"U'm," de Grandin inspected the tip of his cigarette carefully, as though it were something entirely novel, "most mysteries cease to be mysterious, once they are explained, *Monsieur*. You will be good enough to proceed?"

"Ah . . ." Mr. Gervaise glanced about the study as though to take inspiration from the surroundings, then coughed apologetically again. "Ah—the fact is, gentlemen, that several of our little charges have—ah—mysteriously disappeared. During the past six months we have missed no less than five of the home's inmates, two boys and three girls, and only day before yesterday a sixth one disappeared—vanished into air, if you can credit my statement."

"Ah?" Jules de Grandin sat forward a little in his chair, regarding

*see *The Dead Hand*, in *The Phantom Fighter*, by Seabury Quinn.

the caller narrowly. "They have disappeared, vanished, you do say? Perhaps they have decamped?"

"No-o," Gervaise denied, "I don't think that's possible, sir. Our home is only a semi-public institution, you know, being supported entirely by voluntary gifts and benefits of wealthy patrons, and we do not open our doors to orphan children as a class. There are certain restrictions imposed. For this reason, we never entertain a greater number than we are able to care for in a fitting manner, and conditions at Springville are rather different from those obtaining in most institutions of a similar character. The children are well fed, well clothed and excellently housed, and—as far as anyone in their unfortunate situation can be—are perfectly contented and happy. During my tenure of office, more than ten years, we have never had a runaway; and that makes these disappearances all the harder to explain. In each case the surrounding facts have been essentially the same, too. The child was accounted for at night before the signal was given to extinguish the lights, and—and next morning he just wasn't there. That's all there is to say. There is nothing further I can tell you."

"YOU HAVE searched?" de Grandin asked.

"Naturally. The most careful and painstaking investigations have been made in every case. It was not possible to pursue the little ones with hue and cry, of course, but the home has been to considerable expense in hiring private investigators to obtain some information of the missing children, all without result. There is no question of kidnaping, either, for, in every case, the child was known to be safely inside not only the grounds, but in the dormitories, on the night preceding the disappearance. Several reputable witnesses vouch for that in each instance."

"U'm?" de Grandin commented once more. "You say you have been at considerable expense in the matter, *Monsieur*?"

"Yes."

"Good. Very good. You will please be at some more considerable expense. Dr. Trowbridge and I are *gens d'affaires*—businessmen—as well as scientists, *Monsieur*, and while we shall esteem it an honor to serve the fatherless and motherless orphans of your home, we must receive an adequate consideration from Monsieur Richards. We shall undertake the matter of ascertaining the whereabouts of your missing charges at fifteen hundred dollars apiece. Do you agree?"

"But that would be three thousand dollars . . ." the visitor began.

"Perfectly," de Grandin interrupted. "The police will undertake the case for nothing."

"But we can not have the police, as I have just explained . . ."

"You can not have us for less," the Frenchman cut in. "This Monsieur Richards. I know him of old. He desires not the publicity of a search by the gendarmes, and, though he loves me not, he has confidence in my ability, otherwise he would not have sent you. Go to him and say Jules de Grandin will act for him for no less fee than that I have mentioned. Meantime, will you smoke?"

He passed a box of my cigars to the caller, held a lighted match for him and refused to listen to another word concerning the business which had brought Gervaise on the twenty-mile jaunt from Springville.

"TROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*," he informed me the following morning at breakfast, "I assure you it pays handsomely to be firm with these captains of industry, such as Monsieur Richards. Before you had arisen, my friend, that man of wealth was haggling with me over the telephone as though we were a pair of dealers in second-hand furniture. *Morbleu*, it was like an auction. Bid by bid he raised his offer for our services until he met my figure. Today his attorneys prepare a formal document, agreeing to pay us each fifteen hundred dollars for the explanation of the disappearance of each of those six little orphans. A good morning's business, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"De Grandin," I told him, "you're wasting your talents in this work. You should have gone into Wall Street."

"*Eh bien*," he twisted the tips of his little blond mustache complacently, "I think I go very well as it is. When I return to *la belle France* next month I shall take with me upward of fifty thousand dollars—more than a million francs—as a result of my work here. That sum is not to be sneezed upon, my friend. And what is of even more value to me, I take with me the gratitude of many of your countrymen whose burdens I have been able to lighten. *Mordieu*, yes, this trip has been of great use to me, my old one."

"And . . ." I began.

"And tomorrow we shall visit this home of the orphans where Monsieur Gervaise nurses his totally inexplicable mystery. *Parbleu*, that mystery shall be explained, or Jules de Grandin is seven thousand francs poorer!

"ALL ARRANGEMENTS have been made," he confided as we drove over to Springville the following morning. "It would never do for us to announce ourselves as investigators, my friend, so what surer disguise can we assume than that of being ourselves? You and I, are

we not physicians? But certainly. Very well. As physicians we shall appear at the home, and as physicians we shall proceed to inspect all the little ones—separately and alone—for are we not to give them the Schick test for diphtheria immunity? Most assuredly."

"And then . . . ?" I began, but cut my question in two with a quick gesture and a smile.

