

Three in Chains

BY SEABURY QUINN

THE murmur of voices sounded from the drawing room as I let myself in wearily after a hard afternoon at the hospital. An intern might appreciate two appendectomies and an accouchement within the space of four hours, but an intern would need the practice and be thirty years my junior. I was dog-tired and in no mood to entertain visitors. As silently as I could I crept down the hall, but:

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," de Grandin hailed as I passed the partly opened door on tiptoe, "*à moi, s'il vous plaît*. This is of interest, this." Putting the best face I could upon the matter I joined him.

"May I present Monsieur and Madame Jaquay?" he asked, then with a bow to the callers, "*Monsieur, Madame, Dr. Trowbridge*."

The young man who stepped forward with extended hand had fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, a broad, low forehead and deep greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath straight brows. The woman seated on the sofa was in every way his feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap her short-cropped black hair, combed straight back from her forehead and waved in little ripples, lay against her small well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to seem almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry. The dead-white pallor of her skin was enhanced by her lack of rouge and the brilliant lipstick on her mouth, while the greenness of her hazel eyes was rendered more noticeable by skillfully applied eye shadow which gave her lids a faintly violet-green tinge and a luster like that of worn silk.

I shook hands with the young man and bowed to the girl—she was little more—then looked at them again in wonder. "Mr. and Mrs. Jaquay?" I asked. "You look more like—"

"Of course, we do," the girl cut in. "We're twins."

"Twins—"

"Practically, sir. Our mothers were first cousins, and our fathers were first cousins, too, though not related to our mothers, except by marriage. We were born in the same hospital within less than half an hour of each other, and grew up in adjoining houses. We went to school, high school and college together, and were married the day after graduation."

"Is it not entirely charming?" Jules de Grandin demanded.

I was becoming somewhat nettled. Tired as I was I had no wish to interview two-headed calves, Siamese twins, cousins married to each other and like as grains of sand on the seashore or other natural phenomena. "Why, yes, of course," I agreed, "but—"

"But there is more—*parbleu*, much more!—my old and rare," the little Frenchman assured me. To the young man he ordered: "Tell him what you have told me, *mon jeune*. *Mordieu*, but you shall see his eyes pop like those of an astonished toad-frog!"

I dropped into a chair and tried my best to assume a look of polite interest as young Jaquay ran his hand over his sleek hair, cast a look of appeal at de Grandin and began hesitantly. "Georgine and I came here three months ago. Our Uncle, Yancy Molloy, made us sole beneficiaries of his will and Tofte House—perhaps you know the place?—was part of our inheritance. There were a few repairs to be made, though the place was in extraordinarily good condition for so old a structure, and we've been living there a little over two months. We've become very much attached to it; we'd hate to have to leave."

"Then why not stay?" I answered somewhat ungraciously. "If the house is yours and you like it—"

"Because it's haunted, sir."

"What!"

He colored slightly, but went on: "It's



*"—as if that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked
down into some hellish drain-pipe."*

haunted. We didn't notice anything out of the ordinary for the first few days we lived there, then gradually both Georgine and I began to—well, sir, to feel alien presences there. We'd be reading in the library or sitting at table, or just going about our affairs in the house when suddenly we'd have that strange, uncanny feeling you have when someone stares fixedly at the back of your neck.

"When we'd turn suddenly as we always did at first, there'd be no one there, of course, but that odd, eerie sensation of being constantly and covetly watched persisted. Instead of wearing off it grew stronger and stronger till we could hardly bear it."

"U'm?" I commented, taking quick stock of our callers, noting their small stature, their delicacy of form and feature... their double cousinship amounted almost to inbreeding, fertile ground for neuroses to sprout in. "I know that feeling of malaise you refer to, and the fact that you both experienced it seems diagnostic. You young folks of today burn the candle at both ends. There's no need to hurry so; save a few sensations to be probed when you're past forty. These visual, sensory and circulatory symptoms aren't at all unusual. You'll have to take it easier, get much more rest and a lot more sleep. If you can't sleep I'll give you some trional—"

"But certainly," ~~the~~ Grandin cut in. "And the trional will surely stop the sound of clanking chains and dismal, hollow groans."

"What?" I turned on him. "Are you trying to tell me—"

"Not at all, by no means, my old one. But Monsieur Jaquay was endeavoring to do so when you interrupted with your prattle of the so odious trional. Say on, *Monsieur*," he ordered our guest.

"We were getting pretty much on edge from this feeling of being watched so constantly," young Jaquay continued, "but it wasn't till last week we heard anything. We've made some pleasant friends in Harrisonville, sir, and been going out quite a bit. Last Saturday we'd been to New York on a party with Steve and Mollie Tenbroeck and Tom and Jennie Chaplin—dinner at the Wedgewood Room, to Broadway to see 'Up in Central Park,' then to Copacabana for

supper and dancing. It must have been a little after three when we got home.

"GEORGINE had gone to bed, and I was in the bathroom washing my teeth when I heard her scream. I ran into the bedroom with the dentrifice suds still on my lips, and there she was, huddled in the bed with the covers drawn up to her chin, pushing against the headboard as if she were trying to force herself through it. 'Something touched me!' she chattered. 'It was like an ice-cold hand!'

"Well—" he smiled apologetically—"you know how it is, sir. 'What?' I asked.

"I don't know. I was almost asleep when it put its clammy fingers on me!"

"We'd had several rounds of cocktails at both dinner and supper, and Burgundy with dinner and champagne at supper, but both of us were cold sober—well, not more than pleasantly exhilarated—when we got home. 'You're nuts,' I told her.

"And just as I spoke something went wrong with the lights. They didn't go out all at once. That could have been explained by a blown-out fuse or a short circuit in the feed line. This was different. The lamps began to grow dim slowly, as if a rheostat were being turned off. It was possibly a half-minute before the room was dark, but when the darkness came it was terrific. It pressed down on us like a great blanket, then it seemed to smother us completely—more completely than a thousand black cloths. You know that wild, unreasoning feeling of panic you have when you choke at table? This was like it. I was not only blinded, but bound and gagged as well. I tried to call to Georgine. The best that I could do was utter a choked, strangling gasp. I tried to go to her; it was like trying to wade waist-deep through a strong tide. The blackness in that room seemed liquefied, almost solidified.

