

NOVEMBER

# Weird Tales

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## WITCH-HOUSE

an intriguing and thrilling  
story about Jules de Grandin,  
master of the supernatural

By SEABURY QUINN

Paul Ernst  
Robert Bloch  
Robert E. Howard  
Thorp McClusky  
Bassett Morgan

*All  
Stories  
Complete*



A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# Witch-House

By SEABURY QUINN

*'A vivid, fascinating and gripping tale of the blight that fell upon a lovely and beautiful American girl—a tale of Jules de Grandin, ghost-breaker, occultist, and master of the supernatural'*

**S**TREET lights were coming on and the afterglow was paling in the west beneath the first faint stars as we completed our late dinner and moved to the veranda for coffee and liqueurs. Sinking lazily into a wicker deck chair, Jules de Grandin stretched his womanishly small feet out straight before him and regarded the gleaming tips of his brightly polished calfskin pumps with every evidence of satisfaction.

"*Morbleu,*" he murmured dreamily as he drained his demi-tasse and set his cigar glowing before he raised his tiny

glass of kaiserschmarrn, "say what you will, Friend Trowbridge, I insist there is no process half so pleasant as the combination of digestion and slow poisoning by nicotine and alcohol. It is well worth going hungry to enjoy—ah, *pour l'amour d'une souris verte*, be quiet, great-mouthed one!" he broke off as the irritable stutter of the 'phone bell cut in on his philosophizing. "*Parbleu*, the miscreant who invented you was one of humankind's worst enemies!"

"Hullo, Trowbridge," hailed a voice across the wire, "this is Frierbergh. Sorry to trouble you, but Greta's in bad shape. Can you come out right away?"

"Yes, I suppose so," I replied, not especially pleased at having my post-prandial breathing-spell impinged on by a country call. "What seems to be the matter?"

"I wish I knew," he answered. "She just came home from Wellesley last week, and the new house seemed to set her nerves on edge. A little while ago her mother thought she heard a noise up in her bedroom, and when she went in, there was Greta lying on the floor in some sort of fainting-fit. We don't seem able to rouse her, and——"

"All right," I interrupted, thinking regretfully of my less than half-smoked cigar, "I'll be right out. Keep her head low and loosen any tight clothing. If you can make her swallow, give her fifteen drops of aromatic ammonia in a wine-glassful of water. Don't attempt to force

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● It is eleven years since the first story about Jules de Grandin appeared in WEIRD TALES—a fascinating story of weird surgery and a giant ape, called "The Horror on the Links." The hero of that bizarre story was a little French scientist and physician named Jules de Grandin—occultist and ghost-breaker, mercenary, vain, boastful, quick to wrath, yet altogether lovable—who enlisted the sympathies of the readers at once. Since then, sixty-four stories about his exploits have been printed, and Jules de Grandin has become one of the most popular heroes in modern fiction. The tale published in this issue, "Witch-House," describes one of his most amazing exploits. We commend it to you.

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any liquids down her throat, though; she might strangle."

"And this Monsieur Friebergh was unable to give you any history of the casual condition of his daughter's swoon?" de Grandin asked as we drove along the Albemarle Road toward the Friebergh place at Scandia.

"No," I responded. "He said that she's just home from college and has been nervous ever since her arrival. Splendid case history, isn't it?"

"*Eb bien*, it is far from being an

exhaustive one, I grant," he answered, "but if every layman understood the art of diagnosis we doctors might be forced to go to work, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

**T**HOUGH Greta Friebergh had recovered partial consciousness when we arrived, she looked like a patient just emerging from a lingering fever. Attempts to get a statement from her met with small response, for she answered slowly, almost incoherently, and seemed to have no idea concerning the cause of



"It wasn't I reflected in that mirror. As I looked, the moonlight seemed to break and separate into a million little points of light."

her illness. Once she murmured drowsily, "Did you find the kitten? Is it all right?"

"What?" I demanded. "A kitten——"

"She's delirious, poor child," whispered Mrs. Friebergh. "Ever since I found her she's been talking of a kitten she found in the bathroom.

"I thought I heard Greta cry," she added, "and ran up here to see if she were all right. Her bedroom was deserted, but the bathroom door was open and I could hear the shower running. When I called her and received no answer I went in and found her lying on the floor. She was totally unconscious, and remained so till just a few minutes ago."

"U'm?" murmured Jules de Grandin as he made a quick inspection of the patient, then rose and stalked into the bathroom which adjoined the chamber. "Tell me, *Madame*," he called across his shoulder, "is it customary that you leave the windows of your bathroom screened?"

"Why, no, of course not," Mrs. Friebergh answered. "There's an opaque screen in—good gracious, it's fallen out!"

The little Frenchman turned to her with upraised brows. "Fallen, *Madame*? It was not fastened to the window-casing, then?"

"Yes, it was," she answered positively. "I saw to that myself. The carpenters attached it to the casing with two bolts, so that we could take it out and clean it, but so firmly that it could not be blown in. I can't understand——"

"No matter," he broke in. "Forgive my idle curiosity, if you please. I'm sure that Doctor Trowbridge has completed his examination, now, so we can discuss your daughter's ailment with assurance."

To me he whispered quickly as the mother left the room: "What do you make of the objective symptoms, *mon*

*ami*? Her pulse is soft and frequent, she has a fluttering heart, her eyes are all suffused, her skin is hot and dry, her face is flushed and hectic. No ordinary fainting-fit, you'll say? No case of heat-prostration?"

"No-o," I replied as I shook my head in wonder, "there's certainly no evidence of heat-prostration. I'd be inclined to say she'd suffered an arterial hemorrhage, but there's no blood about, so——"

"Let us make a more minute examination," he ordered, and rapidly inspected Greta's face and scalp, throat, wrists and calves, but without finding so much as a pin-prick, much less a wound sufficient to cause syncope.

"*Mon Dieu*, but this is strange!" he muttered. "It has the queerness of the devil, this! Perhaps she bled internally, but—*ab-ba, regardez-vous, mon vieux!*"

Searching further for some sign of wound, he had unfastened her pajama jacket, and the livid spot he pointed to seemed the key which might unlock the mystery that baffled us. Against the smooth white flesh beneath the gentle swell of her left breast there showed a red and angry patch, such as might have shone had a vacuum cup been pressed some time against the skin, and in the center of the ecchymosis were four tiny punctures spaced so evenly apart that they seemed to make an almost perfect square three-quarters of an inch or so in size.

The discolored spot with its core of tiny wounds seemed insignificant to me, but the little Frenchman looked at it as though he had discovered a small, deadly reptile coiled against the girl's pale skin.

"*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" he murmured softly to himself. "Can such things be here, in New Jersey, in the twentieth centennial of our time?"

"What are you maundering about?" I asked him irritably. "She couldn't pos-

sibly have lost much blood through these. Why, she seems almost drained dry, yet there's not a spot of blood upon those punctures. They look to me like insect bites of some kind; even if they were wide open they're not large enough to leak a cubic centimeter of blood in half an hour."

"Blood is not entirely colloidal," he responded slowly. "It will penetrate the tissues to some slight extent, especially if sufficient suction be employed."

"But it would have required a powerful suction——"

"*Précisément*, and I make no doubt that such was used, my friend. Me, I do not like the look of this at all. No, certainly." Abruptly he raised his shoulders in a shrug. "We are here as physicians," he remarked. "I think a quarter-grain of morphine is indicated. After that, bed-rest and much rich food. Then, one hopes, she will achieve a good recovery."

"**H**ow is she, Trowbridge?" Olaf Friebergh asked as we joined him in the pleasant living-room. He was a compact, lean man in his late fifties, but appeared younger, and the illusion of youth was helped by the short mustache, still quite dark, the firm-cheeked, sun-burned face and hazel eyes which, under clear-cut brows, had that brightness which betokens both good health and an interest in life.

"Why, there's nothing really serious the matter," I answered. "She seems quite weak, and there's something rather queer——"

"There's something queer about the whole dam' case," he cut in almost brusquely. "Greta's been on edge since the moment that she came here; nervous as a cat and jumpy and irritable as the very devil. D'ye suppose hysteria could have caused this fainting-fit?"

De Grandin eyed him speculatively a moment; then: "In just what way has Mademoiselle Greta's nervousness been noticeable, *Monsieur*?" he asked. "Your theory of hysteria has much to recommend it, but an outline of the case might help us greatly toward a diagnosis.