"And then, my friend, we shall be guided by circumstances, and if there are no circumstances, *cordieu*, but we shall make them! *Allons*, there is much to do before we handle Monsieur Richards' check."

HOWEVER DARK the mystery overhanging the Springville Orphans' Home might have been, nothing indicating it was apparent as de Grandin and I drove through the imposing stone gateway to the spacious grounds. Wide, smoothly kept lawns, dotted here and there with beds of brightly blooming flowers, clean, tastefully arranged buildings of red brick in the Georgian style, and a general air of prosperity, happiness and peace greeted us as we brought our car to a halt before the main building of the home. Within, the youngsters were at chapel, and their clear young voices rose pure and sweet as bird-songs in springtime to the accompaniment of a mellow-toned organ:

*"There's a home for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
Where Jesus reigns in glory,
A home of peace and joy;
No earthly home is like it,
Nor can with it compare . . ."*

We tiptoed into the spacious assembly room, dimly lit through tall, painted windows, and waited at the rear of the hall till the morning exercises were concluded. Right and left de Grandin shot his keen, stock-taking glance, inspecting the rows of neatly clothed little ones in the pews, attractive young female attendants, and the mild-faced, gray-haired lady of matronly appearance who presided at the organ. "*Mordieu*, Friend Trowbridge," he muttered in my ear, "truly, this is mysterious. Why should any of the *pauvres orphelins* voluntarily quit such a place as this?"

"S-s-sh!" I cut him off. His habit of talking in and out of season, whether at a funeral, a wedding or other religious service, had annoyed me more than once. As usual, he took the rebuke in good part and favor-

ed me with an elfish grin, then fell to studying an elongated figure representing a female saint in one of the stained-glass windows, winking at the beatified lady in a highly irreverent manner.

"Good morning, gentlemen," Mr. Gervaise greeted us as the home's inmates filed past us, two by two. "Everything is arranged for your inspection. The children will be brought to you in my office as soon as you are ready for them. Mrs. Martin"—he turned with a smile to the white-haired organist who had joined us—"these are Dr. de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge. They are going to inspect the children for diphtheria immunity this morning."

To us he added: "Mrs. Martin is our matron. Next to myself she has entire charge of the home. We call her 'Mother Martin,' and all our little ones love her as though she were really their own mother."

"How do you do?" the matron acknowledged the introduction, favoring us with a smile of singular sweetness and extending her hand to each of us in turn.

"*Madame*," de Grandin took her smooth, white hand in his, American fashion, then bowed above it, raising it to his lips, "your little charges are indeed more than fortunate to bask in the sunshine of your ministrations!" It seemed to me he held the lady's hand longer than necessity required, but like all his countrymen my little friend was more than ordinarily susceptible to the influence of a pretty woman, young or elderly.

"And now, *Monsieur*, if you please . . ." He resigned Mother Martin's plump hand regretfully and turned to the superintendent, his slim, black brows arched expectantly.

"Of course," Gervaise replied. "This way, if you please."

"It would be better if we examined the little ones separately and without any of the attendants being present," de Grandin remarked in a business-like tone, placing his medicine case on the desk and unfolding a white jacket.

"But surely you can not hope to glean any information from the children!" the superintendent protested. "I thought you were simply going to make a pretense of examining them as a blind. Mrs. Martin and I have questioned every one of them most carefully, and I assure you there is absolutely nothing to be gained by going over that ground again. Besides, some of them have become rather nervous, and we don't want to have their little heads filled with disagreeable notions, you know. I think it would be much better if Mother Martin or I were present while the children are examined. It would give them greater confidence, you know . . ."

"*Monsieur*" — de Grandin spoke in the level, toneless voice he assumed before one of his wild outbursts of anger — "you will please do exactly as I command. Otherwise . . ." He paused significantly and began removing the clinical smock.

"Oh, by no means, my dear sir," the superintendent hastened to assure him. "No, no; I wouldn't for the world have you think I was trying to put difficulties in your way. Oh, no; I only thought . . ."

"*Monsieur*," the little Frenchman repeated, "from this time onward, until we dismiss the case, I shall do the thinking. You will kindly have the children brought to me, one at a time."

TO SEE THE spruce little scientist among the children was a revelation to me. Always tart of speech to the verge of bitterness, with a keen, mordant wit which cut like a razor or scratched like a briar, de Grandin seemed the last one to glean information from children naturally timid in the presence of a doctor. But his smile grew brighter and brighter and his humor better and better as child after child entered the office, answered a few seemingly idle questions and passed from the room. At length a little girl, some four or five years old, came in, the hem of her blue pinafore twisted between her plump baby fingers in embarrassment.

"Ah," de Grandin breathed, "here is one from whom we shall obtain something of value, my friend, or I much miss my guess.

"*Hola, ma petite tete de chou!*" he exclaimed, snapping his fingers at the tot. "Come hither and tell Dr. de Grandin all about it!"

His "little cabbage-head" gave him an answering smile, but one of somewhat doubtful quality. "Dr. Grandin not hurt Betsy?" she asked, half confidently, half fearsomely.