"Then we heard it. At first it was no more than a whisper, like the sighing of a storm heard miles away, but getting louder, stronger, every second, like a storm that rushes toward you. Then the sigh changed to a moan and the moan became a howl, and the howl rose to a screech, and then rose to a piercing shriek that stabbed our eardrums like a needle. It rose and rose,

spiraling upward till it seemed no human throat could stand the strain of it. Then it stopped suddenly with a deep, guttural gurgle, as if all that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked down into a drain-pipe. The silence that followed was almost worse than the noise. It was as if we had suddenly been stricken stone-deaf.

"I could feel the perspiration trickling down my forehead and into my eyes, but the sweat seemed turned to ice as the silence was smashed by the clanking of a chain. At first it was no more than a light clinking sound, as if some tethered beast stirred in the darkness. But like the shriek it increased in volume till it seemed some chained monster were straining at his iron leash, striving with a strength past anything that man or beast knows to break loose from its fetters."

Jaquay halted in his narrative to draw a handkerchief from his breast pocket and pass it over his brow. His wife was sobbing on the sofa, not violently, but with soft, sad little sounds, like those a frightened child might make.

"And then, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin prompted.

"Then the lights flashed on, not slowly, as they had gone off, but with a sudden blaze of blinding brightness, and there we were in our bedroom and everything was just the same. Georgine was cowering against the headboard of the bedstead, and I was standing at the bathroom door blinking like a fool in the sharp, dazzling light, with the dentifrice suds still on my lips and running down my chin to dribble on the floor."

"And there have been more—manifestations?"

GEORGINE JAQUAY answered in her charmingly modulated contralto. "Not so—so violent, sir. George and I were pretty badly shaken by what happened Saturday night, or more precisely Sunday morning, but we were both very tired and dropped off to sleep before we realized it. Next day was bright and sunny and we'd almost succeeded in convincing ourselves the experience of the night before was nothing but a sort of double nightmare when that sensation of being watched became stronger

than ever. Only now it seemed somehow different."

"*Hein?*"

"Yes, sir. As if whoever—or whatever—watched us were gloating. Our uneasiness increased as the afternoon wore on; by bedtime we were in a pretty sorry state, but—"

"Ah, but you had the hardihood, the courage, *n'est-ce-pas, Madame?* You did not let it drive you from your home?"

"We did not," Georgine Jaquay's small mouth snapped shut like a miniature steel trap on the denial. "We hadn't any idea what it was that wanted to get rid of us, but we determined to face up to it."

"*Bravissimo! And then?*"

"I don't know how long we'd been sleeping. Perhaps an hour; perhaps only a few minutes, but suddenly I wakened and sat bolt-upright, completely conscious. I had a feeling of sharp apprehension, as if an invisible alarm-bell were sounding a warning in my brain. There was no moon, but a little light came through the bedroom windows, enough for me to distinguish the furniture. Everything seemed as usual, then all at once I noticed the door. It showed against the further wall in a dark oblong. Dark. Dark like a hole. Somehow the comparison made me breathe faster. I could feel the pulses racing in my wrists and throat. The door had been shut—and locked—when we went to bed. Now it swung open, and I had a feeling unseen eyes were staring at me from the hallway while mine sought helplessly to pierce the darkness. Then I heard it. Not loud this time, but a sort of whimpering little moan, such as a sick child might give, and then the feeble clanking of a chain, as if whatever were bound by it moved a little, but not much.

"I sat there staring helplessly into the dark while every nerve in my body seemed taut to the breaking point, and listened to that hopeless moaning and the gentle clanking of that chain for what seemed like an hour. Then, very softly, came a woman's voice."

"A woman's, *Madame?*"

"Yes, sir. I could not possibly have been mistaken. It was low, not a whisper, but very weak and—hopeless."

"Yes, *Madame?* And what did this so small voice say, if you please?"

"My poor darling!"

"*Sang du diable!* It said that?"

"Yes, sir. Just that. No more."

"And were there further voices?"

"No, sir. There were a few weak, feeble moans, repeated at longer and longer intervals, and every once in a while the chain would rattle, but there were no more words."

DE GRANDIN turned to young Jaquay. "And did you hear this so strange voice also, *Monsieur?*"

"No, sir. I slept through it all, but later in the night, perhaps just before morning, I wakened with a feeling someone stood beside the bed and watched me, and then I heard the scraping of a chain—not across our floor, but over something hard and gritty, like stone or perhaps concrete, and three people moaning softly."

"Three? *Grand Dieu des cochons*, the man says three! How could you tell, *Monsieur?*"

"Their voices were distinct and different. One was a man's, a light baritone, well-pitched, but very weak. The other two were women's, one soft and husky, like stroked velvet, a Negro woman's, I'm sure, and the other was lighter in tone, musical, but very feeble, like that of a person sinking in a swoon."

"They did not speak?"

"Not in words, sir, but from their tones I knew all three were very weak and exhausted, so far gone that it seemed nothing mattered to them."

"U'm?" de Grandin took his little pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "And what did you do next, *Monsieur?*"

Jaquay looked embarrassed. "We sent for Dr. Van Artsdalen, sir."

"Ah? And who is he, if one may inquire?"

"He's pastor of the Union Church at Harbordale, sir. We told him everything that had happened, and he agreed to exorcise the house."

"*Mordieu*, did you, indeed?" de Grandin twisted the waxed ends of his small blond mustache until they were as sharp as twin needles. "And did he succeed in his mission?"

"I'm afraid he didn't, sir. He read a portion of the Scriptures from St. Luke, where it says that power was given the Disciples to cast out devils, and offered up a prayer, but—we haven't had a moment's peace since, sir."

The little Frenchman nodded. "One understands all too well, *Monsieur*. The occultism, he is neither good nor safe for amateurs to dabble in. This Doctor—the gentleman with the so funny name—may be an excellent preacher, but I fear he was out of his element when he undertook to rid your premises of unwelcome tenants. Who, by example, told him they were devils he came out to drive away?"