Friebergh stirred his highball thoughtfully a moment; then, "D'ye know about this house?" he asked irrelevantly.

"But no, *Monsieur*; what has it to do with *Mademoiselle* your daughter?"

"Just what I'm wondering," Friebergh answered. "Women are weird brutes, Doctor, all of 'em. You never know what fool tricks nerves will play on 'em. This place belonged to one of my remotest ancestors. You're probably aware that this section was originally settled by the Swedes under William Usselinx, and though the Dutch captured it in 1655 many of the Swedish settlers stayed on, not caring much who governed them as long as they were permitted to pursue their business in peace. Oscar Friebergh, my great-great-grandfather's half-brother, built this house and had his piers and warehouses down on Raritan Bay. It was from here he sent his ships to Europe and even to the Orient, and to this house he brought the girl he married late in life.

"Theirs was quite a romance. Loaded with silks and wine, the *Good Intent*, my uncle's fastest ship, put in at Portugal for a final replenishment of victuals and water before setting sail for America on the last Sunday in June, 1672. The townsfolk were making holiday, for a company of witches and wizards, duly convicted by ecclesiastical courts, had been turned over to the secular arm for execution, and a great fire had been kindled on the Monte Sao Jorge. My uncle and the master of the ship, together with several of the seamen, were curious to see what was going on, so they

ascended the hill where, surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, a perfect forest of stakes had been set up, and to each of these were tied two or three poor wretches who writhed and shrieked as the faggots round their feet took fire. The tortured outcasts' screams and the stench of burning flesh fairly sickened the Swedish sailors, and they were turning away from the accursed place to seek the clear air of the harbor when my uncle's attention was attracted to a little girl who fought desperately with the soldiers to break through to the flaming stakes. She was the daughter of a witch and a warlock who were even then roasting at the same stake, chained back to back as they were said to dance at meetings of the witches' coven. The soldiers cuffed her back good-naturedly, but a Dominican friar who stood by bade them let her through to burn, since, being of the witch-folk, her body would undoubtedly burn soon or later, just as her soul was doomed to burn eternally. The sailormen protested vigorously at this, and my uncle caught the wild girl by the wrists and drew her back to safety.

"She was a thin little thing, dressed in filthy rags, half starved, and unspeakably dirty. In her arms she clutched a draggled-looking white kitten which arched its back and fluffed its tail and spat venomously at the soldiers and the priest. But when my uncle pulled the girl to him both child and kitten ceased to struggle, as if they realized that they had found a friend. The Spanish priest ordered them away with their pitiful prize, saying she was born of the witch-people and would surely grow to witchcraft and work harm to all with whom she came in contact, but adding it was better that she work her wicked spells on Englishmen and heretics than on true children of the Church.

"My uncle lifted the child in his arms

and bore her to the *Good Intent*, and the moment that he set her down upon the deck she fell upon her knees and took his hands and kissed them and thanked him for his charity in a flood of mingled Portuguese and English.

"For many days she lay like death, only occasionally jumping from her bunk and screaming, '*Padre, Madre—el fuego! el fuego!*' then falling back, hiding her face in her hands and laughing horribly. My uncle coaxed and comforted her, feeding her with his own hands and waiting on her like a nurse; so by degrees she quieted, and long before they raised the coast of Jersey off their bow she was restored to complete health and, though she still seemed sad and troubled, her temper was so sweet and her desire to please everybody so apparent that every man aboard the ship, from cabin boy to captain, was more than half in love with her.

"No one ever knew her real age. She was very small and so thin from undernourishment that she seemed more like a child than a young woman when they brought her on the *Good Intent*. None of the seamen spoke Portuguese, and her English was so slight that they could not ask her about her parents or her birthplace while she lay ill, and when she had recovered normal health it seemed her memory was gone; for though she took to English with surprizing aptitude, she seemed unable to remember anything about her former life, and for kindness' sake none would mention the *auto da fé* in which her parents perished. She didn't even know her name, apparently, so my uncle formally christened her Kristina, using the Lutheran baptismal ceremony, and for surname chose to call her Beacon as a sort of poetical commemoration of the fire from which he saved her when her parents had been burnt. It seems she——"

"MY DEAR chap," I broke in, "this is an interesting story, I'll admit, but what possible connection can it have with——"

"Be silent, if you please, my friend," de Grandin ordered sharply. "The connection which you seek is forming like the image as the sculptor chips away the stone, or I am a far greater fool than I have reason to suspect. Say on, *Monsieur*," he ordered Friebergh, "this story is of greater import than you realize, I think. You were informing us of the strange girl your uncle-several-times-removed had rescued from the Hounds of God in Portugal?"

Friebergh smiled appreciation of the little Frenchman's interest. "The sea air and good food, and the genuine affection with which everyone on shipboard regarded her had made a great change in the half-starved, half-mad little foundling by the time the *Good Intent* came back to Jersey," he replied. "From a scrawny little ragamuffin she had grown into a lovely, blooming girl, and there's not much doubt the townsfolk held a carnival of gossip when the *Good Intent* discharged the beautiful young woman along with her cargo of Spanish wines and French silks at the quay.

"Half the young bloods of the town were out to court her; for in addition to her beauty she was Oscar Friebergh's ward, and Oscar Friebergh was the richest man for miles around, a bachelor and well past fifty. Anyone who got Kristina for his wife would certainly have done himself a handsome favor.

"Apparently the girl had everything to recommend her, too. She was as good and modest as she was lovely, her devoutness at church service was so great it won the minister's unstinted praise, her ability as a housekeeper soon proved itself, and my uncle's house, which had been left to the casual superintendence

of a cook and staff of Negro slaves, soon became one of the best kept and most orderly households in New Jersey. No one could get the better of Kristina in a bargain. When cheating tradesmen sought to take advantage of her obvious youth and probable inexperience, she would fix her great, unfathomable eyes on them, and they would flush and stammer like schoolboys caught in mischief and own their fault at once. Besides her church and household duties she seemed to have no interest but my uncle, and the young men who came wooing met with cool reception. Less than a year from the day she disembarked, the banns for her wedding to my uncle were posted on the church door, and before the gossip which her advent caused had time to cool, she was Mistress Friebergh, and assumed a leading place in the community.

"For nineteen years they lived quietly in this house, and while my uncle aged and weakened she grew into charming, mature womanhood, treating the old man with a combination of wifely and daughterly devotion, and taking over active management of his affairs when failing sight and memory rendered him incompetent."

FRIEBERGH paused and drew reflectively at his cigar. "I don't suppose you'd know what happened in New England in 1692?" he asked de Grandin.

The Frenchman answered with a vigorous double nod. "*Parbleu*, I do, indeed, *Monsieur*. That year, in Salem, Massachusetts, there were many witchcraft trials, and——"

"Quite so," our host broke in. "Parish and the Mathers set the northern colonies afire with their witchcraft persecutions. Fortunately, not much of the contagion spread outside New England, but:

"Old Oscar Friebergh had been fail-



ing steadily, and though they cupped and leeches him and fed him mixtures of burnt toads, bezoar stone, cloves, and even moss scraped from the skull of a pirate who had been hanged in chains, he died in a coma following a violent seizure of delirium in which he cursed the day that he had taken the witch's brat to his bosom.

"Oscar had sworn his crew to secrecy concerning Kristina's origin, and it seems that they respected the vow while he lived; but some few of them, grown old and garrulous, found their memories suddenly quickened over their glasses of grog after the sexton had set the sods above old Oscar's grave, and evinced a desire to serve gossip and scandal rather than the memory of a master no longer able to reproach them for oath-breaking. There were those who recollected perfectly how the girl Kristina had passed unharmed through the flames and bid her burning parents fond farewell, then came again straight through the flames to put her hand in Oscar Frierbergh's and bid him carry her beyond the seas. Others recalled how she had calmed a storm by standing at the ship's rail and reciting incantations in a language not of human origin, and still others told with bated breath how the water of baptism had scalded her as though it had been boiling when Oscar Frierbergh poured it on her brow.

"The whole township knew her singing, too. When she was about her household tasks or sewing by the window, or merely sitting idly, she would sing, not loudly, but in a sort of crooning voice; yet people passing in the road before the house would pause to listen, and even children stopped their noisy play to hear her as she sang those fascinating songs in a strange tongue which the far-voyaged sailor folk had never heard and which were set to tunes the like of which were

never played on flute or violin or spinet, yet for all their softness seemed to fill the air with melody as the woods are filled with bird-songs in late April. People shook their heads at recollection of those songs, remembering how witches spoke a jargon of their own, known only to each other and their master, Satan, and recalling further that the music used in praise of God was somber as befitted solemn thoughts of death and judgment and the agonies of hell.