"*Parbleu*, not I, my pigeon," he replied as he lifted her to the desk. "*Regardez-vous!*" from the pocket of his jacket he produced a little box of bonbons and thrust them into her chubby hand. "Eat them, my little onion," he commanded. "*Tete du diable*, but they are an excellent medicine for loosening the tongue!"

Nothing loth, the little girl began munching the sweetmeats, regarding her new friend with wide, wondering eyes. "They said you would hurt me — cut my tongue out with a knife if I talked to you," she informed him, then paused to pop another chocolate button into her mouth.

"*Mort d'un chat*, did they indeed?" he demanded. "And who was the vile, detestable one who so slandered Jules de Grandin? I shall — s-s-sh!" he interrupted himself, turning and crossing the office in three long, cat-

like leaps. At the entrance he paused a moment, then grasped the handle and jerked the door suddenly open.

On the sill, looking decidedly surprised, stood Mr. Gervaise.

"Ah, *Monsieur*," de Grandin's voice held an ugly, rasping note as he glared directly into the superintendent's eyes, "you are perhaps seeking for something? Yes?"

"Er—yes," Gervaise coughed softly, dropping his gaze before the Frenchman's blazing stare. "Er—that is—you see, I left my pencil here this morning, and I didn't think you'd mind if I came to get it. I was just going to rap when . . ."

"When I saved you the labor, *n'est-ce-pas?*" the other interrupted. "Very good, my friend. Here"—hastening to the desk he grabbed a handful of miscellaneous pencils, pens and other writing implements, including a stick of marking chalk—"take these and get gone in the name of the good God." He thrust the utensils into the astonished superintendent's hands, then turned to me, the gleam in his little blue eyes and the heightened color in his usually pale cheeks showing his barely suppressed rage. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," he almost hissed, "I fear I shall have to impress you into service as a guard. Stand at the outer door, my friend, and should anyone come seeking pens, pencils, paint-brushes or printing presses, have the goodness to boot him away. Me, I do not relish having people looking for pencils through the keyhole of the door while I interrogate the children!"

Thereafter I remained on guard outside the office while child after child filed into the room, talked briefly with de Grandin, and left by the farther door.

"Well, did you find out anything worth while?" I asked when the examination was finally ended.

"U'm," he responded, stroking his mustache thoughtfully, "yes and no. With children of a tender age, as you know, the line of demarcation between recollection and imagination is none too clearly drawn. The older ones could tell me nothing; the younger ones relate a tale of a 'white lady' who visited the dormitory on each night a little one disappeared, but what does that mean? Some attendant making a nightly round? Perhaps a window curtain blown by the evening breeze? Maybe it had no surer foundation than some childish whim, seized and enlarged upon by the other little ones. There is little we can go on at this time, I fear.

"Meanwhile," his manner brightened, "I think I hear the sound of the dinner gong. *Parbleu*; I am as hungry as a carp and empty as a kettledrum. Let us hasten to the refectory."

Dinner was a silent meal. Superintendent Gervaise seemed ill at ease under de Grandin's sarcastic stare, and the other attendants who shared the table with us took their cue from their chief and conversation languished before the second course was served. Nevertheless, de Grandin seemed to enjoy everything set before him to the uttermost, and made strenuous efforts to entertain Mrs. Martin, who sat immediately to his right.

"But *Madame*," he insisted when the lady refused a serving of the excellent beef which constituted the roast course, "surely you will not reject this so excellent roast! Remember, it is the best food possible for humanity, for not only does it contain the nourishment we need, but great quantities of iron are to be found in it, as well. Come, permit that I help you to that which is at once food and tonic!"

"No, thank you," the matron replied, looking at the juicy roast with a glance almost of repugnance. "I am a vegetarian."

"How terrible!" de Grandin commiserated, as though she had confessed some overwhelming calamity.

"Yes, Mother Martin's been subsisting entirely on vegetables for the last six months," one of the nurses, a plump, red-cheeked girl, volunteered. "She used to eat as much meat as any of us, but all of a sudden she turned against it, and — oh, Mrs. Martin!"

The matron had risen from her chair, leaning half-way across the table, and the expression on her countenance was enough to justify the girl's exclamation. Her face had gone pale — absolutely livid — her lips were drawn back against her teeth like those of a snarling animal, and her eyes seemed to protrude from their sockets as they blazed into the startled girl's. It seemed to me that not only rage, but something like loathing and fear were expressed in her blazing orbs as she spoke in a low, passionate voice: "Miss Bosworth, what I used to do and what I do now are entirely my own business. Please do not meddle with my affairs!"

For a moment silence reigned at the table, but the Frenchman saved the situation by remarking, "*Tiens, Madame*, the fervor of the convert is ever greater than that of those to the manner born. The Buddhist, who eats no meat from his birth, is not half so strong in defense of his diet as the lately converted European vegetarian!"

To me, as we left the dining hall, he confided, "A charming meal, most interesting and instructive. Now my friend, I would that you drive me home at once, immediately. I wish to borrow a dog from Sergeant Costello."

"What?" I responded incredulously. "You want to borrow a . . ."

"Perfectly. A dog. A police dog, if you please. I think we shall have use for the animal this night."

