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WEIRD TALES

408 Holiday Building

Indianapolis, Ind.

The Isle Of Missing Ships

by
Seabury
Quinn

A Complete Novelette

"I could feel them standing over me, and a queer, cold feeling tingled between my shoulder blades, where I momentarily expected a knife thrust."



THE *McCrone*, Sumatra-bound out of Amsterdam, had dropped the low Holland coast an hour behind when I recognized a familiar figure among the miscellany of Dutch colonials. The little man with the erect, military carriage, trimly waxed mustache and direct, challenging blue eyes was as conspicuous amid the throng of over-fleshed planters, traders and petty administrators as a fleur-de-lis growing in the midst of a cabbage patch.

"For the Lord's sake, de Grandin! What are you doing here?" I demanded, seizing him by the hand. "I thought you'd gone back to your microscopes and test tubes when you cleared up the Broussac mystery."

He grinned at me like a blond brother of Mephistopheles as he linked his arm in mine and caught step with me. "*Eh bien*," he agreed with a nod, "so did I; but those inconsiderate Messieurs Lloyd would not have it so. They must needs send me an urgent message to investigate

a suspicion they have at the other end of the earth.

"I did not desire to go. The summer is come and the blackbirds are singing in the trees at St. Cloud. Also, I have much work to do; but they tell me: 'You shall name your own price and no questions shall be asked,' and, *hélas*, the franc is very low on the exchange these days.

"I tell them, 'Ten pounds sterling for each day of my travels and all expenses.' They agree. *Voilà*. I am here."

I looked at him in amazement. "Lloyds? Ten pounds sterling a day?" I echoed. "What in the world—?"

"*La, la!*" he exclaimed. "It is a long story, Friend Trowbridge, and most like a foolish one in the bargain, but, at any rate, the English money is sound. Listen"—he sank his voice to a confidential whisper.—"you know those Messieurs Lloyd, *hein?* They will insure against anything from the result of one of your

American political elections to the loss of a ship in the sea. That last business of theirs is also my business, for the time.

"Of late the English insurers have had many claims to pay—claims on ships which should have been good risks. There was the Dutch Indianman *Van Damm*, a sound little iron ship of twelve thousand tons displacement. She sail out of Rotterdam for Sumatra, and start home heavy-laden with spices and silks, also with a king's ransom in pearls safely locked in her strong box. Where is she now?" He spread his hands and shrugged expressively. "No one knows. She was never heard of more, and the Lloyds had to make good her value to her owners.

"There was the French steamer *l'Orient*, also dissolved into air, and the British merchantman *Nightingale*, and six other sound ships gone—all gone, with none to say whither, and the estimable Messieurs Lloyd to pay insurance. All within one single year. *Parbleu*, it is too much! The English company pays its losses like a true sportsman, but it also begins to sniff the aroma of the dead fish. They would have me, Jules de Grandin, investigate this business of the monkey and tell them where the missing ships are gone.

"It may be for a year that I search; it may be for only a month, or, perhaps, I spend the time till my hair is as bald as yours, Friend Trowbridge, before I can report. No matter; I receive my ten pounds each day and all incidental expenses. Say now, are not those Messieurs Lloyd gambling more recklessly this time than ever before in their long career?"

"I think they are," I agreed.

"But," he replied with one of his elfish grins, "remember, Trowbridge, my friend, those Messieurs Lloyd were never known to lose money per-

manently on any transaction. *Morbleu!* Jules de Grandin, as the Americans say, you entertain the hatred for yourself!"

THE *Mevrouw* churned and wallowed her broadbeamed way through the cool European ocean, into the summer seas, finally out upon the tropical waters of Polynesia. For five nights the smalt-blue heavens were ablaze with stars; on the sixth evening the air thickened at sunset. By 10 o'clock the ship might have been draped in a pall of black velvet as a teapot is swathed in a cozy, so impenetrable was the darkness. Objects a dozen feet from the porthole lights were all but indistinguishable, at twenty feet they were invisible, and, save for the occasional phosphorescent glow of some tumbling sea denizen, the ocean itself was only an undefined part of the surrounding blackness.

"Eh, but I do not like this," de Grandin muttered as he lighted a rank Sumatra cigar from the ship steward's store and puffed vigorously to set the fire going: "this darkness, it is a time for evil doings, Friend Trowbridge."

He turned to a ship's officer who strode past us toward the bridge. "Is it that we shall have a storm, *Monsieur?*" he asked. "Does the darkness portend a typhoon?"

"No," returned the Dutchman. "Id iss volcanic dust. Some of dese volcano mountains are in eruption again and scatter steam and ash over a hundred miles. Tomorrow, perhaps, or de nex' day, ve are out of id an' into de zunzhine again."

"Ah," de Grandin bowed acknowledgment of the information, "and does this volcanic darkness frequently come at this latitude and longitude, *Monsieur?*"

"Ja," the other answered, "dese vaters are almost always covered; de

chimneys of hell poke up through the ocean hereabouts, *Mijnheer*."

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin swore softly to himself. "I think he has spoken truth, Friend Trowbridge. Now if—*Grand Dieu*, see! What is that?"

Some distance off our port bow a brand of yellow fire burned a parabola against the black sky, burst into a shower of sparks high above the horizon and flung a constellation of colored fire-balls into the air. A second flame followed the first, and a third winged upward in the wake of the second. "Rockets," de Grandin announced. "A ship is in distress over there, it would seem."

Bells clanged and jangled as the engine room telegraph sent orders from the bridge; there was a clanking of machinery as the screws churned in opposite directions and the steering mechanism brought the ship's head about toward the distress signals.

"I think we had best be prepared, my friend," de Grandin whispered as he reached upward to the rack above us and detached two kapok swimming jackets from their straps. "Come, slip this over your shoulders, and if you have anything in your cabin you would care to save, get it at once," he advised.