"Her kitten caused much comment, too. The townsfolk recollected how she bore a tiny white cat beneath her arm when first she tripped ashore, and though a score of years had passed, the kitten had not grown into a cat, but still as small as when it first touched land, frisked and frolicked in the Frierbergh house, and played and purred and still persisted in perpetual, supernatural youth.

"Among the villagers was a young man named Karl Pettersen, who had wooed Kristina when she first came, and took the disappointment of refusal of his marriage offer bitterly. He had married in the intervening years, but a smallpox epidemic had robbed his wife of such good looks as she originally had, and continued business failures had conspired to rob him of his patrimony and his wife's dowry as well; so when Oscar Frierbergh died he held Karl's notes of hand for upward of five hundred pounds, secured by mortgages upon his goods and chattels and some farming-land which had come to him at marriage.

"When the executors of Oscar's will made inventory they found these documents which virtually made the widow mistress of the Pettersen estate, and notified the debtor that he must arrange for payment. Karl went to see Kristina late one evening, and what took place at the interview we do not know, though her servants later testified that he shrieked

and shouted and cried out as though in torment, and that she replied by laughing at his agony. However that might be, the records show that he was stricken with a fit as he disrobed for bed that night, that he frothed and foamed at the mouth like a mad dog, and made queer, growling noises in his throat. It is recorded further that he lay in semi-consciousness for several days, recovering only long enough to eat his meals, then lapsing back again into delirium. Finally, weak but fully conscious, he sat up in bed, sent for the sheriff, the minister and the magistrate, and formally denounced Kristina as a witch.

"I've said that we escaped the general horror of witch persecution which visited New England, but if old records are to be believed we made up in ferocity what we lacked in quantity. Kristina's old and influential friends were dead, the Swedish Lutheran church had been taken over by the Episcopacy and the incumbent was an Englishman whose youth had been indelibly impressed by Matthew Hopkins' witch-findings. Practically every important man in the community was a former disappointed suitor, and while they might have forgotten this, their wives did not. Moreover, while care and illness and multiple maternity had left their traces on these women, Kristina was more charmingly seductive in the ripeness of maturity than she had been in youth. What chance had she?

"SHE met their accusations haughtily, and refused to answer vague and rambling statements made against her. It seemed the case against her would break down for want of evidence until Karl Pettersen's wife remembered her familiar. Uncontradicted testimony showed this same small animal, still a kitten, romped and played about the house, though twenty years had passed since it first came

ashore. No natural cat could live so long; nothing but a devil's imp disguised in feline shape could have retained its youth so marvelously. This, the village wise ones held, was proof sufficient that Kristina was a witch and harbored a familiar spirit. The clergyman preached a sermon on the circumstance, taking for his text the twenty-seventh verse of the twentieth chapter of Leviticus: 'A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death.'

"They held her trial on the village green. The records say she wore a shift of scarlet silk, which is all her persecutors would allow her from her wardrobe. Preliminary search had failed to find the devil's mark or witch-teat through which her familiar was supposed to nourish itself by sucking her blood; so at her own request Mistress Pettersen was appointed to the task of hunting for it *coram judice*.

She had supplied herself with pricking-pins, and at a signal from the magistrate ripped the scarlet mantle from Kristina, leaving her stark naked in the center of a ring of cruel and lustful eyes. A wave of smothering shame swept over her, and she would have raised her hands to shield her bosom from the lecherous stares of loafers congregated on the green, but her wrists were firmly bound behind her. As she bent her head in a paroxysm of mortification, the four-inch bodkin in the Pettersen woman's hand fleshed itself first in her thigh, then her side, her shoulder, her neck and her breast, and she writhed in agonizing postures as her tender flesh was stabbed now here, now there, while the rabble roared and shouted in delight.

"The theory, you know, was that at initiation into witch-hood the devil marked his new disciple with a bite, and from this spot the imp by which the witch worked her black magic drew its sustenance by sucking her blood. This

devil's mark or witch-teat was said to be insensible to pain, but as it often failed to differ in appearance from the rest of the body's surface, it was necessary for the searcher to spear and stab the witch repeatedly until a spot insensible to pain was found. The nervous system can endure a limited amount of shock, after which it takes refuge in defensive anesthesia. This seems to have been the case with poor Kristina; for after several minutes of torment she ceased to writhe and scream, and her torturer announced the mark found. It was a little area of flesh beneath the swell of her left breast, roughly square in shape and marked off by four small scars which looked like needle-wounds set about three-quarters of an inch apart.

"But the finding of the mark was inconclusive. While a witch would surely have it, an innocent person might possess something simulating it; so there remained the test of swimming. Water was supposed to reject a witch's body; so if she were tied and thrown into a pond or stream, proof of guilt was deemed established if she floated.

"They cross-tied her, making her sit tailor-fashion and binding the thumb of her right hand so tightly to the great toe of her left foot that the digits soon turned blue for lack of circulation, then doing the same with her left thumb and right great toe, after which she was bundled in a bed-sheet which was tied at the corners above her head, and the parcel was attached to a three-fathom length of rope and towed behind a rowboat for a distance of three-quarters of a mile in Raritan Bay.

"At first the air within the sheet buoyed up the bundle and its contents, and the crowd gave vent to yells of execration. 'She floats, she floats, the water will have none of her; bring the filthy witch ashore and burn her!' they shouted,

but in a little while the air escaped from the wet sheet, and though Kristina sank as far down in the water as the length of rope permitted, there was no effort made to draw her up until the boat had beached. She was dead when finally they dragged her out upon the shingle.

"Karl Pettersen confessed his error and declared the devil had misled him into making a false accusation, and, her innocence proved by her drowning, Kristina was accorded Christian burial in consecrated ground, and her husband's property, in which she had a life estate, reverted to my ancestor. One of the first things he did was to sell this house, and it went through a succession of owner-ships till I bought it at auction last autumn and had it reconditioned as a summer home. We found the old barn filled with household goods, and had them reconditioned, too. This furniture was once Kristina Friebergh's."

I LOOKED around the big, low-ceilinged room with interest. Old-fashioned chintz, patterned with quaint bouquets of roses, hung at the long windows. Deep chairs and sofas were covered with a warm rose-red that went well with the gray woodwork and pale green walls. A low coffee table of pear wood, waxed to a satin finish, stood before a couch; an ancient mirror framed in gilt hung against one wall, while against another stood a tall buhl cabinet and a chest of drawers of ancient Chinese nanmu wood, brown as withered oak leaves and still exhaling a subtly faint perfume. Above the open fireplace hung an ancient painting framed in a narrow strip of gold.

"That's Kristina," volunteered our host as he nodded toward the portrait.

The picture was of a woman not young, not at all old; slender, mysterious, black hair shining smoothly back, deep blue eyes holding a far-off vision, as

though they sensed the sufferings of the hidden places of the world and brooded on them; a keen, intelligent face of a clear pallor with small, straight nose, short upper lip and a mouth which would have been quite lovely had it not been so serious. She held a tiny kitten, a mere ball of white fluffiness, at her breast, and the hand supporting the small animal was the hand of one in whom the blood of ancient races ran, with long and slimy pointed fingers tipped with rosy nails. There was something to arrest attention in that face. The woman had the cold knowledge of death, ominous and ever present, on her.

"*La pauvre!*" de Grandin murmured as he gazed with interest at the portrait. "And what became of Monsieur Pettersen and his so highly unattractive wife?"

Friebergh laughed, almost delightedly. "History seems to parallel itself in this case," he answered. "Perhaps you've heard how the feud resulting from the Salem persecutions was resolved when descendants of accusers and accused were married? Well . . . it seems that after Kristina drowned, executors of Oscar Friebergh's will could not find clue or trace of the notes and mortgages which Pettersen had signed. Everybody had suspicions how they came to disappear, for Mistress Pettersen was among the most earnest searchers of Kristina's private papers when they sought a copy of the compact she had signed with Satan, but—in any event, Karl Pettersen began to prosper from the moment that Kristina died. Every venture which he undertook met with success. His descendants prospered, too. Two years ago the last male member of his line met Greta at a Christmas dance, and"—he broke off with a chuckle—"and they've been that way about each other from the first. I'm thinking they'll be standing side by side beneath a floral bell and saying 'I do'

before the ink on their diplomas has had much chance to dry."