"Oh, all right," I agreed. The workings of his agile mind were beyond me, and I knew it would be useless to question him.

SHORTLY AFTER sundown we returned to the Springville home, a large and by no means amiable police dog, lent us by the local constabulary, sharing the car with us.

"You will engage Monsieur Gervaise in conversation, if you please," my companion commanded as we stopped before the younger children's dormitory. "While you do so, I shall assist this so excellent brute into the hall where the little ones sleep and tether him in such manner that he can not reach any of his little room-mates, yet can easily dispute passage with anyone attempting to enter the apartment. Tomorrow morning we shall be here early enough to remove him before any of the attendants who may enter the dormitory on legitimate business can be bitten. As for others . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and prepared to lead the lumbering brute into the sleeping quarters.

His program worked perfectly. Mr. Gervaise was nothing loth to talk with me about the case, and I gathered that he had taken de Grandin's evident dislike much to heart. Again and again he assured me, almost with tears in his eyes, that he had not the least intention of eavesdropping when he was discovered at the office door, but that he had really come in search of a pencil. It seemed he used a special indelible lead in making out his reports, and had discovered that the only one he possessed was in the office after we had taken possession. His protestations were so earnest that I left him convinced de Grandin had done him an injustice.

Next morning I was at a loss what to think. Arriving at the orphanage well before daylight, de Grandin and I let ourselves into the little children's dormitory, mounted the stairs to the second floor where the youngsters slept, and released the vicious dog which the Frenchman had tethered by a stout nail driven into the floor and a ten-foot length of stout steel chain. Inquiry among the building's attendants elicited the information that no one had visited the sleeping apartment after we left, as there had been no occasion for anyone connected with the home to do so. Yet on the floor beside the dog there lay a ragged square of white linen, such as might have been ripped from a night-robe or a suit of pajamas; reduced almost to a pulp by the savage brute's worrying, and—

when Superintendent Gervaise entered the office to greet us, he was wearing his right arm in a sling.

"You are injured, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked with mock solicitude, noting the superintendent's bandaged hand with dancing eyes.

"Yes," the other replied, coughing apologetically, "yes, sir. I—I cut myself rather badly last night on a pane of broken glass in my quarters. The window must have been broken by a shutter being blown against it, an . . ."

"Quite so," the Frenchman agreed amiably. "They bite terrifically, these broken window-panes, is it not so?"

"Bite?" Gervaise echoed, regarding the other with a surprised, somewhat frightened expression. "I hardly understand you—oh, yes, I see," he smiled rather feebly. "You mean cut."

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin assured him solemnly as he rose to leave, "I did mean exactly what I said; no more and certainly no less."

"Now what?" I queried as we left the office and the gaping superintendent behind us.

"*Non, non,*" he responded irritably. "I know not what to think, my friend. One thing, he points this way, another, he points elsewhere. Me, I am like a mariner in the midst of a fog. Go you to the car, Friend Trowbridge, and chaperone our so estimable ally. I shall pay a visit to the laundry, meantime."

None too pleased with my assignment, I re-entered my car and made myself as agreeable as possible to the dog, devoutly hoping that the hearty breakfast de Grandin had provided him had taken the edge off his appetite. I had no wish to have him stay his hunger on one of my limbs. The animal proved docile enough, however, and besides opening his mouth once or twice in prodigious yawns which gave me an excellent dentition, did nothing to cause me alarm.

WHEN de GRANDIN returned he was fuming with impatience and anger. "*Sacre nom d'un grillon!*" he swore. "It is beyond me. Undoubtedly this Monsieur Gervaise is a liar, it was surely no glass which caused the wound in his arm last night; yet there is no suit of torn pajamas belonging to him in the laundry."

"Perhaps he didn't send them to be washed," I ventured with a grin. "If I'd been somewhere I was not supposed to be last night and found someone had posted a man-eating dog in my path, I'd not be in a hurry to send my torn clothing to the laundry where it might betray me."

"*Tiens,* you reason excellently, my friend," he complimented, "but

can you explain how it is that there is no torn night-clothing of Monsieur Gervaise at the washrooms today, yet two ladies' night-ropes — one of Mere Martin's, one of Mademoiselle Bosworth's — display exactly such rents as might have been made by having this bit of cloth torn from them?" He exhibited the relic we had found beside the dog that morning and stared gloomily at it.

"H'm, it looks as if you hadn't any facts which will stand the acid test just yet," I replied flippantly; but the seriousness with which he received my commonplace rejoinder startled me.

"*Morbleu*, the acid test, do you say?" he exclaimed. "*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu*, it may easily be so! Why did I not think of it before? Perhaps. Possibly. Who know? It may be so!"

"What in the world . . ." I began, but he cut me short with a frantic gesture.

"*Non, non*, my friend, not now," he implored. "Me, I must think. I must make this empty head of mine do the work for which it is so poorly adapted. Let us see, let us consider, let us ratiocinate!"

"*Parbleu*, I have it!" He drew his hands downward from his forehead with a quick, impatient motion and turned to me. "Drive me to the nearest pharmacy, my friend. If we do not find what we wish there, we must search elsewhere, until we discover it. *Mordieu*, Trowbridge, my friend, I thank you for mentioning that acid test! Many a wholesome truth is contained in words of idle jest, I do assure you."