"Why—er—" Jaquay's face reddened—"I don't think anybody did, sir. We told him only what we had experienced, and he assured us that evil is always subject to good, and could not stand against the power of—"

"One understands completely," de Grandin cut in sharply. "The reverend gentleman is also doubtless one of those who believe savage animals cannot stand the gaze of the human eye, that sharks must turn upon their back to bite, and that you are immune from lightning-stroke if you have rubber heels upon your shoes. In fine, one gathers he is one of those who is not ignorant because of what he does not know, but because of the things he knows which are not true. What has occurred since his visit?"

"All day we feel those unseen eyes fairly boring into us; at night the sighs and groans and chain-clankings begin almost as soon as darkness comes and keeps up till sunrise. Frankly, sir, we're afraid to stay in the place after sunset."

The Frenchman nodded approval. "I think that you are wise to absent yourselves, *Monsieur*. For you to stay in that house after dark would not be courageous, it would be the valor of ignorance, and that, *parbleu*, is not so good. No, not at all."

"Attend me, if you please: I have made a study of such matters. To 'cast out devils,' may be an act of Christian faith which anyone possessing virtue may perform. Me, I do not know. But I do know from long experience that what will be effective in one case will wholly fail in another. Do you know surely what it is that haunts this

house from which you have so wisely fled? Did the good *pasteur* know? Do I know? *Non, pardieu*, we grope in ignorance, all of us! We know not what it is we have to contend with. Attend me, *Monsieur*, if you please, with great carefulness. As that very learned writer, Manly Wade Wellman, has observed, there are many sorts of disembodied beings.

*'In earth and sky and sea
Strange things there be.'*

"There are, by example, certain things called elementals. These never were in human form; they have existed from the beginning, and, I assure you, they are very naughty. They are definitely unfriendly to humankind; they are mischievous, they are wicked. They should be given as wide a berth as possible. It is safer to walk unarmed through a jungle infested with blood-hungry tigers than to frequent spots where they are known to be, unless you are well-armed with occult weapons, and even then your chances are no better than those of the hunter who goes out to trail the strong and savage beast.

"Then there are those things we call ghosts. They cannot be defined with nicety, but as a class they are the immortal, or at least the surviving spiritual part of that which was once man or woman. These may be either good, indifferent or bad. The bad, of course, far outnumber the good, for the great bulk of humanity that has died has not been good. *Alors*, it behooves us to step carefully when we have dealings with them. You comprehend?

"*Bien*. It may well be the good *pasteur* used the wrong technique when he assumed to rid you of your so unwelcome cotenants. He did not surely know his adversary; it is entirely possible that he succeeded only in annoying him as one might irritate but not cripple a lion by shooting him with a light rifle. *Mais oui*, it may be so. Let us now proceed with system. Let us make a reconnaissance, spy out the land, acquaint ourselves with that with which we must match forces.

"When this is done we shall proceed to business, not before. No, certainly; by no means."

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he asked at breakfast next morning, "what do you know of this house from which *Monsieur* and *Madame Jaquay* have been driven?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," I answered. "I know it's more than a hundred years old and was built by Jacob Tofte whose family settled in New Jersey shortly after the Dutch wrested it from the Swedes in 1655."

"U'm? It is the original structure?"

"As far as I know. They built for permanence, those old Dutchmen. I've never been inside it, but I'm told its stone walls are two feet thick."

"You do not know the year in which it was erected?"

"About 1800, I believe. It must have been before 1804, for there were originally slave quarters on the back lot, and slavery was abolished in New Jersey in that year."

"*Morbleu, pas possible!*"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing of the consequence, my friend. I did but entertain an idle thought. Those ghostly sighs and groans, those ghostly clankings of the chains, might not they have some connection with slavery?"

"None that I can see."

"And none, *h las*, that leaps to my eye, either," he admitted with a smile as he rose. "I did but toy with the suggestion." He lit a cigarette and turned toward the wall. "Expect me when I return, *mon vieux*. I have much ground to cover, and may be late for dinner—may *le bon Dieu* grant otherwise."

The evening meal was long since over when he returned, but that his day's work had not been fruitless I knew by the twinkle in his little round blue eyes, and his first words confirmed my diagnosis. "My friend, I would not go so far as to say I have found the key to this mystery, but I damnation think that I can say under which doormat the key hides."

I motioned toward the decanter and cigars, a work of supererogation, for he was already pouring himself a generous drink of brandy. "*Bien oui*," he nodded solemnly as he shot the soda hissing into his glass. "All morning I did search, and nowhere could I find a person who knew much about that execrable Tofte House

until I reached the County Historical Society's archives. There I found more than ample reward for my labors. There were old deeds, old, yellowed newspapers; even the diaries of old inhabitants. Yes.

"This Jacob Tofte, he who built that house, must have been the devil of a fellow. In youth he followed the sea—*eh bien*, who shall say how far he followed it, or into what dark paths it led him? Those were the days of sailing ships, my old and rare, a man set forth upon a voyage new-married and easily might find himself the father of a five-year-old when he returned. But not our friend old Jacob. Not he! He traveled many times to Europe, more than once to China and the Indies, and finally to Africa. There he found his true vocation. Yes."

He paused, eyes gleaming, and it would have been cruel to have withheld the question he so obviously expected. "Did he become a 'blackbirder,' a slaver?" I asked.

"*Parbleu*, my friend, you have put your finger on the pulse," he nodded. "A slave trader he became, *vraiment*, and probably a very good one, which means he must have been a very bad man, cruel and ruthless, utterly heartless. *Tiens*, the wicked old one prospered, as the wicked have a way of doing in this far from perfect world. When he was somewhere between forty-five and fifty years of age he returned to New Jersey very well supplied with money, retired from his gruesome trade and became a solid citizen of the community. Anon he built himself a house as solid as himself and married.