"You're crazy, man," I protested, pushing the life preserver away. "We aren't in any danger. Those lights were at least five miles away, and even if that other ship is fast on a reef our skipper would hear the breakers long before we were near enough to run aground."

"*Nom d'un nom!*" the little Frenchman swore in vexation. "Friend Trowbridge, you are one great zany. Have you no eyes in that so empty head of yours? Did you not observe how those rockets went up?"

"How they went up?" I repeated. "Of course I did; they were fired

from the deck—perhaps the bridge—of some ship about five miles away."

"So?" he replied in a sarcastic whisper. "Five miles, you say? And you, a physician, do not know that the human eye sees only about five miles over a plane surface? How, then, if the distressed ship is five miles distant, could those flares have appeared to rise from a greater height than our own deck? Had they really been fired from sea-level—even from a masthead, at that distance—they should have appeared to rise across the horizon. As it was, they first became visible at a considerable height."

"Nonsense," I rejoined; "whoever would be setting off rockets in mid-air in this part of the world?"

"Who, indeed?" he answered, gently forcing the swimming coat on me. "That question, *mon ami*, is precisely what those Messieurs Lloyd are paying me ten pounds a day to answer. Hark!"

Distinctly, directly in our path, sounded the muttering roar of waves breaking against rocks.

Clang! The ship's telegraph shrieked the order to reverse, to put about, to the engine room from the bridge. Wheels and chains rattled, voices shouted hoarse orders through the dark, and the ship shivered from stem to stern as the engines struggled hysterically to break our course toward destruction.

Too late! Like a toy boat caught in a sudden wind squall, we lunged forward, gathering speed with each foot we traveled. There was a rending crash like all the crockery in the world being smashed at once, de Grandin and I fell headlong to the deck and shot along the smooth boards like a couple of ball players sliding for second base, and the stout little *Meuroux* listed suddenly to port, sending us banging against the deck rail.

"Quick, quick, my friend!" de

Grandin shouted. "Over the side and swim for it. I may be wrong, *prie-Dieu* I am, but I fear there will be devil's work here anon. Come!" He lifted himself to his feet, balanced on the rail a moment, then slipped into the purple water that swirled past the doomed ship's side a scant seven feet below us.

I followed, striking out easily toward the quiet water ahead, the kapok jacket keeping me afloat and the rushing water carrying me forward rapidly.

"By George, old fellow, you've been right this far," I congratulated my companion, but he shut me off with a sharp hiss.

"Still, you fool," he admonished savagely. "Keep your silly tongue quiet and kick with your feet. Kick, kick, I tell you! Make as great commotion in the water as possible—*nom de Dieu!* We are lost!"

Faintly luminous with the phosphorescence of tropical sea water, something seeming as large as a submarine boat shot upward from the depths below, headed as straight for my flailing legs as a sharpshooter's bullet for its target.

De Grandin grasped my shoulder and heaved me over in a clumsy back somersault, and at the same time thrust himself as deeply into the water as his swimming coat would permit. For a moment his fiery silhouette mingled with that of the great fish and he seemed striving to embrace the monster, then the larger form sank slowly away, while the little Frenchman rose puffing to the surface.

"*Mordieu!*" he commented, blowing the water from his mouth; "that was a near escape, my friend. One little second more and he would have had your leg in his belly. Lucky for us I knew the pearl divers' trick of slitting those fellows' gills with a

knife, and luckier still I thought to bring along a knife to slit him with."

"What was it?" I asked, still bewildered by the performance I had just witnessed. "It looked big enough to be a whale."

He shook his head to clear the water from his eyes as he replied: "It was our friend, *Monsieur le Requin*—the shark. He is always hungry, that one, and such morsels as you would be a choice titbit for his table, my friend."

"A shark!" I answered incredulously. "But it couldn't have been a shark, de Grandin, they have to turn on their backs to bite, and that thing came straight at me."

"*Ah, bah!*" he shot back disgustedly. "What old wives' tale is that you quote? *Le requin* is no more compelled to take his food upside down than you are. I tell you, he would have swallowed your leg up to the elbow if I had not cut his sinful gizzard in two!"

"Good Lord!" I began splashing furiously. "Then we're apt to be devoured any moment!"

"Possibly," he returned calmly, "but not probably. If land is not too far away that fellow's brethren will be too busy eating him to pay attention to such small fry as us. *Grâce à Dieu*, I think I feel the good land beneath our feet even now."

It was true. We were standing armpit-deep on a sloping, sandy beach with the long, gentle swell of the ocean kindly pushing us toward the shore. A dozen steps and we were safely beyond the tide-line, lying face down upon the warm sands and gulping down great mouthfuls of the heavy, sea-scented air. What de Grandin did there in the dark I do not know, but for my part I offered up such unspoken prayers of devout thanksgiving as I had never breathed before.

My devotions were cut short by a

sputtering mixture of French profanity.

"What's up?" I demanded, then fell silent as de Grandin's hand closed on my wrist like a tightened tourniquet.

"Hark, my friend," he commanded. "Look across the water to the ship we left and say whether or no I was wise when I brought us away."

Out across the quiet lagoon inside the reef the form of the stranded *Mevrouw* loomed a half shade darker than the night, her lights, still burning, casting a fitful glow upon the crashing water at the reef and the quiet water beyond. Two, three, four, half a dozen shades gathered alongside her; dark figures, like ants swarming over the carcass of a dead rat, appeared against her lights a moment, and the stabbing flame of a pistol was followed a moment later by the reports of the shots wafted to us across the lagoon. Shouts, cries of terror, screams of women in abject fright followed one another in quick succession for a time, then silence, more ominous than any noise, settled over the water.