FIVE MILES OUT of Springville a gang of workmen were resurfacing the highway, and we were forced to detour over a back road. Half an hour's slow driving along this brought us to a tiny Italian settlement where a number of laborers originally engaged on the Lackawanna's right of way had bought up the swampy, low-lying lands along the creek and converted them into model truck gardens. At the head of the single street composing the hamlet was a neatly whitewashed plank building bearing the sign *Farmacia Italiana*, together with a crudely painted representation of the Italian royal coat of arms.

"Here, my friend," de Grandin commanded, plucking me by the sleeve. "Let us stop here a moment and inquire of the estimable gentleman who conducts this establishment that which we would know."

"But what . . . ?" I began, then stopped, noting the futility of my question. Jules de Grandin had already leaped from the car and entered the little drug store.

Without preamble he addressed a flood of fluent Italian to the drug-

gist, receiving monosyllabic replies which gradually expanded both in verbosity and volume accompanied by much waving of hands and lifting of shoulders and eyebrows. What they said I had no means of knowing, since I understood no word of Italian, but I heard the word *acido* repeated several times by each of them during the three minutes' heated conversation.

When de Grandin finally turned to leave the store, with a grateful bow to the proprietor, he wore an expression as near complete mystification and surprise as I had ever seen him display. His little eyes were rounded with mingled thought and amazement, and his narrow red lips were pursed beneath the line of his slim blond mustache as though he were about to emit a low, soundless whistle.

"Well?" I demanded as we regained the car. "Did you find out what you were after?"

"Eh?" he answered absently. "Did I find—Trowbridge, my friend, I know not what I found out, but this I know: those who lighted the witch-fires in olden days were not such fools as we believe them. *Parbleu*, at this moment they are grinning at us from their graves, or I am much mistaken. Tonight, my friend, be ready to accompany me back to that orphans' home where the devil nods approval to those who perform his business so skilfully."

That evening he was like one in a muse, eating sparingly and seemingly without realizing what food he took, answering my questions absent-mindedly or not at all, even forgetting to light his customary cigarette between dinner and dessert. "*Nom du'un champignon*," he muttered, staring abstractedly into his coffee cup, "it must be that it is so; but who would believe it?"

I sighed in vexation. His habit of musing aloud but refusing to tell the trend of his thoughts while he arranged the factors of a case upon his mental chessboard was one which always annoyed me, but nothing I had been able to do had swerved him from his custom of withholding all information until he reached the climax of the mystery. "*Non, non*," he replied when I pressed him to take me into his confidence, "the less I speak, the less danger I run of showing myself to be one great fool, my friend. Let me reason this business in my own way, I beseech you." And there the matter rested.

Toward midnight he rose impatiently and motioned toward the door. "Let us go," he suggested. "It will be an hour or more before we reach our destination, and that should be the proper time for us to see what I fear we shall behold, Friend Trowbridge."

We drove across country to Springville through the early autumn night in silence, turned in at the orphanage gates and parked before the administration building, where Superintendent Gervaise maintained his living quarters.

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin called softly as he rapped gently on the superintendent's door, "it is I, Jules de Grandin. For all the wrong I have done you I humbly apologize, and now I would that you give me assistance."

Blinking with mingled sleep and surprise, the little, gray-haired official let us into his rooms and smiled rather fatuously at us. "What is it you'd like me to do for you, Dr. de Grandin?" he asked.

"I would that you guide us to the sleeping apartments of Mere Martin. Are they in this building?"

"No," Gervaise replied wonderingly. "Mother Martin has a cottage of her own over at the south end of the grounds. She likes the privacy of a separate house, and we . . ."

"*Precisement*," the Frenchman agreed, nodding vigorously. "I well understand her love of privacy, I fear. Come let us go. You will show us the way?"

MOTHER MARTIN'S cottage stood by the southern wall of the orphanage compound. It was a neat little building of the semi-bungalow type, constructed of red brick, and furnished with a low, wide porch of white-painted wood. Only the chirping of a cricket in the long grass and the long-drawn, melancholy call of a crow in the nearby poplars broke the silence of the starlit night as we walked noiselessly up the brick path leading to the cottage door. Gervaise was about to raise the polished brass knocker which adorned the white panels when de Grandin grasped his arm, enjoining silence.

Quietly as a shadow the little Frenchman crept from one of the wide, shutterless front windows to the other, looking intently into the darkened interior of the house, then, with upraised finger warning us to caution, he tiptoed from the porch and began making a circuit of the house, pausing to peer through each window as he passed it.

At the rear of the cottage was a one-story addition which evidently housed the kitchen, and here the blinds were tightly drawn, though beneath their lower edges there crept a faint narrow band of lamplight.

"*Ah — bien !*" the Frenchman breathed, flattening his aquiline nose against the window-pane as though he would look through the shrouding curtain by virtue of the very intensity of his gaze.