"All of which brings us back three centuries, and down to date—and Greta," I responded somewhat sharply. "If I remember, you'd begun to tell us something about her hysterical condition and the effect this house had on her, when you detoured to that ancient family romance."

"*Précisément, Monsieur,* the house," de Grandin prompted. "I think that I anticipate you, but I should like to hear your statement——" He paused with interrogatively raised brows.

"Just so," our host returned. "Greta has never heard the story of Kristina and Karl Pettersen, I'm sure, for I didn't know it very well myself till I bought this house and started digging up the ancient records. She'd certainly never been in the house, nor even seen the plans, since the work of restoration was done while she was off to school; yet the moment she arrived she went directly to her room, as if she knew the way by heart. Incidentally, her room is the same one——"

"Occupied by Madame Kristina in the olden days!" supplied de Grandin.

"Good Lord! How'd you guess?"

"I did not guess, *Monsieur,*" the little Frenchman answered levelly; "I knew."

"Humph. Well, the child has seemed to hate the place from the moment she first entered it. She's been moody and distraught, complaining of a constant feeling of malaise and troubled sleep, and most of the time she's been so irritable that there's scarcely any living with her. D'ye suppose there's something psychic in the place—something that the rest of us don't feel, that's worked upon her nerves until she had this fainting-fit tonight?"

"Not at all," I answered positively. "The child's been working hard at school, and——"

"Very likely," Jules de Grandin interrupted. "Women are more finely attuned

to such influences than men, and it is entirely possible that the tragedy these walls have witnessed has been felt subconsciously by your daughter, Monsieur Frierbergh."

"DOCTOR TROWBRIDGE, I don't like this place," Greta Frierbergh told me when we called on her next day. "It—there's something about it that terrifies me; makes me feel as though I were somebody else."

She raised her eyes to mine, half frightened, half wondering, and for a moment I had the eery sensation of being confronted with the suffering ghost of a girl in the flesh.

"Like someone else?" I echoed. "How 'd'ye mean, my dear?"

"I'm afraid I can't quite say, sir. Something queer, a kind of feeling of vague uneasiness coupled with a sort of 'I've been here before' sensation came to me the moment I stepped across the threshold. Everything, the house, the furniture, the very atmosphere, seemed to combine to oppress me. It was as if something old and infinitely evil—like the wiped-over memory of some terrifying childhood nightmare—were trying to break through to my consciousness. I kept reaching for it mentally, as one reaches for a half-remembered tune or a forgotten name; yet I seemed to realize that if I ever drew aside the veil of memory my sanity would crack. Do you understand me, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid I don't, quite, child," I answered. "You've had a trying time at school, and with your social program speeded up——"

Something like a grimace, the parody of a smile, froze upon de Grandin's face as he leant toward the girl. "Tell us, *Mademoiselle*," he begged, "was there something more, some tangibility, which matched this feeling of malaise?"

"Yes, there was!" responded Greta.

"And that——"

"Last night I came in rather late, all tired and out of sorts. Karl Pettersen and I had been playing tennis in the afternoon, and drove over to Keyport for dinner afterward. Karl's a sweet lad, and the moonlight was simply divine on the homeward drive, but——" The quick blood stained her face and throat as she broke off her narrative.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*, but?" de Grandin prompted.

She smiled, half bashfully, at him, and she was quite lovely when she smiled. It brightened the faintly sad expression of her mouth and raised her eyes, ever so little, at the corners. "It can't have been so long since you were young, Doctor," she returned. "What did you do on moonlight summer nights when you were alone with someone you loved terribly?"

"*Morbleu*," the little Frenchman chuckled, "the same as you, *petite*; no more, I think, and certainly no less!"

She smiled again, a trifle sadly, this time. "That's just the trouble," she lamented. "I couldn't."

"*Hein*, how is it you say, *Mademoiselle*?"

"I wanted to, Lord knows my lips were hungry and my arms were aching for him, but something seemed to come between us. It was as if I'd had a dish of food before me and hadn't eaten for a long, long time, then, just before I tasted it, a whisper came, 'It's poisoned!'"

"Karl was hurt and puzzled, naturally, and I tried my best to overcome my feeling of aversion, but for a moment when his lips were pressed to mine I had a positive sensation of revulsion. I felt I couldn't bear his touch, his kisses seemed to stifle me; if he hadn't let me go I think that I'd have fainted.

"I ran right in the house when we

got home, just flinging a good-night to Karl across my shoulder, and rushed up to my room. 'Perhaps a shower will pull me out of it,' I thought, and so I started to disrobe, when——" Once more she paused, and now there was no doubt of it: the girl was terrified.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*, and then?" the Frenchman prompted softly.

"I'd slipped my jumper and culottes off, and let down my hair, preparatory to knotting it up to fit inside my shower cap, when I chanced to look into the mirror. I hadn't turned the light on, but the moonlight slanted through the window and struck right on the glass; so I could see myself as a sort of silhouette, only"—again she paused, and her narrow nostrils dilated—"only *it wasn't I!*"

"*Sacré nom d'un fromage vert*, what is it that you tell us, *Mademoiselle*?" asked Jules de Grandin.

"It wasn't I reflected in that mirror. As I looked, the moonlight seemed to break and separate into a million little points of light, so that it was more like a mist powdered with diamond dust than a solid shaft of light; it seemed to be at once opaque yet startlingly translucent, with a sheen like that of flowing water, yet absorbing all reflections. Then suddenly, where I should have seen myself reflected in the mirror, I saw another form take shape, half veiled in the sparkling mist that seemed to fill the room, yet startlingly distinct. It was a woman, a girl, perhaps, a little older than I, but not much. She was tall and exquisitely slender, with full-blown, high-set breasts and skin as pale as ivory. Her hair was black and silken-fine and rippled down across her shoulders till it almost reached her knees, and her deep-blue eyes and lovely features held a look of such intense distress that I thought involuntarily of those horribly realistic mediæval pictures of the Crucifixion. Her shoulders

were braced back, for she held her hands behind her as though they had been tied, and on her breast and throat and sides were numerous little wounds as though she had been stabbed repeatedly with something sharp and slender, and from every wound the fresh blood welled and trickled out upon the pale, smooth skin."

"She was——" began de Grandin, but the girl anticipated him.

"Yes," she told him, "she was nude. Nothing clothed her but her glorious hair and the bright blood streaming from her wounds.

"For a minute, maybe for an hour, we looked into each other's eyes, this lovely, naked girl and I, and it seemed to me that she tried desperately to tell me something, but though I saw the veins and muscles stand out on her throat with the effort that she made, no sound came from her tortured lips. Somehow, as we stood there, I felt a queer, uncanny feeling creeping over me. I seemed in some way to be identified with this other girl, and with that feeling of a loss of personality, a bitter, blinding rage seemed surging up in me. Gradually, it seemed to take some sort of form, to bend itself against a certain object, and with a start I realized that I was consumed with hatred; dreadful, crushing, killing hatred toward someone named Karl Pettersen. Not my Karl, especially, but toward everybody in the world who chanced to bear that name. It was a sort of all-inclusive hatred, something like the hatred of the Germans which your generation had in the World War. 'I can't—I won't hate Karl!' I heard myself exclaiming, and turned to face the other girl. But she was not there.

"There I stood alone in the darkened, empty room with nothing but the moonlight—ordinary moonlight, now—slanting down across the floor.

"I turned the lights on right away and

took a dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia, for my nerves were pretty badly shot. Finally I got calmed down and went into the bathroom for my shower.

"I was just about to step into the spray when I heard a little plaintive *mew* outside the window. When I crossed the room, there was the sweetest little fluffy white kitten perched on the sill outside the screen, its green eyes blinking in the light which streamed down from the ceiling-lamp and the tip of its pink tongue sticking out like the little end of thin-sliced ham you sometimes see peeping from behind the rolls in railway station sandwiches. I unhooked the screen and let the little creature in, and it snuggled up against my breast and purred and blinked its knowing eyes at me, and then put up a tiny, pink-toed paw and began to wash its face.

"Would you like to take a shower with me, pussy?" I asked it, and it stopped its washing and looked up at me as if to ask, "What did you say?" then stuck its little nose against my side and began to lick me. You can't imagine how its little rough tongue tickled."