Half an hour, perhaps, de Grandin and I stood tense-muscled on the beach, staring toward the ship, waiting expectantly for some sign of renewed life. One by one her porthole lights blinked out; at last she lay in utter darkness.

"It is best we seek shelter in the bush, my friend," de Grandin announced matter-of-factly. "The farther out of sight we get the better will be our health."

"What in heaven's name does it all mean?" I demanded as I turned to follow him.

"Mean?" he echoed impatiently. "It means we have stumbled on as fine a nest of pirates as ever cheated the yardarm. When we reached this island, Friend Trowbridge, I fear we did but step from the soup kettle into the flame. *Mille tonneres*, what a fool

you are, Jules de Grandin! You should have demanded fifty pounds sterling a day from those Messieurs Lloyd! Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us seek shelter. Right away, at once, immediately."

THE sloping beach gave way to a line of boulders a hundred yards inland, and these, in turn, marked the beginning of a steady rise in the land, its lower portion overgrown with bushes, loftier growth supplanting the underbrush as we stumbled upward over the rocks.

When we had traversed several hundred rods and knocked nearly all the skin from our legs against unexpectedly projecting stones, de Grandin called a halt in the midst of a copse of wide-leaved trees. "We may as well rest here as elsewhere," he suggested philosophically. "The pack will scarcely hunt again tonight."

I was too sleepy and exhausted to ask what he meant. The last hour's events had been as full of surprizes to me as a traveling carnival is for a farmhand.

It might have been half an hour later, or only five minutes, judging by my feelings, that I was roused by the roar of a muffled explosion, followed at short intervals by two more detonations. "*Mordieu!*" I heard de Grandin exclaim. "Up, Friend Trowbridge. Rise and see!" He shook me roughly by the shoulder, and half dragged me to an opening in the trees. Out across the lagoon I saw the hulk of the *Mevrouw* falling apart and sliding into the water like a mud bank attacked by a summer flood, and round her the green waters boiled and seethed as though the entire reef had suddenly gone white-hot. Across the lagoon, wave after swelling wave raced and tumbled, beating on the glittering sands of the beach in a furious surf.

"Why——" I began, but he an-

swored my question before I could form it.

"Dynamite!" he exclaimed. "Last night, or early this morning, they looted her, now they dismantle the remains with high explosives; it would not do to let her stand there as a sign-post of warning for other craft. *Pardieu!* They have system, these ones. Captain Kidd and Blackbeard, they were but freshmen in crime's college, Friend Trowbridge. We deal with postgraduates here. Ah"—his small, womanishly slender hand caught me by the arm—"observe, if you please; what is that on the sands below?"

Following his pointing finger with my eyes, I made out, beyond a jutting ledge of rocks, the rising spiral of a column of wood smoke. "Why," I exclaimed delightedly, "some of the people from the ship escaped, after all! They got to shore and built a fire. Come on, let's join them. Hello, down here; hello, hello! You——"

"Fool!" he cried in a suppressed shout, clapping his hand over my mouth. "Would you ruin us altogether, completely, entirely? *Le bon Dieu* grant your ass's bray was not heard, or, if heard, was disregarded!"

"But," I protested, "those people probably have food, de Grandin, and we haven't a single thing to eat. We ought to join them and plan our escape."

He looked at me as a school teacher might regard an unusually backward pupil. "They have food, no doubt," he admitted, "but what sort of food, can you answer me that? Suppose—*nom d'un moineau, regardez vous!*"

As if in answer to my hail, a pair of the most villainous-looking Papuans I had ever beheld came walking around the rocky screen beyond which the smoke rose, looked undecidedly toward the heights where we hid, then turned back whence they had come. A moment later they re-

appeared, each carrying a broad-bladed spear, and began climbing over the rocks in our direction.

"Shall we go to meet them?" I asked dubiously. Those spears looked none too reassuring to me.

"*Mais non!*" de Grandin answered decidedly. "They may be friendly; but I distrust everything on this accursed island. We would better seek shelter and observe."

"But they might give us something to eat," I urged. "The whole world is pretty well civilized now, it isn't as if we were back in Captain Cook's day."

"Nevertheless," he returned as he wriggled under a clump of bushes, "we shall watch first and ask questions later."

I crawled beside him and squatted, awaiting the savages' approach.

But I had forgotten that men who live in primitive surroundings have talents unknown to their civilized brethren. While they were still far enough away to make it impossible for us to hear the words they exchanged as they walked, the two Papuans halted, looked speculatively at the copse where we hid, and raised their spears menacingly.

"*Ciel!*" de Grandin muttered. "We are discovered." He seized the stalk of one of the sheltering plants and shook it gently.

The response was instant. A spear whizzed past my ear, missing my head by an uncomfortably small fraction of an inch, and the savages began clambering rapidly toward us; one with his spear poised for a throw, the other drawing a murderous knife from the girdle which constituted his sole article of clothing.

"*Parbleu!*" de Grandin whispered fiercely. "Play dead, my friend. Fall out from the bush and lie as though his spear had killed you." He gave me a sudden push which sent me reeling into the open.

I fell flat to the ground, acting the part of a dead man as realistically as possible and hoping desperately that the savages would not decide to throw a second spear to make sure of their kill.

Though my eyes were closed, I could feel them standing over me, and a queer, cold feeling tingled between my shoulder blades, where I momentarily expected a knife thrust.

Half opening one eye, I saw the brown, naked shins of one of the Papuans beside my head, and was wondering whether I could seize him by the ankles and drag him down before he could stab me, when the legs beside my face suddenly swayed drunkenly, like tree trunks in a storm, and a heavy weight fell crashing upon my back.

Startled out of my sham death by the blow, I raised myself in time to see de Grandin in a death grapple with one of the savages. The other one lay across me, the spear he had flung at us a few minutes before protruding from his back directly beneath his left shoulder blade.