A moment we stood there in the darkness, de Grandin's little waxed mustache twitching at the ends like the whiskers of an alert tom-cat, Gervaise and I in total bewilderment, when the Frenchman's next move filled us with mingled astonishment and alarm. Reaching into an inner pocket, he produced a small, diamond-set glass-cutter, moistened it with the tip of his tongue and applied it to the window, drawing it slowly downward, then horizontally, then upward again to meet the commencement of the first down-stroke, thus describing an equilateral triangle on the pane. Before the cutter's circuit was entirely completed, he drew what appeared to be a square of thick paper from another pocket, hastily tore it apart and placed it face downward against the glass. It was only when the operation was complete that I realized how it was accomplished. The "plaster" he applied to the window was nothing more nor less than a square of fly-paper, and its sticky surface prevented any telltale tinkle from sounding as he finished cutting the triangle from the window-pane and carefully lifted it out by means of the gummed paper.

Once he had completed his opening he drew forth a small, sharp-bladed penknife, and working very deliberately, lest the slightest sound betray him proceeded to slit a peep-hole through the opaque window-blind.

For a moment he stood there, gazing through his spy-hole, the expression on his narrow face changing from one of concentrated interest to almost incredulous horror, finally to fierce, implacable rage.

"*A moi, Trowbridge, a moi, Gervaise!*" he shouted in a voice which was almost a shriek as he thrust his shoulder unceremoniously against the pane, bursting it into a dozen pieces, and leaped into the lighted room beyond.

I scrambled after him as best I could, and the astounded superintendent followed me, mouthing mild protests against our burglarious entry of Mrs. Martin's house.

One glance at the scene before me took all thought of our trespass from my mind.

WHEELED ABOUT to face us, her back to a fiercely glowing coal-burning kitchen range, stood the once placid Mother Martin, enveloped from throat to knees in a commodious apron. But all semblance of her placidity was gone as she regarded the trembling little Frenchman who extended an accusing finger at her. Across her florid, smooth-skinned face had come such a look of fiendish rage as no flight of my imagination could have painted. Her lips, seemingly shrunk to half their natural thick-

ness, were drawn back in animal fury against her teeth, and her blue eyes seemed forced forward from her face with the pressure of hatred within her. At the corners of her twisting mouth were little flecks of white foam, and her jaw thrust forward like that of an infuriated ape. Never in my life, on any face, either bestial or human, had I seen such an expression. It was a revolting parody of humanity on which I looked, a thing so horrible, so incomparably cruel and devilish, I would have looked away if I could, yet felt my eyes compelled to turn again to the evil visage as a fascinated bird's gaze may be held by the glitter in the serpent's film-covered eye.

But horrid as the sight of the woman's transfigured features was, a greater horror showed behind her, for protruding half its length from the fire-grate of the blazing range was something no medical man could mistake after even a split-second's inspection. It was the unfleshed radius and ulna bones of a child's forearm, the wrist process still intact where the flesh and periosteum had not been entirely removed in dissection. On the tile-topped kitchen table beside the stove stood a wide-mouthed glass bowl filled with some liquid about the shade of new vinegar, and in this there lay a score of small, glittering white objects—*a child's teeth*. Neatly dressed, wound with cord like a roast, and, like a roast, placed in a wide, shallow pan, ready for cooking, was a piece of pale, veal-like meat.

"You—you," the woman cried in a queer, throaty voice, so low it was scarcely audible, yet so intense in its vibrations that I was reminded of the rumbling of an infuriated cat's cry.

"How—did—you—find . . . ?"

"*Eh bien, Madame,*" de Grandin returned, struggling to speak with his customary cynical flippancy, but failing in the attempt, "how I did find out is of small moment. *What* I found, I think you will agree, is of the great import."

FOR AN INSTANT I thought the she-fiend would launch herself at him, but her intention lay elsewhere. Before any of us was aware of her move she had seized the glass vessel from the table, lifted it to her lips and all but emptied its contents down her throat in two frantic swallows. Next instant, frothing, writhing, contorting herself horribly, she lay on the tiled floor at our feet, her lips thickening and swelling with brownish blisters as the poison she had drunk regurgitated from her esophagus and welled up between her tightly set teeth.

"Good heavens!" I cried, bending forward instinctively to aid her, but

the Frenchman drew me back. "Let be, Friend Trowbridge," he remarked. "It is useless. She has taken enough hydrochloric acid to kill three men, and those movements of hers are only mechanical. Already she is unconscious, and in another five minutes she will have opportunity to explain her so strange life to One far wiser than we.

"Meantime," he assumed the cold, matter-of-fact manner of a morgue attendant performing his duties, "let us gather up these relics of the poor one" — he indicated the partially cremated arm-bones and the meat in the shining aluminum pan — "and preserve them for decent interment. I . . ."

A choking, gasping sound behind us turned our attention to the orphanage superintendent. Following more slowly through the window in de Grandin's wake, he had not at first grasped the significance of the horrors we had seen. The spectacle of the woman's suicide had unnerved him, but when de Grandin pointed to the relics in the stove and on the table, the full meaning of our discovery had fallen on him. With an inarticulate cry he had dropped to the floor in a dead faint.