"And then, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin asked as Greta broke off smilingly and lay back on her pillows.

"Then? Oh, there wasn't any then, sir. Next thing I knew I was in bed, with you and Doctor Trowbridge bending over me and looking as solemn and learned as a pair of owls. But the funny part of it all was that I wasn't ill at all; just too tired to answer when you spoke to me."

"And what became of this small kitten, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin asked.

"Mother didn't see it. I'm afraid the little thing was frightened when I fell, and jumped out of the bathroom window."

"U'm?" Jules de Grandin teased the needle-points of his mustache between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger; then:

"And this so mysterious lady without clothing whom you saw reflected in your mirror, *Mademoiselle?* Could you, by any chance, identify her?"

"Of course," responded Greta, matter-of-factly as though he'd asked her if she had studied algebra at school, "she was the girl whose portrait's in the living-room downstairs, Kristina Frierbergh."

"**W**ILL you leave me in the village?" asked de Grandin as we left the Frierbergh house. "I would supplement the so strange story which we heard last night by searching through the records at the church and court-house, too."

Dinner was long overdue when he returned that evening, and, intent upon his dressing, he waved my questioning aside while he shaved and took a hasty shower. Finally, when he had done justice to the salad and meringue glacé, he leant his elbows on the table, lit a cigarette and faced me with a level, serious glance.

"I have found out many things today, my friend," he told me solemnly. "Some supplement the story which Monsieur Frierbergh related; some cast new light upon it; others are, I fear, disquieting.

"By example: There is a story of the little kitten of which Monsieur Frierbergh told us, the kitten which refused to grow into a cat. When poor Madame Kristina was first haled before the magistrates for trial, a most careful search was made for it, but nowhere could the searchers find it; yet during the *al fresco* trial several persons saw it now here, now there, keeping just outside the range of stone-throw, but at all times present. Further, when the ban of witchcraft had apparently been lifted by Madame Kristina's inability to float and her burial within the churchyard close had been permitted, this so little kitten was seen nightly at her grave, curled up like a

patch of snow against the greenery of the growing grass. Small boys shied stones at it, and more than once the village men went to the graveyard and took shots at it, but stone and bullet both were ineffective; the small animal would raise its head and look at those who sought to harm it with a sadly thoughtful glance, then go back to its napping on the grave. Only when approached too closely would it rouse itself, and when the hunter had almost succeeded in tiptoeing close enough to strike it with a club or sword it would completely vanish, only to reappear upon the grave when, tired out with waiting, its assailant had withdrawn to a safe distance.

"Eventually the townsfolk became used to it, but no horse would pass the cemetery while it lay upon its mistress' grave without shying violently, and the most courageous of the village dogs shunned the graveyard as a place accursed. Once, indeed, a citizen took out a pair of savage mastiffs, determined to exterminate the little haunting beast, but the giant dogs, which would attack a maddened bull without a moment's hesitation, quailed and cowered from the tiny bit of fluffy fur, nor could their master's kicks and blows and insults force them past the graveyard gateway."

"Well, what's disquieting in that?" I asked. "It seems to me that if there were any sort of supernatural intervention in the case, it was more divine than diabolical. Apparently the townsfolk tried to persecute the little harmless cat to death exactly as they had its mistress. The poor thing died eventually, I suppose?"

"One wonders," he returned as he pursed his lips and blew a geometrically perfect smoke-ring.

"Wonders what?"

"Many things, *parbleu*. Especially concerning its death and its harmlessness,

Attend me, if you please: For several years the small cat persisted in its nightly vigils at the grave. Then it disappeared, and people thought no more about it. One evening Sarah Spotswood, a young farmer's daughter, was passing by the graveyard, when she was accosted by a small white cat. The little creature came out in the road near where it winds within a stone's-throw of the grave of Kristina Friebergh. It was most friendly, and when she stooped to fondle it, it leaped into her arms."

He paused and blew another smoke-ring.

"Yes?" I prompted as he watched the cloudy circle sail a lazy course across the table-candles.

"Quite yes," he answered imperturbably. "Sarah Spotswood went insane within a fortnight. She died without regaining reason. Generally she was a harmless, docile imbecile, but occasionally she broke out raving in delirium. At such times she would shriek and writhe as though in torment, and bleeding wounds appeared upon her sides and breast and throat. The madhouse-keepers thought she had inflicted injury upon herself, and placed her in a straitjacket when they saw the signs of the seizure coming on. It made no difference: the wounds accompanied each spell of madness, as though they were stigmata. Also, I think it worth while mentioning, a small white kitten, unknown to anybody in the madhouse, was always observed somewhere about the place when Sarah's periods of mania came.

"**H**ER end came tragically, too. She escaped surveillance on a summer afternoon, fled to a little near-by stream and cast herself into it. Though the water was a scant six inches deep, she lay upon her face until she died by drowning.

"Two other similar cases are recorded.



Since Sarah Spotswood died in 1750 there have been three young women similarly seized, the history of each case revealing that the maniac had taken a stray white kitten for pet shortly before the onset of incurable madness, and that in every instance the re-appearance of this kitten, or an animal just like it, had coincided with return of manic seizures. Like their predecessor, each of these unfortunate young women succeeded in drowning herself. In view of these things would you call this kitten either dead or harmless?"

"You have a theory?" I countered.

"Yes—and no," he answered enigmatically. "From such information as we have I am inclined to think the verdict rendered in Madame Kristina's witch-trial was a false one. While not an ill-intentioned one—unknowingly, indeed, perhaps—I think the lady was what we might call a witch; one who had power, whether she chose to exercise it or not, of working good or bad to fellow humans by means of supernatural agencies. It seems this little kitten which never grew to cathood, which lay in mourning on her grave and which afflicted four unfortunate young women with insanity, was her familiar—a beast-formed demon through whose aid she might accomplish magic."

"But that's too utterly absurd!" I scoffed. "Kristina Friebergh died three centuries ago, while this kitten——"

"Did not necessarily die with her," he interjected. "Indeed, my friend, there are many instances in witch-lore where the familiar has outlived its witch."

"But why should it seek out other girls——"

"*Précisément*," he answered soberly. "That, I damn think, is most significant. Witches' imps, though they may be ambassadors from hell, are clothed in pseudo-natural bodies. Thus they have

need of sustenance. This the witch supplies with her blood. It is at the insensitive spot known as the witch-mark or witch's teat that the familiar is suckled. When Monsieur Friebergh told us of Madame Kristina's trial, you will recall that he described the spot in which she felt no pain as an area roughly square in shape marked off by four small scars which looked like needle-wounds set about three-quarters of an inch apart? Consider, my friend—think carefully—where have you seen a cicatrix like that within the last few days?" His eyes, round and unwinking as those of a thoughtfully inclined tom-cat, never left mine as he asked the question.

"Why"—I temporized—"oh, it's too absurd, de Grandin!"

"You do not answer, but I see you recognize the similarity," he returned. "Those little 'needle-wounds,' *mon vieux*, were made by little kitten-teeth which pierced the white and tender skin of Mademoiselle Greta just before she swooned. She exhibited the signs of hemorrhage, that you will agree; yet we found no blood. *Pourquoi?* Because the little fluffy kitten which she took into her arms, the little beast which licked her with its tongue a moment before she lost consciousness, *sucked it from her body*. This cat-thing seems immortal, but it is not truly so. Once in so many years it must have sustenance, the only kind of sustenance which will enable it to mock at time, the blood of a young woman. Sarah Spotswood gave it nourishment, and lost her reason in the process, becoming, apparently, identified with the unfortunate Madame Kristina, even to showing the stigmata of the needle-wounds which that poor creature suffered at her trial. The manner of her death—by drowning—paralleled Kristina's, also, as did those of the other three who followed her in madness—*after*

'having been accosted by a small white kitten.'

"Then what d'ye suggest?" I asked him somewhat irritably, but the cachinnation of the telephone cut in upon the question.

"Good Lord!" I told him as I hung up the receiver. "Now it's young Karl Pettersen! His mother 'phoned to tell me he's been hurt, and——"

"Right away, at once; immediately," he broke in. "Let us hasten to him with all speed. Unless I make a sad mistake, his is no ordinary hurt, but one which casts a challenge in our faces. Yes, assuredly!"