"Now here—" he leveled a slim forefinger at me like a pointed weapon—"occurs that which affords me the small inkling of a clue. The girl he married was his cousin, Marise Tenbrocken. She was but half his age and had been affianced to her cousin Merthou Van Brundt, a young man of her own age and the cousin, rather more distantly, of Monsieur Jacob. One cannot say with certainty if she broke her engagement willingly or at parental insistence. One knows only that Monsieur Jacob was wealthy while young Monsieur Merthou was very poor and had his way to make in the world. Such things happened in the old days as in the present, my friend."

HE PAUSED a moment, took a sip of brandy and soda, and lighted a cigar. "Of these things I am sure," he recommenced at length. "From there on one finds only scattered bones and it is hard to reconstruct the skeleton, much more so to hang flesh upon the frame. Divorce was not as common in those days as now, nor did people wash domestic soiled linen in public. We cannot surely know if this marriage of May and October was a happy union. At any rate the old *Monsieur* seems to have found domestic life a trifle dull after so many years of adventure, so in 1803 we find him fitting out a small schooner to go to New Orleans. *Madame* his wife remained at home. So did her *ci-devant fiancé*, who had found employment, if not consolation, in the offices of Peter Tandy, a ship chandler.

"Again I have but surmise to guide me. Did the almost-whitened embers of old love spring into ardent flame once more when Monsieur Van Brundt and Madame Tofte found themselves free from the surveillance of the lady's husband, or had they carried on a *liaison* beneath old Monsieur Jacob's nose? One wonders.

"*En tout cas*, Monsieur Jacob returned all unexpectedly from his projected voyage to New Orleans, dropping anchor in the Bay but three weeks after he had left. With Monsieur Tofte's arrival we find Madame Marise and her cousin, formerly her *fiancé*, and doubtless now her lover, vanishing completely. *Pouf!* Like that."

"And what became of them?" I asked as he remained silent.

"*Qui sait?* The devil knows, not I. They disappeared, they vanished, they evaporated; they were lost to view. With them perhaps went one Celeste, a Martinique mulatress Monsieur Jacob had bought—or perhaps stolen—to be Madame Marise's waiting maid.

"Her disappearance seemed to cause him more concern than that of *Madame* his wife and his young cousin Merthou, for he advertised for her by handbill, offering a reward of fifty dollars for her return. She was, it seems, a valuable property, speaking French, Spanish and English, understanding needlework and cooking and the niceties of the toilette. One would think he

would have offered more for her, but probably he was a very thrifty man. At any rate, it does not appear she was ever apprehended."

"And what became of Jacob Tofte?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "He sleeps, one hopes peacefully, in the churchyard of St. Chrysostom's. There was a family mausoleum on his land, but when he died in 1835 he left directions for his burial in St. Chrysostom's, and devised five thousand dollars to the parish. *Tiens*, he was a puzzle, that one. His very tombstone presents an enigma."

"How's that?"

"I viewed it in the churchyard today. Besides his name and vital data it bears this bit of doggerel:

*'Beneath this stone lies J. Tofte,
The last of five fine brothers.
He died more happy by his lone
And sleeps more sound than others.'*

"What do you make from that, *hein*?"

"Humph. Except that it's more generous in its substitution of adjectives for adverbs than most epitaphs, I'd say it compares favorably with the general level of graveyard poetry."

"Perhaps," he agreed doubtfully, "but me, I am puzzled. 'He died more happy,' says the epitaph. More happy than whom? And than whom does he sleep more soundly? Who are these mysterious others he refers to?"

"I can't imagine. Can you?"

"I—think—" he answered, speaking slowly, eyes narrowed, "I—think—I—can, my friend."

"I have searched the title to that property, beginning with Monsieur Jacob's tenancy. It has changed hands a surprising number of times. Monsieur Molloy, from whom Monsieur and Madame Jaquay inherited, was the fiftieth owner of the house. He acquired it in 1930 at an absurdly small price, and went to much expense to modernize it, yet lived in it less than a year. There followed a succession of lessees, none of whom remained long in possession. For the past ten years the place was vacant. Does light begin to percolate?"

I shook my head and he smiled rather

bleakly. "I feared as much. No matter. Tomorrow is another day, and perhaps we shall be all wiser then."

"YOU have no office hours today, *n'est-ce-pas*?" he asked me shortly after breakfast the next morning.

"No, this is my Sabbatical," I answered. "One or two routine calls, and then—"

"Then you can come to Tofte House with us," he interrupted with a smile. "I damn think we shall see some things there to-day."

George and Georgine Jaquay were waiting for us at the Berkeley-York where they had taken temporary residence, and once more I was struck by their amazing likeness to each other. George wore gray flannels and a black Homburg, a shirt of white broadcloth and a pearl-gray cravat; Georgine wore a small black hat, a gray flannel manishly-cut suit with a white blouse and a little mauve tie at her throat. They were almost exactly of a size, and their faces similar as two coins stamped from the same die. The wonder of it was, I thought, that they required words to communicate with each other.

The gentleman with them I took to be their lawyer. He was about fifty, carefully if somberly dressed in a formally-cut dark suit with white edging marking the V of his waistcoat. His tortoise-shell glasses were attached to a black ribbon and in one gray-gloved hand he held a black derby and a black malacca cane.

"This is Monsieur Peteros, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin introduced when we had exchanged greetings with the Jaquays. "He is a very eminent medium who has kindly agreed to assist us."

Despite myself I raised my brows. The man might have been an attorney, a banker or mill-owner. Certainly he was the last one I should have picked as a practitioner of the rather malodorous profession of spiritualistic medium. Perhaps my face showed more than I realized, for Mr. Peteros' thin lips compressed more tightly and he acknowledged the introduction with a frigid "How d'ye do?"

But if the atmosphere were chilly de Grandin seemed entirely unaware of it. "Come, *mes amis*," he bade, "we are assem-

bled and the time for action has arrived. Let us go all soon and not delay one little minute. No, certainly not."

FRAMED by birch and oak, elm and maple, the big old house in Andover Road looked out upon a stretch of well-kept lawn. It was built of native bluestone without porches, and stood foursquare to the highway. Its walls were at least two feet thick, its windows high and narrow, its great front door a slab of massive oak. The sort of house a man who had been in the slave trade might have put up, a veritable fortress, capable of withstanding attacks with anything less than artillery.