"*Pardieu*," the Frenchman exclaimed, crossing to the water-tap and filling a rumbler, "I think we had best bestow our services on the living before we undertake the care of the dead, Friend Trowbridge."

As he recrossed the kitchen to minister to the unconscious superintendent there came an odd, muffled noise from the room beyond. "*Qui vive?*" he challenged sharply, placing the glass of water on the dresser and darting through the door, his right hand dropping into his jacket pocket where the ready pistol lay. I followed at his heels, and, as he stood hesitating at the threshold, felt along the wall, found the electric switch and pressed it, flooding the room with light. On the couch beneath the window, bound hand and foot with strips torn from a silk scarf and gagged with another length of silk wound about her face, lay little Betsy, the child who had informed us she feared being hurt when we made our pretended inspection of the home's inmates the previous day.

"*Morbleu*," de Grandin muttered as he liberated the little one from her bonds, "another?"

"Mother Martin came for Betsy and tied her up," the child informed us as she raised herself to a sitting posture. "She told Betsy she would send her to heaven with her papa and mamma, but Betsy must be good and not make a fuss when her hands and feet were tied."

She smiled vaguely at de Grandin.

"Why doesn't Mother Martin come for Betsy?" she demanded. "She said she would come and send me to heaven in a few minutes, but I

waited and waited, and she didn't come, and the cloth over my face kept tickling my nose, and . . . "

"Mother Martin has gone away on business, *ma petite*," the Frenchman interrupted. "She said she could not send you to your papa and *maman*, but if you are a very good little girl you may go to them some day. Meantime — here is the best substitute I can find for heaven at this time, *cherie*."

"WELL, OLD CHAP, I'll certainly have to admit you went right to the heart of the matter," I congratulated as we drove homeward through the paling dawn, "but I can't for the life of me figure out how you did it."

His answering smile was a trifle wan. The horrors we had witnessed at the matron's cottage had been almost too great a strain for even his iron nerve. "Partly it was luck," he confessed wearily, "and partly it was thought."

"When first we arrived at the home for orphans I had nothing to guide me, but I was convinced that the little ones had not wandered off voluntarily. The environment seemed too good to make any such hypothesis possible. Everywhere I looked I saw evidences of loving care, and faces which could be trusted. But somewhere, I felt, as an old wound feels the coming changes of the weather, there was something evil, some evil force working against the welfare of those poor ones. Where could it be and by whom was it exerted? 'This is for us to find out,' I tell me as I look over the attendants who were visible in the chapel.

"Gervaise, he is an old woman in trousers. Never would he hurt a living thing, no, not even a fly, unless it bit him first.

"Mere Martin, she was of a saintly appearance, but when I was presented to her I learn something which sets my brain to thinking. On the softness of her white hands are stains and callouses. Why? I hold her hand longer than convention required, and all the time I ask me, 'What have she done to put these hardnesses on her hands?'

"To this I had no answer, so I bethought me perhaps my nose could tell what my sense of touch could not. When I raised her hand to my lips I made a most careful examination of it, and also I did smell. Trowbridge, my friend, I made sure those disfigurements were due to HCL—what you call hydrochloric acid in English.

"'Morbleu, but this is extraordinary,' I tell me. 'Why should one who has no need to handle acid have those burns on her skin?'

"'That are for you to answer in good time,' I reply to me. And then

I temporarily forget the lady and her hands, because I am sure that Monsieur Gervaise desires to know what we say to the young children. *Eh bien*, I did do him an injustice there, but the wisest of us makes mistakes. my friend, and he gave me much reason for suspicion.

"When the little Betsy was answering my questions she tells me that she has seen a 'white lady,' tall and with flowing robes, like an angel, come into the dormitory where she and her companions slept on many occasions, and I have ascertained from previous questions that no one enters those sleeping quarters after the lights are out unless there is a specific need for a visit. What was I to think? Had the little one dreamed it, or has she seen this so mysterious 'white lady' on her midnight visits? It is hard to say where recollection stops and romance begins in children's tales. my friend, as you well know, but the little Betsy was most sure the 'white lady' had come only on those nights when her little companions vanished.

"Here we had something from which to reason, though the morsel of fact was small. However, when I talk further with the child, she informed me it was Mere Martin who had warned her against us, saying we would surely cut her tongue with a knife if she talked to us. This, again, was worthy of thought. But Monsieur Gervaise had been smelling at the door while we were interrogating the children, and he had also disapproved of our seeing them alone. My suspicion of him would not die easily, my friend; I was stubborn, and refused to let my mind take me where it would.

"So, as you know, when we had posted the four-footed sentry inside the children's door, I made sure we would catch a fish in our trap, and next morning I was convinced we had, for did not Gervaise wear his arm in a sling? Truly, he did.

"But at the laundry they showed me no torn pajamas of his while I found the gowns of both Mademoiselle Bosworth and Madame Martin torn as if the dog had bitten them. More mystery. Which way should I turn, if at all?

"I FIND THAT Gervaise's window really had been broken, but that meant nothing; he might have done it himself in order to construct an alibi. Of the reason for Mademoiselle Bosworth's torn robe I could glean no trace; but behind my brain, at the very back of my head, something was whispering at me; something I could not hear, but which I knew was of importance.