I DO not think I ever saw a man more utterly unstrung than young Karl Pettersen. His injury was trivial, amounting to scarcely more than a briar-scratch across his throat, but the agony of grief and horror showing in his face was truly pitiful, and when we asked him how the accident occurred his only answer was a wild-eyed stare and a sob-torn sentence he reiterated endlessly: "Greta, oh, Greta, how could you?"

"I think that there is something devilish here, Friend Trowbridge," whispered Jules de Grandin.

"So do I," I answered grimly. "From that wound I'd say the little fool has tried to kill himself after a puppy-lovers' quarrel. See how the cut starts underneath the condyle of the jaw, and tapers off and loses depth as it nears the median line? I've seen such cuts a hundred times, and——"

"But no," he interrupted sharply. "Unless the young *Monsieur* is left-handed he would have made the cut across the left side of his throat; this wound describes a slant across the right side. It was made by someone else—someone seated on his right, as, by example, in a motorcar.

"*Monsieur!*" he seized the boy by both his shoulders and shook him roughly.

W. T.—2

"Stop this childish weeping. Your wound is but a skin-scratch. It will heal almost with one night's sleep, but its cause is of importance. How did you get it, if you please?"

"Oh, Greta——" Karl began again, but the smacking impact of de Grandin's hand against his cheek cut short his wail.

"*Nom d'un coq*, you make me to lose patience with you!" cried the Frenchman. "Here, take a dose of this!" From his jacket pocket he produced a flask of cognac, poured a liberal portion out into a cup and thrust it into Karl's unsteady hand. "Ah, so; that is better," he pronounced as the lad gulped down the liquor. "Now, take more, *mon vieux*; we need the truth, and quickly, and never have I seen a better application of the proverb that in alcohol dwells truth."

Within five minutes he had forced the better portion of a pint of brandy down the young man's throat, and as the potent draft began to work, his incoherent babbling gave way to a melancholy but considered gravity which in other circumstances would have appeared comic.

"Now, man to man, *compagnon de débauche*, inform us what took place," the Frenchman ordered solemnly.

"Greta and I were out driving after dinner," answered Karl. "We've been nuts about each other ever since we met, and today I asked her if she'd marry me. She'd been actin' sort o' queer and distant lately, so I thought that maybe she'd been fallin' for another bird, and I'd better hurry up and get my brand on her. Catch on?"

De Grandin nodded somewhat doubtfully. "I think I apprehend your meaning," he replied, "though the language which you use is slightly strange to me. And when you had completed your proposal——"

"She didn't say a word, but just

pointed to the sky, as though she'd seen some object up there that astonished her."

"Quite so. One understands; and then?"

"Naturally, I looked up, and before I realized what was happening she slashed a penknife across my throat and jumped out of the car screaming with laughter. I wasn't very badly hurt, but——" He paused, and we could fairly see his alcoholic aplomb melt and a look of infantile distress spread on his features. "O-o-o!" he wailed disconsolately. "Greta, my dear, why did you——"

"The needle, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," Jules de Grandin whispered. "There is nothing further to be learned, and the opiate will give him merciful oblivion. Half a grain of morphine should be more than ample."

"THIS is positively the craziest piece of business I ever heard of!" I exclaimed as we left the house. "Only the other night she told us that she loved the lad so much that her heart ached with it; this afternoon she interrupts his declaration by slashing at his throat. I never heard of anything so utterly fantastic——"

"Except, perhaps, the case of Sarah Spotswood and the other three unfortunates who followed her to madness and the grave?" he interrupted in a level voice. "I grant the little *demoiselle* has acted in a most demented manner. *Ha*, but is she crazier than——"

"Oh, for the love of mercy, stop it!" I commanded querulously. "Those cases were most likely mere coincidences. There's not a grain of proof——"

"If a thing exists we must believe it, whether it is susceptible of proof or not," he told me seriously. "As for coincidence—had only one girl graduated into death from madness after encountering a kitten such as that which figures in each of

these occurrences, we might apply the term; but when three young women are so similarly stricken, *parbleu*, to fall back on coincidence is but to shut your eyes against the facts, *mon vieux*. One case, yes; two cases, perhaps; three cases—*non*, it is to pull the long arm of coincidence completely out of joint, by blue!"

"Oh, well," I answered wearily, "if you—good Lord!"

Driven at road-burning speed a small, light car with no lamps burning came careening crazily around the elbow of the highway, missed our left fender by a hair and whizzed past us like a bullet from a rifle.

"Is it any wonder our insurance rates are high with idiots like that out upon the public roads?" I stuttered, inarticulate with fury, but the whining signal of a motorcycle's siren cut my protest short as a state policeman catapulted around the bend in hot pursuit of the wild driver.

"D'ye see um?" he inquired as he stopped beside us with a scream of brakes. "Which way did 'e go?"

"Took the turn to the right," I answered. "Running like a streak with no lights going, and——"

"My friend mistakes," de Grandin interrupted as he smiled at the policeman; "the wild one turned abruptly to the left, and should be nearly to the village by this time."

"Why, I'm positive he took the right-hand turn——" I began, when a vicious kick upon my shin served notice that de Grandin wished deliberately to send the trooper on a wild-goose chase. Accordingly: "Perhaps I was mistaken," I amended lamely; then, as the officer set out:

"What was your idea in that?" I asked.

"The speeder whom the gendarme followed was Mademoiselle Greta," he replied. "I recognized her in our head-

lights' flash as she went by, and I suggest we follow her."

"Perhaps we'd better," I conceded; "driving as she was, she's likely to end up in a ditch before she reaches home."

"WHY, Greta's not been out to-night," said Mrs. Friebergh when we reached the house. "She went out walking in the afternoon and came home shortly after dinner and went directly to her room. I'm sure she's sleeping."

"But may we see her anyway, *Madame?*" de Grandin asked. "If she sleeps we shall not waken her."

"Of course," the mother answered as she led the way upstairs.

It was dark and quiet as a tomb in Greta's bedroom, and when we switched on the night-light we saw her sleeping peacefully, her head turned from us, the bedclothes drawn up close about her chin.

"You see, the poor, dear child's exhausted," Mrs. Friebergh said as she paused upon the threshold.

De Grandin nodded acquiescence as he tiptoed to the bed and bent an ear above the sleeping girl. For a moment he leant forward; then, "I regret that we should so intrude, *Madame,*" he apologized, "but in cases such as this——" An eloquently non-committal shrug completed the unfinished sentence.

Outside, he ordered in a sharp-edged whisper: "This way, my friend, here, beneath this arbor!" In the vine-draped pergola which spanned the driveway running past the house, he pointed to a little single-seated roadster. "You recognize him?" he demanded.

"Well, it *looks* like the car that passed us on the road——"

"Feel him!" he commanded, taking my hand in his and pressing it against the radiator top.

I drew away with a suppressed ejaculation. The metal was hot as a teakettle full of boiling water.

"Not only that, *mon vieux,*" he added as we turned away; "when I pretended to be counting Mademoiselle Greta's respiration I took occasion to turn back the covers of her bed. She was asleep, but most curiously, she was also fully dressed, even to her shoes. Her window was wide open, and a far less active one than she could climb from it to earth and back again."

"Then you think——"

"*Non, non,* I do not think; I wish I did; I merely speculate, my friend. Her mother told us that she went out walking in the afternoon. That is what she thought. Plainly, that is what she meant to think. Mademoiselle Greta walked out, met the young Monsieur Petersen and drove with him, cut him with her ninety-six times cursed knife, then leaped from his car and walked back home. Anon, when all the house was quiet, she clambered from her window, drove away upon some secret errand, then returned in haste, re-entered her room as she had left it, and"——he pursed his lips and raised his shoulders in a shrug——"there we are, my friend, but just where is it that we are, I ask to know."

"On our way to home and bed," I answered with a laugh. "After all this mystery and nonsense, I'm about ready for a drink and several hours' sleep."

"An excellent idea," he nodded, "but I should like to stop a moment at the cemetery, if you will be so kind. I desire to see if what I damn suspect is true."

Fifteen minutes' drive sufficed to bring us to the lich-gate of the ancient burying-ground where generations of the county's founders slept. Unerringly he led the way between the sentinel tomb-

stones till, a little distance from the ivy-mantled wall which bordered on the highway, he pointed to a moss-grown marker.

"There is Madame Kristina's tomb," he told me in a whisper. "It was there—by blue! Behold, my friend!"