"*À moi, Friend Trowbridge!*" the little Frenchman called. "Quick, or we are lost."

I tumbled the dead Papuan unceremoniously to the ground and grappled with de Grandin's antagonist just as he was about to strike his dirk into my companion's side.

"*Bien, très bien!*" the Frenchman panted as he thrust his knife forward, sinking the blade hilt-deep into the savage's left armpit. "Very good, indeed, Friend Trowbridge. I have not hurled the javelin since I was a boy at school, and I strongly mis-doubted my ability to kill that one with a single throw from my ambush, but, happily, my hand has not lost its cunning. *Voilà*, we have a perfect score to our credit! Come, let us bury them."

"But was it necessary to kill the

poor fellows?" I asked as I helped him scrape a grave with one of his victims' knives. "Mightn't we have made them understand we meant them no harm?"

"Friend Trowbridge," he answered between puffs of exertion as he dragged one of the naked bodies into the shallow trench we had dug, "never, I fear me, will you learn the sense of the goose. With fellows such as these, even as with the shark last night, we take necessary steps for our own protection first.

"This interment which we make now, think you it is for tenderness of these *canaille*? *Ah, non*. We bury them that their friends find them not if they come searching, and that the buzzards come not flapping this way to warn the others of what we have done. Good, they are buried. Take up that one's spear and come with me. I would investigate that fire which they have made."

WE APPROACHED the heights overlooking the fire cautiously, taking care to remain unseen by any possible scout sent out by the main party of natives. It was more than an hour before we maneuvered to a safe observation post. As we crawled over the last ridge of rock obstructing our view I went deathly sick at my stomach and would have fallen down the steep hill, had not de Grandin thrown his arm about me.

Squatting around a blazing bonfire in a circle, like wolves about the stag they have run to earth, were perhaps two dozen naked savages, and, bound upright to a stake fixed in the sand, was a white man, lolling forward against the restraining cords with a horrible limpness. Before him stood two burly Papuans, the war clubs in their hands, red as blood at the tips, telling the devil's work they had just completed. It was blood on the clubs. The brown fiends had beaten their helpless captive's head in, and even

now one of them was cutting the cords that held his body to the stake.

But beyond the dead man was a second stake, and, as I looked at this, every drop of blood in my body seemed turned to liquid fire, for, lashed to it, mercifully unconscious, but still alive, was a white woman whom I recognized as the wife of a Dutch planter going out from Holland to join her husband in Sumatra.

"Good God, man!" I cried. "That's a woman; a white woman. We can't let those devils kill her!"

"Softly, my friend," de Grandin cautioned, pressing me back, for I would have risen and charged pell-mell down the hill. "We are two, they are more than a score; what would it avail us, or that poor woman, were we to rush down and be killed?"

I turned on him in amazed fury. "You call yourself a Frenchman," I taunted, "yet you haven't chivalry enough to attempt a rescue? A fine Frenchman you are!"

"Chivalry is well—in its place," he admitted, "but no Frenchman is so foolish as to spend his life where there is nothing to be bought with it. Would it help her if we, too, were destroyed, or, which is worse, captured and eaten also? You know it would not, my friend. Do we, as physicians, seek to throw away our lives when we find a patient hopelessly sick with phthisis? But no, we live that we may fight the disease in others—that we may destroy the germs of the malady. So let it be in this case. Save that poor one we can not; but take vengeance on her slayers we can and will. I, Jules de Grandin, swear it. Ha, she has it!"

Even as he spoke one of the cannibal butchers struck the unconscious woman over the head with his club. A stain of red appeared against the pale yellow of her hair, and the poor creature shuddered convulsively, then

hung passive and flaccid against her bonds once more.

"*Par le sang du diable,*" de Grandin gritted between his teeth, "if it so be that the good God lets me live, I swear to make those *sales bouchers* die one hundred deaths apiece for every hair in that so pitiful woman's head!"

He turned away from the horrid sight below us and began to ascend the hill. "Come away, Friend Trowbridge," he urged. "It is not good that we should look upon a woman's body served as meat. *Pardieu*, almost I wish I had followed your so crazy advice and attempted a rescue; we should have killed some of them so! No matter, as it is, we shall kill all of them, or may those Messieurs Lloyd pay me not one penny."

FEELING secure against discovery by the savages, as they were too engrossed in their orgy to look for other victims, we made our way to the peak which towered like a truncated cone at the center of the island.

From our station at the summit we could see the ocean in all directions and get an accurate idea of our surroundings. Apparently, the islet was the merest point of land on the face of the sea—probably only the apex of a submarine volcano. It was roughly oval in shape, extending for a possible five miles in length by two-and-a-quarter miles at its greatest width, and rising out of the ocean with a mountainous steepness, the widest part of the beach at the water-line being not more than three or four hundred feet. On every side, and often in series of three or four, extended reefs and points of rock (no doubt the lesser peaks of the mountain whose unsubmerged top constituted the island) so that no craft larger than a whaleboat could hope to come within half a mile of the land without having its bottom torn out by the hidden or semi-submerged crags.

"*Nom d'un petit bonhomme!*" de Grandin commented. "This is an ideal place for its purpose, *c'est certain*. Ah, see!"—he drew me to a ridge of rock which ran like a rampart across the well-defined path by which we had ascended. Fastened to the stone by bolts were three sheet-iron troughs, each pointing skyward at an angle of some fifty degrees, and each much blackened by smoke stains. "Do you see?" he asked. "These are for firing rockets—observe the powder burns on them. And here"—his voice rose to an excited pitch and he fairly danced in eagerness—"see what is before us!"