Jaquay produced his key and fitted it into the incongruously modern lock of the old door, swung back the white-enameled panels and stood aside for us to enter. Mr. Peteros went first with me close at his elbow, and as I stepped across the sill I all but collided with him. He had come to an abrupt halt, his head thrown back, nostrils quivering like those of an apprehensive animal. There was a nervous tic in his left cheek, the corners of his mouth were twitching. "Don't you sense it?" he asked in a voice that grated grittily in his throat.

Involuntarily I inhaled deeply. "No," I replied shortly. The only thing I "sensed" was the Charbert perfume Georgine Jaquay used so lavishly. I had no very high opinion of mediums. If Peteros thought he could set the stage to put us in a mood for any "revelations" he might later make, he'd have to try something more subtle.

We stood in a wide, long hall, evidently stretching to the rear of the house, stone-floored and walled with rough-cast plaster. The ceiling was of beamed oak and its great timbers seemed to have been hand-squared. The furniture was rather sparse, being for the most part heavy maple, oak or hickory—benches, tables and a few rush-bottomed square-framed chairs, and though it had small beauty it had value, for the newest piece there must have been at least a hundred years old. A fireplace stretched a full eight feet across the wall to the right, and on the bluestone slab that served for mantel were ranged pewter plates and tankards and a piece or two of old Dutch delft any one of which would have fetched its weight in

gold from a knowing antique dealer. To our left a narrow stairway with a handrail of wrought brass and iron curved upward.

I was about to remark on the patent antiquity of the place when de Grandin's sharp command forestalled me: "It was in the bedroom you had your so strange experiences, my friends. Let us go there to see if Monsieur Peteros can pick up any influences."

Young Jaquay led the way, and we trooped up the narrow stairway single file, but halfway up I paused and grasped the balustrade. I had gone suddenly dizzy and felt chilled to the bone, yet it was not an ordinary chill. Rather, it seemed a sudden coldness started at my fingertips and shivered up into my shoulders, then, as with a cramp induced by a galvanic battery, every nerve in my body began to tingle and contract.

Just behind me, Peteros grasped my elbow, steadying me. "Swallow," he commanded in a sharp whisper. "Swallow hard and take a deep breath." As I obeyed the tingling feeling of paralysis left me and I heard him chuckle softly. "I see you felt it, too," he murmured. "Probably you felt it worse than I did; you weren't prepared for it." I nodded, feeling rather foolish.

Apparently the Jaquays had refurnished the bedroom, for it had none of the gloomy eighteenth century air of the rest of the house. The bedstead was a canopied four-poster, either Adam or a good reproduction, a tall chest of mahogany stood against one wall, between the narrow, high-set windows was a draped dressing table in the long mirror of which were reflected silver toilet articles and crystal bottles. Curtains of fluted organdie, dainty and crisp, hung at the windows. The floor was covered with an Abusson carpet.

"*Bien.*" De Grandin took command as we entered the chamber. "Will you sit there, *Madame*?" he indicated a chintz-covered chair for Georgine. "And you, Monsieur Jaquay, I would suggest you sit beside her. You may be under nervous strain. To have a loving hand to hold may prove of helpfulness. *Mais oui*, do not I know? I shall say yes. You, Friend Trowbridge, will sit here, if you please, and Monsieur Peteros will occupy this chair—" he indicated a

large armchair with high, tufted back. "Me, I prefer to stand. Is all in readiness?"

"I think we'd better close the curtains," Peteros replied. "I seem to get the emanations better in the dusk."

"*Bien. Mais certainement.*" The little Frenchman drew the brocade over-draperies of the windows, leaving us in semi-darkness.

Mr. Peteros leant back and took a silver pencil from his waistcoat pocket. Holding it upright before his face, he fixed his eyes upon its tip. A minute passed, two minutes; three. From the hall below came the ponderous, pompous ticking of the great clock, small noises from the highway—the rumble of great cargo trucks, the yelp of motor horns—came to us through the closed and curtained windows. Peteros continued staring fixedly at the pencil point, and in the semi-darkness his face was indistinct as a blurred photograph. Then the upright pencil wavered from the perpendicular. Slowly, like a reversed pendulum, or the arm of a metronome, it swung in a short arc from right to left and back again. His eyes followed it, converging on each other until it seemed he made a silly grimace. The silver rod paused in its course, wavered like a tree caught in a sudden wind, and dropped with a soft thud to the carpet. The medium's head fell back against the cushions of his chair, his eyelids drooped and in a moment came the sound of measured breathing, only slightly stertorous, scarcely more noticeable than the ticking of the clock downstairs. I knit my brows and shook my head in annoyance. I could have simulated a more convincing trance. If he thought we could be imposed upon by such a palpable bit of trickery. . . .

"O-o-o-oh!" Georgine Jaquay exclaimed softly. She had raised one hand to her throat and the painted nails of her outspread fingers were like a collar of garnets on the white flesh.

I felt a sudden tenseness. Issuing from Peteros' lips was a thin column of smoke, as if he had inhaled deeply from a cigar. Yet it was not ordinary smoke. It had an oddly luminous quality, as if its particles were microscopic opals that glowed with their own inward fire, and instead of coming in a series of short puffs, as cigar smoke

would have come from his mouth, it flowed in steady, even stream, like steam escaping from a simmering kettle. "*Regardez, l'il vous plait*, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered half belligerently. "I tell you it is psychoplasm—soul stuff!"

THE cloud of luminescent vapor drifted slowly toward the ceiling, then as if wafted by an unfelt zephyr coiled and circled toward the wall pierced by the curtained windows, and slowly, more like dripping water than a cloud of steam or smoke, began to trickle down the wall until it covered it completely.

It is difficult to describe what happened next. Slowly in the opalescent vapor that obscured the wall there seemed to generate small sparks of bluish light, mere tiny points of phosphorescence, and gradually, but with a gathering speed, they multiplied until they floated like a swarm of dancing midgets circling round each other till they joined to form small nebulae of brightness large as gleaming cigarette ends. The nebulae became more numerous, touched each other, coalesced as readily as rain drops brought together, till they formed a barrier of eerie, intense bluish light.