Following his indicating finger's line I saw a little spot of white against the mossy grass about the tombstone's base, and even as I looked, the little patch of lightness moved, took shape, and showed itself a small, white, fluffy kitten. The tiny animal uncoiled itself, raised to a sitting posture, and regarded us with round and shining eyes.

"Why, the poor little thing!" I began, advancing toward it with extended hand. "It's lost, de Grandin——"

"*Pardieu*, I think that it is quite at home," he interrupted as he stooped and snatched a piece of gravel from the grave beneath his feet. "*Regardez, s'il vous plaît!*"

In all the years I'd known him I had never seen him do an unkind thing to woman, child or animal; so it was with something like a gasp of consternation that I saw him hurl the stone straight at the little, inoffensive kitten. But great as my surprize had been at his unwonted cruelty, it was swallowed up in sheer astonishment as I saw the stone strike through the little body, drive against the granite tombstone at its back, then bounce against the grave-turf with a muffled thud. And all the while the little cat regarded him with a fixed and slightly amused stare, making no movement to evade his missile, showing not the slightest fear at his approach.

"You see?" he asked me simply.

"I—I thought—I could have sworn——" I stammered, and the laugh with which he greeted my discomfiture was far from mirthful.

"You saw, my friend, nor is there any

reason for you to forswear the testimony of your sight," he assured me. "A hundred others have done just as I did. If all the missiles which have been directed at that small white cat-thing were gathered in a pile, I think that they would reach a tall man's height; yet never one of them has caused it to forsake its vigil on this grave. It has visited this spot at will for the past two hundred years and more, and always it has meant disaster to some girl in the vicinity. Come, let us leave it to its brooding; we have plans to make and things to do. Of course."

"*GRAND Dieu des chats, c'est l'explication terrible!*" de Grandin's exclamation called me from perusal of the morning's mail as we completed breakfast the next day.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"*Parbleu*, what is it not?" he answered as he passed a folded copy of the *Journal* to me, indicating the brief item with a well-groomed forefinger.

#### TREASURE HUNTERS VIOLATE THE DEAD

the headline read, followed by the short account:

Shortly after eleven o'clock last night vandals entered the home of the late Timothy McCaffrey, Argyle Road near Scandia, and stole two of the candles which were burning by his casket while he lay awaiting burial. The body was reposing in the front room of the house, and several members of the family were in the room adjoining.

Miss Monica McCaffrey, 17, daughter of the deceased, was sitting near the doorway leading to the front room where the body lay, and heard somebody softly opening the front door of the house. Thinking it was a neighbor come to pay respects to the dead, she did not rise immediately, not wishing to disturb the visitor at his devotions, but when she noticed an abrupt diminution of the light in the room in which her father's body lay, as though several of the candles had been extinguished, she rose to investigate.

As she stepped through the communicating doorway she saw what she took to be a young man in a light tan sports coat running out the front door of the house. She followed the intruder to the porch and was in time to see him jump into a small sports roadster standing by the

front gate with its engine running, and drive away at breakneck speed.

Later, questioned by state troopers, she was undetermined whether the trespasser was a man or woman, as the overcoat worn by the intruder reached from neck to knees, and she could not definitely say whether the figure wore a skirt or knickerbockers underneath the coat.

When Miss McCaffrey returned to the house she found that all the vigil lights standing by the coffin had been extinguished and two of the candles had been taken.

Police believe the act of wanton vandalism was committed by some member of the fashionable summer colony at Scandia who were engaged in a "treasure hunt," since nothing but two candles had been taken by the intruder.

"For goodness' sake!" I looked at de Grandin in blank amazement.

His eyes, wide, round and challenging, were fixed on mine unwinkingly. "Non," he answered shortly, "not for goodness' sake, my friend; far from it, I assure you. The thief who stole these candles from the dead passed us on her homeward way last night."

"Her homeward way? You mean——"

"But certainly. Mademoiselle Greta wore such a coat as that *le journal* mentions. Indubitably it was she returning from her gruesome foray."

"But what could she be wanting corpse-lights for?"

"Those candles had been exorcised and blessed, my friend; they were, as one might say, spiritually antiseptic, and it was a law of the old witch covens that things stolen from the church be used to celebrate their unclean rites. All evidence points to a single horrid issue, and tonight we put it to the test."

"Tonight?"

"*Précisément*. This is the twenty-third of June, Midsummer's Eve. Tonight in half the world the bonfires spring in sudden flame on mountain and in valley, by rushing river and by quiet lake. In France and Norway, Hungary and Spain, Rumania and Sweden, you could see the flares stand out against the blackness of the night while people dance about them and chant charms against the

powers of Evil. On Midsummer's Eve the witches and the wizards wake to power; tonight, if ever, that which menaces our little friend will manifest itself. Let us be on hand to thwart it—if we can."

"Greta's dancing at the Country Club," said Mrs. Friebergh when we called to see our patient late that evening. "I didn't want her to go, she's seemed so feverish and nervous all day long, but she insisted she was well enough, so——"

"Precisely, *Madame*," Jules de Grandin nodded. "It is entirely probable that she will feel no ill effects, but for precaution's sake we will look in at the dance and see how she sustains the strain of exercise."

"But I thought you said that we were going to the club," I remonstrated as he touched my arm to signal a left turn. "But we are headed toward the cemetery——"

"But naturally, my friend; there is the grave of Madame Kristina; there the small white cat-thing keeps its watch; there we must go to see the final act played to its final curtain."

He shifted the small bundle on his knees and began unfastening the knots which bound it.

"What's that?" I asked.

For answer he tore off the paper and displayed a twelve-gage shotgun, its double barrels sawed off short against the wood.

"Good Lord!" I murmured; "what-ever have you brought that for?"

He smiled a trifle grimly as he answered, "To test the soundness of the advice which I bestowed upon myself this morning."

"Advice you gave yourself—good heavens, man, you're raving!"

"Perhaps so," he grinned. "There are those who would assure you that de

Grandin's cleverness is really madness, while others will maintain his madness is but cleverness disguised. We shall know more before we grow much older, I damn think."

THE air seemed thick and heavy with a brooding menace as we made our way across the mounded graves. Silence, choking as the dust of ages in a mummy-tomb, seemed to bear down on us, and the chirping of a cricket in the grass seemed as loud and sharp as the scraping of metal against metal as we picked our path between the tombstones. The stars, caught in a web of overhanging cloud, were paling in the luminance which spread from the late-rising moon, and despite myself I felt the ripple of a chill run up my back and neck. The dead had lain here quietly two hundred years and more, they were harmless, powerless, but—reason plays no part when instinct holds the reins, and my heart beat faster and my breathing quickened as we halted by the tombstone which marked Kristina Friebergh's grave.

I cannot compute the time we waited. Perhaps it was an hour, perhaps several, but I felt as though we had crouched centuries among the moon-stained shrubbery and the halftones of the purple shadows when de Grandin's fingers on my elbow brought me from my semi-dream to a sort of terrified alertness. Down by the ancient lich-gate through which ten generations of the village dead had come to their last resting-place, a shadow moved among the shadows. Now it lost itself a moment; now it stood in silhouette against the shifting highlights on the corpse-road where the laurel bushes swayed in the light breeze. Terror touched me like a blast of icy wind. I was like a little, frightened boy who finds himself deserted in the darkness.

Now a tiny spot of lightness showed

against the blackened background of the night; a second spot of orange light shone out, and I descried the form of Greta Friebergh coming slowly toward us. She was dressed in red, a bright-red evening dress of pleated net with surplice sleeves and fluted hem, fitted tightly at the waistline, molding her slender, shapely hips, swirling about her toeless silver sandals. In each hand she bore a candle which licked hungrily against the shadows with its little, flickering tongue of orange flame. Just before her, at the outer fringe of candlelight, walked a little chalk-white kitten, stepping soundlessly on dainty paws, leading her unhurriedly toward the grave where Kristina Friebergh lay as a blind man's poodle might escort its master.

I would have spoken, but de Grandin's warning pressure on my arm prevented utterance as he pointed silently across the graveyard to the entrance through which Greta had just come.

Following cautiously, dodging back of tombstones, taking cover behind bushes, but keeping at an even distance from the slowly pacing girl, was another figure. At a second glance I recognized him. It was young Karl Pettersen.

Straight across the churchyard Greta marched behind her strange conductor, halted by the tombstone at the head of Kristina's grave, and set her feebly flaring candles in the earth as though upon an altar.