Up the path, almost at the summit of the peak, and about twenty-five feet apart, stood two poles, each some twelve feet in height and fitted with a pulley and lanyard. As we neared them we saw that a lantern with a green globe rested at the base of the right-hand stake, while a red-globed lamp was secured to the rope of the left post. "Ah, clever, clever," de Grandin muttered, staring from one pole to the other. "Observe, my friend. At night the lamps can be lit and hoisted to the tops of these masts, then gently raised and lowered. Viewed at a distance against the black background of this mountain they will simulate a ship's lights to the life. The unfortunate mariner making for them will find his ship fast on these rocks while the lights are still a mile or more away, and—too well we know what happens then. Let us see what more there is, eh?"

Rounding the peak we found ourselves looking down upon the thatched beehive-roofs of a native village, before which a dozen long Papuan canoes were beached on the narrow strip of sand. "Ah," de Grandin inspected the cluster of huts, "it is there the butchers dwell, eh? That will be a good spot for us to avoid, my friend. Now to find the

residence of what you Americans call the master mind. Do you see aught resembling a European dwelling, Friend Trowbridge?"

I searched the greenery below us, but nowhere could I descry a roof. "No," I answered after a second inspection, "there's nothing like a white man's house down there; but how do you know there's a white man here, anyway?"

"Ho, ho," he laughed, "how does the rat know the house contains a cat when he hears it mew? Think you those *sacré* eaters of men would know enough to set up such devil's machinery as this, or that they would take care to dynamite the wreck of a ship after looting it? No, no, my friend, this is white man's work, and very bad work it is, too. Let us explore."

Treading warily, we descended the smooth path leading to the rocket-troughs, looking sharply from left to right in search of anything resembling a white man's house. Several hundred feet down the mountain the path forked abruptly, one branch leading toward the Papuan village, the other running to a narrow strip of beach bordering an inlet between two precipitous rock walls. I stared and stared again, hardly able to believe my eyes, for, drawn up on the sand and made fast by a rope to a ringbolt in the rock was a trim little motor-boat, flat-bottomed for navigating the rock-strewn waters in safety, broad-beamed for mastering the heavy ocean swells, and fitted with a comfortable, roofed-over cabin. Forward, on the little deck above her sharp clipper bow, was an efficient-looking Lewis gun mounted on a swivel, and a similar piece of ordnance poked its aggressive nose out of the engine cockpit at the stern.

"*Par la barbe d'un bouc vert,*" de Grandin swore delightedly, "but this is marvelous, this is magnificent, this is superb! Come, Friend Trow-

bridge, let us take advantage of this miracle; let us leave this hell-hole of an island right away, immediately, at once. *Par—*” The exclamation died, half uttered, and he stared past me with the expression of a superstitious man suddenly face to face with a sheeted specter.

“SURELY, gentlemen,” said a suave voice behind me, “you are not going to leave without permitting me to offer you some slight hospitality? That would be ungenerous.”

I turned as though stung by a wasp and looked into the smiling eyes of a dark-skinned young man, perhaps thirty years of age. From the top of his spotless *topi* to the tips of his highly polished tan riding boots he was a perfect model of the well-dressed European in the tropics. Not a stain of dust or travel showed on his spruce white drill jacket or modishly cut riding breeches, and as he waved his silver-mounted riding crop in greeting, I saw his slender hands were carefully manicured, the nails cut rather long and stained a vivid pink before being polished to the brightness of mother-of-pearl.

De Grandin laid his hand upon the knife at his belt, but before he could draw it, a couple of beetle-browed Malays in khaki jackets and *sarongs* stepped from the bushes bordering the path and leveled a pair of businesslike Mauser rifles at us. “I wouldn’t,” the young man warned in a blasé drawl, “I really wouldn’t, if I were you. These fellows are both dead shots, and could put enough lead in you to sink you forty fathoms down before you could get the knife out of its sheath, much less into me. Do you mind, really?” He held out his hand for the weapon. “Thank you, that is much better”—he tossed the blade into the water of the inlet with a careless gesture,—“really, you know, the most frightful-

ly messy accidents are apt to happen with those things.”

De Grandin and I eyed him in speechless amazement, but he continued as though our meeting were the most conventional thing imaginable:

“Mr. Trowbridge—pardon my assumption, but I heard your name called a moment ago—will you be good enough to favor me with an introduction to your friend?”

“I am Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, of Harrisonville, New Jersey,” I replied, wondering, meanwhile, if I were in the midst of some crazy dream, “and this is Dr. Jules de Grandin, of Paris.”

“So good of you,” the other acknowledged with a smile. “I fear I must be less frank than you for the nonce and remain veiled in anonymity. However, one really must have some sort of designation, mustn’t one? So suppose you know me for the present as Goonong Besar. Savage, unchristian-sounding sort of name, I’ll admit, but more convenient than calling, ‘hey, you!’ or simply whistling when you wish to attract my attention. Eh, what? And now”—he made a slight bow,—“if you will be so kind as to step into my humble burrow in the earth—. Yes, that is it, the doorway right before you.”

Still under the menacing aim of the Malays’ rifles, de Grandin and I walked through the cleft in the rock, traversed a low, narrow passage, darker than a windowless cellar, made a sharp turn to the left, and halted abruptly, blinking our eyes in astonishment.

Before us, seeming to run into infinity, was a wide, long apartment paved with alternate squares of black and white marble, colonnaded down each side with double rows of white-marble pillars and topped with a vaulted ceiling of burnished copper plates. Down the center of the cor-

ridor, at intervals of about twenty feet, five silver oil lamps with globes of finely cut crystal hung from the polished ceiling, making the entire room almost as bright as equatorial noon.

"Not half bad, eh?" our host remarked as he viewed our astonishment with amusement. "This is only the vestibule, gentlemen; you really have no idea of the wonders of this house under the water. For instance, would either of you care to retrace your steps? See if you can find the door you came in."