There was eeriness, uncanniness about it, but it was not terrifying. Instead of fear I felt a sort of gentle melancholy. Vague, long-forgotten memories wafted through my mind . . . a girl's soft laugh, the touch of a warm hand, the echo of the muted whisper of a once-loved voice, the subtle fragrance of old hopes and aspirations.

Half dazzled, wholly mystified by the phenomenon, I watched the luminous curtain.

A sort of cloudiness appeared in its bright depths, at first no more than a dim, unformed network of small dots and dashes, but gradually they built up a pattern. As when an image appears on the copper of a halftone plate in its acid bath, a picture took form on the surface of the glowing curtain. As if through the proscenium of a theatre—or on a motion picture screen—we looked into another room.

I recognized it instantly, so did Georgine Jaquay, for I heard her gasp, "Why, it's the hall of this house!"

"*Taisez-vous!*" de Grandin snapped.

"Laissez-moi tranquille, s'il vous plait, Madame! Be silent!"

It was the hall we had come through less than ten minutes before, yet somehow it was not the same. A great fire blazed on the wrought-metal andirons and in a pair of brass candlesticks tallow dips were burning. The lights and shadows shifted constantly, but such illumination as there was seemed to do little more than stain the darkness. The door through which we had come opened and a middle-aged Negro dressed in a suit of coarse tow came into the apartment, bending almost double under the weight of a brass-bound trunk of sole leather. He paused uncertainly a moment, seemed to turn as if to hear some command shouted at him from outside, then shambled toward the stairway.

The door, which had swung partly shut, was kicked back violently, and across the sill a man stepped with a woman in his arms. He was a big man, tall and heavy-set, with enormous shoulders and great depth of chest, dressed in the fashion of a hundred years and more ago. His suit of heavy woolen stuff was snuff-colored, made with a long coat and breeches reaching to his knees, and his brown stockings were of knitted wool but little better than those of the Negro. I guessed his age as somewhere near fifty, for there were streaks of gray in the long hair that he wore plaited in a queue and in the short dark reddish beard and mustache that masked his lower face. He had a big nose, dark hawk-eyes, broad low forehead and high-jutting cheek-bones. His skin was darkly tanned, and though he had few wrinkles they were deep ones. He was, I thought, a well-to-do farmer, perhaps a merchant sea captain. Certainly he was no gentleman, and just as certainly he was a hard customer, tricky and unscrupulous in bargaining and fierce and ruthless in a fight.

Of the woman we could see little, for a long hooded cloak of dark blue linsey-woolsey covered her from head to heels. What was at once apparent, however, was that she did not snuggle in his arms. She neither held his shoulders nor put her arms about his neck, merely lay quiescent in his grasp as if she rested after an exhausting ordeal, or realized the futility of struggling.

But when he set her on her feet we saw that she was very delicately made, not tall but seeming taller than her actual height because of extreme slenderness. She was pretty, almost beautiful, with a soft cream-and-carnation skin, bronze hair that positively flamed in the firelight, and eyes of luminous greenish violet with the wondering expression of a hurt child.

The man said something to her and with a start I realized we witnessed a pantomime, a scene of vibrant life and action soundless as an old-time moving picture, but legible in meaning as sky-writing on a windless day. We saw her shake her small head in negation, then as he echoed his peremptory demand hold out her hands in a gesture of entreaty. Her face was bloodless and her eyes suffused with tears, but if she had been a bird and he a cat her appeal could not have been more futile. Abruptly he seized her left hand and raised it to a level with her eyes, and on its third finger we saw the great, heavy plain gold band that marked her as a matron. For a moment he stood thus, then flung the little hand from him as if it were a bit of dross and grasped the trembling girl in his arms, crushed her to him and bruised her shrinking lips with kisses that betrayed no trace of love but were afire with blazing passion.

When he released her she shrank back, cheeks aflame with outraged blood and eyes almost filmy with nausea, but as he repeated his command she crept rather than walked to the stairway and mounted it slowly, holding fast to the wrought-brass handrail for support.

THE man turned toward the kitchen, bel-
lowing an order and into the hall stole another girl about the age of her whom he had just mauled so lustfully. She was a mulatress, scarce larger than a child, with delicately formed features, short wavy brown hair clustering round her ears and neck in tiny ringlets, and large dark eyes as gentle—and as frightened—as a gazelle's. Despite the almost shapeless gown of woolen stuff that hung on her we saw her figure was exquisite, with high breasts, narrow hips and lean, small waist. She bore a straw-wrapped stone demijohn stopped with a broken corncob, and at his order

took a pewter tankard from the mantel and poured some of the colorless contents of her jar into it. "More!" We could not hear the word, but it required no skill in lip-reading to know what he ordered, and with a shrug that was no more than a flutter of her shapely shoulders she splashed an added half-pint of liquor into the beaker.

It was obvious she was afraid of him, for she stayed as far away as she could, and her large eyes watched him furtively. When she had filled the mug she stood back quickly, pretending to be busy with recorking the bottle, but obviously eager to stay out of reach.

Her stratagem was futile, for when he downed the draft he wiped his mouth upon his cuff and held out his hand. "Kiss it!" we saw, rather than heard him order. She took his rough paw in her delicate gold hands and bent her sleek head over it, but he would not let her kiss its back. "Not that way!" he bade roughly, and obediently she turned it over and pressed her lips to its palm.

Why he demanded this peculiar form of homage I had no idea, but evidently de Grandin understood its implication, for I heard him mutter, "*Sale bête—dirty beast!*"

The bearded man threw back his head and laughed a laugh that must have filled the house with its bellow, then half playfully but wholly viciously he struck the girl across the face with a back-handed blow that sent her reeling to a fall beside the tiled hearth of the fireplace. The demijohn slipped from her hand, and in a moment a dark stain of moisture spread across the stones.