For a moment she stood statue-still, profiled against the moon, and I saw her fingers interlace and writhe together as if she prayed for mercy from inexorable fate; then she raised her hands, undid snap-fasteners beneath her arms and shook her body with a sort of lazy undulation, like a figure in a slowed-down motion picture, freeing herself from the scarlet evening gown and letting it fall from her.

Straight, white and slim she posed her ivory nakedness in silhouette against the moon, so still that she seemed the image of a woman rather than a thing of flesh and blood, and we saw her clasp her hands behind her, straining wrists and elbows pressed together as though they had been bound with knotted thongs, and on her features came a look of such excruciating pain that I was forcibly reminded of the pictures of the martyrs which the mediæval artists painted with such dreadful realism.

She turned and writhed as though in deadly torment, her head swayed toward one shoulder, then the other; her eyes were staring, almost starting from their sockets; her lips showed ruddy froth where she gnashed them with her teeth; and on her sides and slim, white flanks, upon her satin-gleaming shoulders, her torture-corded neck and sweetly rounded breasts, there flowered sudden spots of red, cruel, blood-marked wounds which spouted little streams of ruby fluid as though a merciless, sharp skewer probed and stabbed and pierced the tender, wincing flesh.

A wave of movement at the grave's foot drew our glance away from the tormented girl. Karl Pettersen stood there at the outer zone of candlelight, his face agleam with perspiration, eyes bright and dilated as though they had been filled with belladonna. His mouth began to twist convulsively and his hands shook in a nervous frenzy.

"Look—look," he slobbered thickly, "she's turning to the witch! She's not my Greta, but the wicked witch they killed so long ago. They're testing her to find the witch-mark; soon they'll drown her in the bay—I know the story; every fifty years the witch-cat claims another victim to go through the needle-torture, then——"

"You have right, *mon vieux*, but I

damn think it has found its last one," interrupted Jules de Grandin as he rested his shotgun in the crook of his left elbow and pulled both triggers with a jerk of his right hand.

Through a smoky pompon flashed twin flares of flame, and the shotgun's bellow was drowned out by a strangling scream of agony. Yet it was not so much a cry of pain as of wild anger, maniacal, frenzied with thwarted rage. It spouted up, a marrow-freezing geyser of terrifying sound, and the kitten which had crouched at Greta's feet seemed literally to fly to pieces. Though the double charge of shotgun slugs had hit it squarely, it did not seem to me that it was ripped to shreds, but rather as though its tiny body had been filled with some form of high explosive, or a gas held at tremendous pressure, and that the penetrating slugs had liberated this and caused a detonation which annihilated every vestige of the small, white, furry form.

AS THE kitten vanished, Greta dropped down to the ground unconscious, and, astoundingly, as though they had been wiped away by magic, every sign of pulsing, bleeding wounds was gone, leaving her pale skin unscarred and without blemish in the faintly gleaming candlelight.

"And now, *Monsieur, s'il vous plait!*" With an agile leap de Grandin crossed the grave, drew back his sawed-off shotgun and brought its butt-plate down upon Karl's head.

"Good heavens, man, have you gone crazy?" I demanded as the youngster slumped down like a pole-axed ox.

"Not at all, by no means; otherwise, entirely, I assure you," he answered as he gazed down at his victim speculatively. "Look to *Mademoiselle*, if you will be so kind; then help me carry this one to the motorcar."



Clumsily, I drew the scarlet ballgown over Greta's shoulders, then grasped her underneath the arms, stood her on unconscious feet a moment and let the garment fall about her. She was scarcely heavier than a child, and I bore her to the car with little effort, then returned to help de Grandin with Karl Pettersen.

"What ever made you do it?" I demanded as we set out for my office.

Pleased immensely with himself, he hummed a snatch of tune before he answered: "It was expedient that he should be unconscious at this time, my friend. Undoubtedly he followed Mademoiselle Greta from the dance, saw her light the candles and disrobe herself, then show the bleeding stigma of the witch. You heard what he cried out?"

"Yes."

"*Très bon.* They love each other, these two, but the memory of the things which he has seen tonight would come between them and their happiness like a loathsome specter. We must eliminate every vestige of that memory, and of the wound she dealt him, too. But certainly. When they recover consciousness I shall be ready for them. I shall wipe their memories clean of those unpleasant things. Assuredly; of course."

"How can you do that?"

"By hypnotism. You know I am an adept at it, and these two, exhausted, all weakened with the slowly leaving burden of unconsciousness, will offer little opposition to my will. To implant suggestions which shall ripen and bear fruit within their minds will be but child's play for me."

We drove along in silence a few minutes; then, chuckling, he announced: "*Tiens,* she is the lucky girl that Jules de Grandin is so clever. Those other ones were not so fortunate. There was no Jules de Grandin to rescue Sarah Spotswood from her fate, nor the others,

either. No. The same process was beginning in this case. First came a feeling of aversion for her lover, a reluctance to embrace him. That was the will of wickedness displacing her volition. Then, all unconsciously, she struck him with a knife, but the subjugation of her will was not complete. The will of evilness forced her hand to strike the blow, but her love for him withheld it, so that he suffered but a little so small scratch."

"Do you mean to tell me Kristina Frierbergh was responsible for all these goings-on?" I asked.

"No-o, I would not say it," he responded thoughtfully. "I think she was a most unfortunate young woman, more sinned against than sinning. That *sacré petit chat*—that wicked little cat-thing—was her evil genius, and that of Sarah Spotswood and the other girls, as well as Mademoiselle Greta. You remember Monsieur Frierbergh's story, how his several times great-uncle found the little Kristina trying to force her way into the flames which burnt her parents, with a little kitten clutched tight in her arms? That is the explanation. Her parents were undoubtedly convicted justly for the crime of witchcraft, and the little cat-thing was the imp by which they worked their evil spells. When they were burnt, the cat-familiar lingered on and attached itself to their poor daughter. It had no evil work to do, for there is no record that Kristina indulged in witchery. But it was a devil's imp, instinct with wickedness, and her very piety and goodness angered it; accordingly it brought her to a tragic death. Then it must find fresh source of nourishment, since witches' imps, like vampires, perpetuate themselves by sucking human blood. Accordingly it seized on Sarah Spotswood as a victim, and took her blood and sanity, finally her life. For half a century it lived on the vitality it took from that

unfortunate young woman, then—*pouf!*—another victim suffers, goes insane and dies. Each fifty years the process is repeated till at last it comes to Mademoiselle Greta—and to me. Now all is finished."

"But I saw you toss a stone at it last night without effect," I argued, "yet tonight——"

"*Précisément.* That gave me to think. 'It can make a joke of ordinary missiles,' I inform me when I saw it let the stone I threw pass through its body. 'This being so, what are we to do with it, Jules de Grandin?'"

"Phantoms and werewolves which are proof against the ordinary bullet can be killed by shots of silver,' I reply.

"Very well, then, Jules de Grandin, I say to me; 'let us use a silver bullet.'

"*Ha,* but this small cat-thing are an artful dodger, you might miss it,' I remind me; so I make sure there shall be no missing. From the silversmith I get some silver filings, and with these I stuff some shotgun shells. 'Now, *Monsieur le Chat,*' I say, 'if you succeed in dodging these, you will astonish me.'

"*Eb bien,* it was not I who was astonished, I damn think."

**W**ERE TOOK the children to my surgery, and while I went to seek some wine and biscuit at de Grandin's urgent

request, he placed them side by side upon the couch and took his stance before them.

When I tiptoed back some fifteen minutes later, Greta lay sleeping peacefully upon the sofa, while Karl was gazing fascinated into Jules de Grandin's eyes.

"... and you will remember nothing but that you love her and she loves you, *Monsieur,*" I heard de Grandin say, and heard the boy sigh sleepily in acquiescence.

"Why, we're in Doctor Trowbridge's surgery!" exclaimed Greta as she opened her eyes.

"But yes, of course," de Grandin answered. "You and Monsieur Karl had a little, trifling accident upon the road, and we brought you here."

"Karl dear"—for the first time she seemed to notice the scratch upon his neck—"you've been hurt!"

"*Ab bah,* it is of no importance, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin told her with a laugh. "Those injuries are of the past, and tonight the past is dead. See, we are ready to convey you home, but first"—he filled the glasses with champagne and handed them each one—"first we shall drink to your happiness and forgetfulness of all the things which happened in the bad old days."