We swung about, like soldiers at the command of execution, staring straight at the point where the entranceway should have been. A slab of marble, firm and solid as any composing the walls of the room, to all appearances, met our gaze; there was neither sign nor remote evidence of any door or doorway before us.

Goonong Besar chuckled delightfully and gave an order to one of his attendants in the harsh, guttural language of Malaya. "If you will look behind you, gentlemen," he resumed, again addressing us, "you will find another surprize."

We wheeled about and almost bumped into a pair of grinning Malay lads who stood at our elbows.

"These boys will show you to your rooms," Goonong Besar announced. "Kindly follow them. It will be useless to attempt conversation, for they understand no language but their native speech, and as for replying, unfortunately, they lack the benefits of a liberal education and can not write, while——" he shot a quick order to the youths, who immediately opened their mouths as though yawning. Both de Grandin and I gave vent to exclamations of horror. The boys' mouths gaped emptily. Both had had their tongues cut off at the roots.

"You see," Goonong went on in the same musical, slightly bored voice, "these chaps can't be a bit of

use to you as gossips, they really can't.

"I think I can furnish you with dinner clothes, Dr. de Grandin, but" — he smiled apologetically — "I'm afraid you, Dr. Trowbridge, are a little too—er—corpulent to be able to wear any garments made for me. So sorry! However, no doubt we can trick you out in a suit of whites. Captain Van Thun—er, that is, I'm sure you can be accommodated from our stores. Yes.

"Now, if you will follow the guides, please"—he broke off on a slightly interrogative note and bowed with gentle courtesy toward each of us in turn,—"you will excuse me for a short time, I'm sure."

Before we could answer, he signaled his two attendants, and the three of them stepped behind one of the marble columns. We heard a subdued click, as of two pieces of stone coming lightly together.

"But, *Monsieur*, this is incredible, this is monstrous!" de Grandin began, striding forward. "You shall explain, I demand——. *Cordieu*, he is gone!"

He was. As though the wall had faded before his approach, or his own body had dissolved into ether, Goonong Besar had vanished. We were alone in the brilliantly-lighted corridor with our tongueless attendants.

NODDING and grinning, the lads signaled us to follow them down the room. One of them ran a few paces ahead and parted a pair of silken curtains, diselosing a narrow doorway through which only one could go at a time. Obeying the lad's gestures, I stepped through the opening, followed by de Grandin and our dumb guides.

The lad who had held aside the curtains for us ran ahead a few paces and gave a strange, eery cry. We looked sharply at him, wondering

what the utterance portended, and from behind us sounded the thud of stone on stone. Turning, we saw the second Malay grinning broadly at us from the place where the doorway had been. I say "had been" advisedly, for, where the narrow arched door had pierced the thick wall a moment before, was now a solid row of upright marble slabs, no joint or crack showing which portion of the wall was solid stone and which cunningly disguised door.

"*Sang du diable!*" de Grandin muttered. "But I do not like this place. It reminds me of that grim fortress of the Inquisition at Toledo where the good fathers, dressed as demons, could appear and disappear at will through seeming solid walls and frighten the wits out of and the true faith into superstitious heretics."

I suppressed a shudder with difficulty. This underground house of secret doors was too reminiscent of other practises of the Spanish Inquisition besides the harmless mummery of the monks for my peace of mind.

"*Eh bien,*" de Grandin shrugged, "now we are here we may as well make the best of it. Lead on, *diablotins*"—he turned to our dark-skinned guides,—“we follow.”

We were standing in a long, straight passage, smooth-walled with panels of polished marble, and, like the larger apartment, tiled with alternate squares of black and white. No doorways led off the aisle, but other corridors crossed it at right angles at intervals of thirty to thirty-five feet. Like the larger room, the passage was lighted by oil lamps swung from the ceiling.

Following our guides, we turned to the right down a passageway the exact duplicate of the first, entered a third corridor, and, after walking a considerable distance, made another turn and stopped before a narrow curtained archway. Through this we

entered a large square room, windowless, but well lighted by lamps and furnished with two bedsteads of bamboo having strong China matting on them in lieu of springs or mattress. A low bamboo dressing table, fitted with a mirror of polished metal, and several reed chairs constituted the residue of the furniture.

One of the boys signed to us to remove our clothes, while the other ran out, returning almost immediately dragging two sheet-iron bath tubs after him. Placing these in the center of the room he left us again, and reappeared in a few minutes with a wheeled contrivance something like a child's express wagon in which stood six large earthen jars, four containing warm water, the other two cold.

We stepped into the tubs and the lads proceeded to rub us down with an oily liquid, strongly perfumed with sandalwood and very soothing to feel. When this had been well worked into our skins the lads poured the contents of the warm-water jars over us, splashing us thoroughly from hair to feet, then sluiced us off with a five-gallon *douche* of almost ice-cold water. Towels of coarse native linen were unfolded, and in less than five minutes we were as thoroughly cleansed, dried and invigorated as any patron of a Turkish bath at home.

I felt rather dubious when my personal attendant produced a clumsy native razor and motioned me to be seated in one of the cane chairs, but the lad proved a skilful barber, light and deft of touch and absolutely speechless—a great improvement upon the loquacious American tonsorialist, I thought.

Dinner clothes and a suit of carefully laundered white drill, all scented with the pungent, pleasing odor of clove husks, were brought in on wicker trays, and as we put the finishing touches on our toilet one of

the lads produced a small casket of polished cedar in which reposed a layer of long, black cigars, the sort which retail for a dollar apiece in Havana.

"*Nom d'un petit bonhomme!*" de Grandin exploded as he exhaled a lungful of the fragrant smoke; "this is marvelous; it is magnificent; it is superb—but I like it not, Friend Trowbridge."