We saw him beckon her imperiously, saw her rise trembling to her feet and slink toward him, her wide eyes fearful, her lips trembling. Nearer she crept, shaking her head from side to side, begging mutely for mercy, and when she was within arm's length he seized her as a pouncing beast might grasp its prey. As a terrier might shake a rat he shook her, swaying her slim shoulders till her head bobbed giddily and her short curls waved like wind-whipped bunting round her ears. Protesting helplessly she opened her mouth and the force with which he shook her drove her teeth together on her tongue so that a little stream

of blood came from the corners of her mouth. Then, not content with this punishment, he struck her with his fist, knocking her to the floor, then raising her again that he might strike her down once more. Three times he hit her with his knotted fist, and every blow drew blood. When he was done he left her in a little crumpled heap beside the hearthstone, her slim gold hands held to her face and bright blood dripping from her nose, her lips and her bruised cheeks.

"*Cochon, pourceau, sale chameau!*" de Grandin whispered venomously. "*Pardieu*, he was a species of a stinking swine, that one!"

The big man wiped his mouth upon his sleeve once more and, swaying slightly from the effect of the potent apple-jack, made for the stairway up which the girl he had borne into the house had crept.

THE picture before us began to fade, not growing dimmer but apparently dissolving like a cloud of steam before a current of air, and in a moment little dots and lines of color danced and moved across the luminous screen, forming figures like the prisms of a kaleidoscope, then gradually merging to depict another scene.

Not very different from its present aspect, save that its lawn was not so well kept, the front yard of the house spread before us. It was early evening, and from the marshes—long since filled in and built over—rose a soft, light mist, silvery, unearthly, utterly still. The trees that rimmed the highway were almost denuded of their foliage and stood out in sharp silhouette, pointing to the pale sky from which most of the stars had been wiped by a half-moon's light. An earlier wind had blown the fallen leaves across the bricked walk with its low box borders, and the man and woman walking away from us kicked them from their path, rustling them against their feet as children love to do in autumn. At the lower end of the footway they paused and as the girl turned her face up to her escort we recognized the young woman we had seen borne into the house. The moonlight brought them into clear-cut definition. The man was young, about the girl's age, and bore a strong resemblance to her, obviously a family likeness. His clothes and

linen were threadbare but scrupulously clean, and his lean drawn face showed the effect of high ambition and slender resources. What they said we had no way of knowing, but we saw her arms creep up around his neck, not passionately, but tenderly, like the tendrils of a vine, as she raised her lips for his kiss. A moment they stood thus in silent embrace, then she unclasped her arms from his neck and he turned away, walking down the moonlit highroad with no backward glance and with squared shoulders, like a man who has made final, immutable decision.

ONCE more the scene was obscured, then took on new form, and we saw the white girl and the mulatress working feverishly packing a small nail-studded trunk. They folded linen underwear and sprinkled it with crumbled dry lavender, pressed a woolen dress down on the antique lingerie, added several pairs of cotton stockings and a pair of square-toed little buckled shoes. The box was packed and strapped, the girl ran to the door, but paused upon the threshold, the joy wiped from her face as sunlight disappears before a sudden cloud.

In the entrance stood the bearded man, and over one shoulder, as a butcher might have held a new-slaughtered calf, he bore the body of the young man we had seen before. Blood trickling from a scalp-wound told us how the boy had been bludgeoned, and on the barrel of the antique horse-pistol in the big man's right hand there was a smear of blood to which a few brown hairs adhered.

There was something utterly appalling in the big man's quietness. Methodically as if he followed a rehearsed plan he dropped the unconscious man on the bed, retraced his steps to the door and returned with three short lengths of iron chain which he proceeded to fasten round the necks of the two women and the swooning man.

Amazingly the women made no effort to resist but stood as dumbly and quiescently as well-trained horses waiting to be harnessed as he latched the fetters on their throats. Perhaps the memory of past beatings told them that submissiveness was wiser, perhaps they realized the hopelessness of entreaty or effort. It was very quick-

ly accomplished, and in a moment the big man had shouldered the unconscious youth again, tucked the little trunk beneath his free arm, and nodded toward the door. Without a word of protest or entreaty the women went before him, holding the free ends of their neck chains in their hands as if to still their clinking.

WE LOOKED into a little room, perhaps some twelve feet square, stone-floored, stone-walled, stone-ceilinged. It was darker than a moonless midnight, but somehow we could distinguish objects. About the walls were small partitioned spaces rising four deep, tier on tier, like oversized pigeonholes, and each was closed with a stone slab in which a heavy ring-bolt had been set. Something like a swarm of small red ants seemed crawling up the backs of my knees and my spine. One did not need to be an antiquarian to recognize the crypts of an old family tomb.

Something stirred in the darkness, and as I strained my eyes toward it I saw the huddled form of a woman. I knew it for a woman by the long red hair that hung upon its head, but otherwise, although it had been stripped of clothing, it was almost unclassifiable. Emaciation was so far advanced that she was little more than a mummy. Knee- and elbow-joints stood out against the staring skin like apples on broomsticks, the hip-bones showed like ploughshares each side the pelvis, the ribs were like the bars of a grating, and every tooth was outlined through the shrunken lips.

The creature bent its skull-face to the stone pavement and licked a little moisture from the trickle of a tiny spring-fed rivulet that crossed the flags, then tried to rouse itself to a sitting posture, tried vainly again, and sank back limply. Slowly, painfully, as if it fought paralysis, it edged across the cold damp stones of the floor, stretched out a bony, tendon-scored hand toward another thing that crouched against the farther wall.

This was—or had been—a man, but now it was no better than a skeleton held in articulation by the skin stretched drum-tight over it. It seemed to rouse to semi-consciousness by the other's movement, and tried desperately to reach the withered hand

stretched toward it. In vain. The chains that tethered the whimpering woman-lich and her companion were barely long enough to stretch from their ring-bolts to the floor, leaving the captives just length of leash enough to lie on the floor, but not permitting them sufficient movement to reach each other, even when their arms were stretched to fullest extent.

And as we watched the prisoners struggle futilely to bring their dying hands together we saw something flutter feebly in the darkness at the rear of the tomb. Chained like the other two the golden-skinned mulatress lay against the wall, and constantly her head turned from side to side and her emaciated body shook with unremitting spasms.

"*Cordieu*, but it was monstrous, that!" de Grandin whispered grittily. "Not content with making them die horribly by slow starvation; not content with making it impossible for them so much as to join hands in their extremity, he chained that other poor one with them that they should be denied all privacy, even in the hour of death!"