"Then, as we drove away from the home, you mentioned the acid test.

My friend, those words of yours let loose the memory which cried aloud to me, but which I could not clearly understand. Of a suddenness I did recall the scene at luncheon, how Mademoiselle Bosworth declared Mere Martin ate no meat for six months, and how angry Madame Martin was at the mention of it. *Parbleu*, for six months the little ones had been disappearing—for six months Madame Martin had eaten no meat, yet she were plump and well-nourished. She had the look of a meat-eater!"

"Still," I protested, "I don't see how that put you on the track."

"No?" he replied. "Remember, my friend, how we stopped to interview the druggist. Why think you we did that?"

"Hanged if I know," I confessed.

"Of course not," he agreed with a nod. "But I know. 'Suppose,' I say to me, 'someone have eaten the flesh of these poor disappeared children? What would that one do with the bones?'"

"He would undoubtedly bury or burn them," I reply.

"Very good, but more likely he would burn them, since buried bones may be dug up, and burned bones are only ashes; but what of the teeth? They would resist fire such as can be had in the ordinary stove, yet surely they might betray the murderer.

"But of course," I admit, "but why should not the murderer reduce those teeth with acid, hydrochloric acid, for instance?"

"Ah-ha," I tell me, "that are the answer. Already you have one whose hands are acid-stained without adequate explanation, also one who eats no meat at table. Find out, now, who have bought acid from some neighborhood drug store, and perhaps you will have the answer to your question."

"THE ITALIAN GENTLEMAN who keeps the pharmacy tells me that a lady of very kindly mien comes to him frequently and buys hydrochloric acid, which she calls muriatic acid, showing she are not a chemist, but knows only the commercial term for the stuff. She is a tall, large lady with white hair and kind blue eyes.

"It are Mere Martin!" I tell me. "She are the "white lady" of the orphanage!"

"Then I consult my memory some more, and decide we shall investigate this night.

"Listen, my friend: In the Paris *Surete* we have the history of many remarkable cases, not only from France, but other lands as well. In the year 1849 a miscreant named Swiatek was haled before the Austrian courts on a charge of cannibalism, and in the same year there was another somewhat similar case where a young English lady—a girl of

refinement and careful education and nurture — was the defendant. Neither of these was naturally fierce or bloodthirsty, yet their crimes were undoubted. In the case of the beggar we have a transcription of his confession. He did say in part: When first driven by dire hunger to eat of human flesh he became, as the first horrid morsel passed his lips, as it were a ravening wolf. He did rend and tear the flesh and growl in his throat like a brute beast the while. From that time forth he could stomach no other meat, nor could he abide the sight or smell of it. Beef, pork or mutton filled him with revulsion. And had not Madame Martin exhibited much the same symptoms at table? Truly.

"Things of a strange nature sometimes occur, my friend. The mind of man is something of which we know but little, no matter how learnedly we prate. Why does one man love to watch a snake creep, while another goes into ecstasies of terror at sight of a reptile? Why do some people hate the sight of a cat, while others fear a tiny, harmless mouse as though he were the devil's brother-in-law? None can say, yet these things are. So I think it is with crime.

"This Madame Martin was not naturally cruel. Though she killed and ate her charges, you will recall how she bound the little Betsy with silk, and did it in such a way as not to injure her, or even to make her uncomfortable. That meant mercy? By no means, my friend. Myself, I have seen peasant women in my own land weep upon and fondle the rabbit they were about to kill for *dejeuner*. They did love and pity the poor little beast which was to die, but *que voulez vous?* One must eat.

"Some thought like this, I doubt not, was in Madame Martin's mind as she committed murder. Somewhere in her nature was a thing we can not understand; a thing which made her crave the flesh of her kind for food, and she answered the call of that craving even as the taker of drugs is helpless against his vice.

"*Tiens*, I am convinced that if we searched her house we should have the explanation of the children's disappearance, and you yourself witnessed what we saw. It was well she took the poison when she did. Death, or incarceration in a madhouse, would have been her portion had she lived, and" — he shrugged — "the world is better off without her."

"U'm, I see how you worked it, out." I replied, "but will Mr. Richards be satisfied? We've accounted for one of the children, because we found part of her skeleton in the fire, but can we swear the rest disappeared in the same manner? Richards will want a statistical table of facts before he parts with three thousand dollars, I imagine."

"*Parbleu*, will he, indeed?" de Grandin answered, something like his

usual elfish grin spreading across his face. "What think you would be the result were we to notify the authorities of the true facts leading up to Madame Martin's suicide? Would not the newspapers make much of it. *Cordieu*, I shall say they would and the home for orphans over which Monsieur Richards presides so pompously would receive what you call 'the black eye.' *Morbleu*, my friend, the very black eye, indeed! No, no: me, I think Monsieur Richards will gladly pay us the reward, nor haggle over terms.

"Meanwhile, we are at home once more. Come, let us drink the cognac."

"Drink cognac?" I answered. "Why, in heaven's name?"

"*Parbleu*, we shall imbibe a toast to the magnificent three thousand dollars Monsieur Richards pays us tomorrow morning!"