"Bosh," I responded, puffing in placid content, "you're afraid of your shadow, de Grandin! Why, man, this is wonderful—think where we were this morning, shipwrecked, pursued by man-eaters, with starvation as the least of our perils, and look at us now, both dressed in clean clothes, with every attention and convenience we could have at home, and safe, man, safe."

"Safe?" he answered dubiously. "Safe, do you say? Did you apprehend, my friend, how our host, that so mysterious Monsieur Goonong, almost spoke of Captain Van Thun when the question of clothing you came up?"

"Why, now you speak of it, I do remember how he seemed about to say something about Captain Something-or-Other, and apparently thought better of it," I agreed. "But what's that to do with us?"

The little Frenchman came close to me and sank his voice to a scarcely audible whisper: "Captain Franz Van Thun," he breathed, "was master of the Dutch Indiaman *Van Damm*, which sailed from Rotterdam to Sumatra, and was lost, as far as known, *with all on board*, on her homeward voyage."

"But—" I protested.

"*Sh-s-sh!*" he cut me off. "Those servant boys are beckoning; come, we are wanted elsewhere."

I looked up at the two mutes, and shuddered at sight of the leering grins on their faces.

THE lads led us through another bewildering series of corridors till our sense of location was completely obfuscated, finally paused, one on each side of an archway, and, bowing deeply, signaled us to enter.

We strode into a long, marble-tiled room which, unlike every other apartment in the queer house, was not brilliantly lighted. This room's sole illumination was furnished by the glow of fourteen wax candles set in two seven-branched silver candelabra which stood at opposite ends of a polished mahogany table of purest Sheraton design, its waxed surface giving back reflections of crystal and silver dinner service fit for the table of a king.

"Ah, gentlemen," Goonong Besar, arrayed in immaculate evening clothes, greeted us from the farther end of the room, "I hope you have brought good appetites with you. I'm fairly ravenous, for my part. Will you join me?"

The same Malay servitors who had accompanied him at our meeting stood behind him now, their semi-military khaki jackets and *sarongs* exchanged for costumes of freshly ironed white linen and their rifles replaced by a pair of large-caliber Luger pistols which each wore conspicuously tucked in his scarlet silk cummerbund.

"Sorry I can't offer you a cocktail," our host apologized as we seated ourselves, "but ice is not among the improvements available in my modest little ménage, unfortunately. However, we find the sea caves do quite well as refrigerators, and I think you'll find this chilled wine really acceptable as a substitute. Ah"—he looked diffidently from one of us to the other, finally fixing his gaze on me,—“will you be good enough to ask the blessing, Dr. Trowbridge? You look as if you might be experienced in that line.”

Startled, but greatly reassured by

the request, I bowed my head and repeated the customary formula, almost springing from my chair with amazement as I opened my eyes at the prayer's end. While de Grandin and I had bent above the table during grace, the servants had pulled back the rich *batik* with which the wall facing us was draped, revealing a series of heavy plate glass panels against which the ocean's green waters pressed. We were looking directly on to the sea bottom.

"Jolly clever idea, what?" Goonong Besar inquired, smiling at our surprised faces. "Thought it all up myself; like to see the little finny fellows swim past, you know. Had a beastly hard time getting workmen to do the job for me, too; but all sorts of unbelievable persons trickle into these islands from time to time—architects gone *ga-ga* with drink, skilled artisans in all the trades and what-not,—I finally managed to collect the men I wanted."

"But, *Monsieur*, the expense," de Grandin protested with typical Gallic logic, "it must have been prodigious!"

"Oh, no," the young man answered negligently. "I had to feed the beggars, of course, but most of 'em were habituated to native food, and that's not very expensive."

"But their salaries," de Grandin persisted; "why, *Monsieur*, this house is a work of genius, a marvel of engineering; even drink-ruined architects and engineers capable of producing such a place as this would demand fabulous fees for their services—and the laborers, the men who cut and polished the marble here, they must have been numerous as an army; their wages would be ruinous."

"Most of the marble was salvaged from deserted Dutch colonial palaces," Goonong Besar replied. "You know, Holland built a mighty empire in these islands a century or so ago,

and her planters lived in palaces fit for kings. When the empire crumbled the planters left, and he who cared to might help himself to their houses, wholly or in part. As for wages"—he waved a jeweled hand carelessly—"I am rich, but the wages made no great inroads on my fortune. Do you remember your medieval history, Dr. de Grandin?"

"Eh? But certainly," the Frenchman responded, "but——"

"Don't you recall, then, the precaution the nobles, ecclesiastical as well as temporal, took to insure the secrecy of their castle or cathedral plans?" He paused, smiling quizzically at de Grandin.

"*Parbleu!* But you would not; you could not, you would not dare!" the Frenchman almost shouted, half rising from his chair and staring at our host as though a mad dog sat in his place.

"Nonsense, of course I would—and did," the other replied good-humoredly. "Why not? The men were bits of human flotsam, not worth salvaging. And who was to know? Dead men are notoriously uncommunicative, you know. Proverbially so, in fact."

"But, you tell this to me?" de Grandin looked at him incredulously.

Our host's face went perfectly expressionless as he stared directly at de Grandin for a period while one might count five slowly, then his dark, rather sullen face lighted with a smile. "May I offer you some more wine, my dear doctor?" he asked.

I looked alternately at my companions in wonderment. Goonong Besar had made some sinister implication which de Grandin had been quick to comprehend, I knew, and their subsequent conversation concerning dead men telling no tales contained a thinly veiled threat; but try as I would I could not find the key to their enigmatic talk. "Medieval

castles and cathedrals? Dead men tell no tales?" I repeated to myself. What did it all mean?