He struck his hands together sharply. "*Monsieur!*" he called. "*Monsieur Peteros!*"

The gruesome scene before us faded as if it had been frescoed on wax melting in quick heat, and through the semi-darkness of the room there swirled a wraithlike cloud of gleaming vapor that hovered like a nimbus above the medium a moment, then, as if he had inhaled it, was absorbed by him. "Eh?" Peteros murmured sleepily. "Did I go into a trance? What did I say?"

"Not a word, *Monsieur*," de Grandin told him. "You were as dumb as an infant oyster, but through your help we are much wiser. Yes. Certainly. Stay here and rest, for you must be exhausted. The rest of us have duties to perform. Come, *mes amis*," he looked at me and the Jaquays in turn, "let us go to that abominable tomb, that never-to-be-quite-sufficiently-anathematized sepulchre. We are a century and more too late—we cannot rescue them, *hèlas*, but we can give them what they most desire. Of a surety."

WITH a crowbar we forced back the rust-bound iron door of the Tofte

mausoleum and after standing back a moment for the outer air to enter de Grandin led the way into the tomb, playing the beam of his flashlight before him.

"*Voyez! Voilà que!*" he ordered as the shifting shaft of light stabbed through the murky darkness. Death lay at our feet. Arranged in orderly array as if they waited articulation by an osteologist were the bones of three skeletons. Dangling from the ring-bolts of three stone-sealed crypts to the floor beside the skulls were lengths of rust-bitten iron chain. The disintegration of the prisoners' upper spinal columns had loosed the loops of iron latched about their throats. We had no difficulty determining their sex. Even if the widely-opened sciatic notches of the pelvic bones and the smoothly curved angular fronto-nasal articulation of the skulls had not denoted the female skeletons to de Grandin's practiced eye and mine the pitiful relics lying by two of the skulls would have told their story—the amethyst-set gold earrings of the white girl and the patina-encrusted copper loops that once had hung in the mulatress' little ears.

The Frenchman stepped back, bowing as if he addressed three living people. "*Mes pauvres*," he announced softly, "we are come to give you release from your earth-bound state. Your pleas have been heard; you shall be together in what remains of the flesh. The evil man who boasted of his better, sounder sleep—*parbleu*, but Jules de Grandin makes a monkey out of him!"

"It is a case for the coroner," he told us as we walked back to the house. "We need not tell the things that we saw in the bedroom. The circumstances of the disappearance of Madame Tofte and Monsieur Van Brundt as they appear in the historical records, together with the advertisement crafty old Monsieur Jacob broadcast for the return of the poor Celeste, will be sufficient to establish their identity. As to the manner of their death—*eh bien*, does it not proclaim itself? But certainly."

He smiled grimly. "And that old hypocrite who lies so snugly in St. Chrysostom's churchyard—though it is late in overtaking him his sin has found him out at last. The jury of the coroner cannot help but name him as the murderer of those poor ones."

THE dinner at the Berkeley-York had been a huge success. *Consommé de tortue vert* with sherry, *huîtres François* with Chablis, *truite Margery* with Meursault, *coq au vin* with Nuits St. Georges and finally *crêpes Sussettes* with cointreau. As the waiter poured the coffee and Chartreuse I fully expected to hear de Grandin purr. "I suppose it's your theory that the stone and timbers of Tofte House held a certain psychic quality derived from association with the tragedy of Marise Tofte and Merthou Van Brundt, or that these unhappy lovers in the stress of their emotion passed on lasting thought-emanations to their inanimate surroundings?" I asked him. "I've heard you say that dreams or visions can be evoked in psychically sensitive persons when they're permitted to sleep in a room with a chip from a house where some atrocious crime has been committed, or—"

"I would not quite say that," he interrupted with a smile as he took a morsel of pink peppermint between his teeth and sipped a little black coffee. "This, I think, is what we might call a genuine ghost story, one where the earthbound spirits of the dead, denied the rites of Christian burial, sought constantly for help from the living."

"Consider, if you please: That Madame Marise and Monsieur Merthou were about to elope, accompanied by the slave girl Celeste, we have no doubt at all. Also, after seeing what a *bête bas* she had for husband one cannot greatly blame her, especially as she was still in love with her cousin who seems to have been a quiet, amiable young man. Yes.

"Next, we know the naughty old Monsieur Jacob laid a trap for them. He pretended to go on a long voyage, gave them barely time to renew love and make plans for eloping then *pouf!* swooped down on them like a cat on two luckless mice. The sad rest we know also.

"When he had chained them like brute

beasts they died all miserably in the tomb, and their poor, starved bodies lay unburied. What then? Year after painful year they sought to tell their plight to those who came to live in that old house, but always they did fail. Those whom they begged for help were frightened and ran off.

"But finally these unhappy cousins who were thwarted in their love were visited by cousins fate had given to each other. And so it came about that we, with Monsieur Peteros' assistance, found their pitiful remains, had their killer branded as a murderer, and after proper rites laid them in consecrated ground. Yes, certainly."

A grim expression settled on his lips. "That poor Celeste, the slave girl, she gave me some trouble," he confided.

"How's that?" asked Georgine Jaquay.

"The sexton of St. Chrysostom's told me the ground was reserved for the burial of white people exclusively. '*Monsieur*,' I say to him, 'this are no woman, but a skeleton I seek to have interred here, and the skeleton of a young girl of color is white as that of a Caucasian. Besides, if you persist in your pig-odious refusal I shall have to tweak your far from handsome nose.' *Tiens*, he let us bury her beside those whose death she had shared."

Georgine Jaquay gave a short neighing laugh, the sort of laugh a person gives to keep from weeping, but in a moment tears glinted on her lashes. "Do you suppose it was because they were cousins, and George and I are cousins, that they finally found peace through us?" she asked.

He raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman can achieve. "Who knows, *Madame*? It are entirely possible," he answered. Then with one of his quick elfin grins, "Or possibly it were because you and *Monsieur* your husband had the good sense to consult Jules de Grandin. He is a very clever fellow, that one."