Goonong Besar broke in on my thought: "May I offer you a bit more of this white meat, Dr. Trowbridge?" he asked courteously. "Really, we find this white meat" (the words were ever so slightly emphasized) "most delicious. So tender and well flavored, you know. Do you like it?"

"Very much, thank you," I replied. "It's quite different from anything I've ever tasted. In a way it reminds me of delicate young pork, yet it's different, too. Is it peculiar to the islands, Mr. Goonong?"

"Well—er"—he smiled slightly as he cut a thin slice of the delicious roast and placed it on my plate,— "I wouldn't say it is peculiar to our islands, though we have an unusual way of preparing it in this house. The natives hereabouts refer to the animal from which it comes as 'long pig'—really a disgusting sort of beast while living; but quite satisfactory when killed and properly cooked. May I serve you again, Dr. de Grandin?" He turned toward the Frenchman with a smile.

I sat suddenly upright in utter, dumfounded amazement as I beheld de Grandin's face. He was leaning forward in his chair, his fierce little blue eyes very round and almost protruding from his head, his weather-tanned cheeks gone the color of putty as he stared at our host like a subject regarding a professional hypnotist. "*Dieu, grand Dieu!*" he ejaculated in a choking whisper. "'Long pig,' did you say? *Sang de St. Denis!* And I have eaten it!"

"My dear chap, are you ill?" I cried, leaping from my chair and hastening to his side. "Has your dinner disagreed with you?"

"*Non, non!*" he waved me away, still speaking in that choking whis-

per. "Sit down, Friend Trowbridge, sit down; but *par l'amour de Dieu*, I beseech you, eat no more of that accursed meat, at least not tonight."

"Oh, my dear sir!" Goonong Besar protested mildly. "You have spoiled Dr. Trowbridge's appetite, and he was enjoying this delicious white meat so much, too. This is really too bad, you know. Really, it is!"

He frowned at the silver meat platter before him a moment, then signaled one of his attendants to take it away, adding a quick command in Malayan as he did so.

"Perhaps a little entertainment will help us forget this unfortunate *contretemps*," he suggested. "I have sent for Miriam. You will like her, I fancy. I have great hopes for her; she has the makings of a really accomplished *artiste*, I think."

The servant who had taken away the meat returned and whispered something in our host's ear. As he listened, Goonong Besar's thin, well-bred face took on such an expression of fury as I had never before seen displayed by a human being. "What?" he shouted, forgetting, apparently, that the Malay did not understand English. "I'll see about this—we'll soon see who says 'must' and 'shall' in this house."

He turned to us with a perfunctory bow as he rose. "Excuse me, please," he begged. "A slight misunderstanding has arisen, and I must straighten it out. I shan't keep you waiting long, I hope; but if you wish anything while I am gone, Hussein"—he indicated the Malay who stood statue-still behind his chair—"will attend your wants. He speaks no English, but you can make him understand by signs, I think."

"Quick, de Grandin, tell me before he comes back," I besought as Goonong, accompanied by one of the Malays, left the room.

"Eh?" replied the Frenchman.

looking up from an absorbed contemplation of the tableware before him. "What is it you would know, my friend?"

"What was all that word-juggling about medieval builders and dead men telling no tales?" I demanded.

"Oh, that?" he answered with a look of relief. "Why, do you not know that when a great lord of the Middle Ages commissioned an architect to build a castle for him it was almost tantamount to a death sentence? The architect, the master builders, even the principal workmen, were usually done to death when the building was finished in order that they might not divulge its secret passages and hidden defenses to an enemy, or duplicate the design for some rival noble."

"Why—why, then, Goonong Besar meant he killed the men who built this submarine house for him!" I ejaculated, horror-stricken.

"Precisely," de Grandin answered, "but, bad as that may be, we have a more personal interest in the matter. Did you notice him when I showed surprize he should confess his guilt to us?"

"Good heavens, yes!" I answered. "He meant——"

"That, though still breathing, we are, to all intents, dead men," de Grandin supplied.

"And that talk of 'white meat,' and 'long pig'?" I asked.

He drew a shuddering breath, as though the marble-lined cavern had suddenly gone icy-cold. "Trow-bridge, my friend," he answered in a low, earnest whisper, "you must know this thing; but you must control yourself, too. Not by word or sign must you betray your knowledge. Throughout these devil-ridden islands, wherever the brown fiends who are their natives eat men, they refer to the cannibal feast as a meal of long pig. That so unfortunate man

we saw dead at the stake this morning, and that pitiful Dutch woman we saw clubbed to death—they, my friend, were 'long pigs.' That was the *white meat* this devil out of lowest hell set before us this night. That is the food we have eaten at this accursed table!"

"My God!" I half rose from my chair, then sank back, overcome with nausea. "Did we—do you suppose—was it *her* flesh——?"

"*S-s-sh!*" he warned sharply. "Silence, my friend; control yourself. Do not let him see you know. He is coming!"

AS THOUGH de Grandin's words had been a theatrical cue for his entrance, Goonong Besar stepped through the silken portières at the doorway beyond the table, a pleased smile on his swarthy face. "So sorry to keep you waiting," he apologized. "The trouble is all adjusted now, and we can proceed with our entertainment. Miriam is a little diffident before strangers, but I—er—persuaded her to oblige us." He turned toward the door through which he had entered and waved his hand to someone behind the curtains.

Three Malays, one a woman bent with age and hideously wrinkled, the other two vacant-faced youths, came through the doorway at his gesture. The woman, bearing a section of bamboo fitted with drumheads of rawhide at each end, led the way, the first boy rested his hand on her shoulder, and the second lad, in turn, held tightly to his companion's jacket. A second glance told us the reason for this procedure. The woman, though aged almost to the point of paralysis, possessed a single malignant, blood-shot eye; both boys were sightless, their scarred and sunken eyelids telling mutely of eyeballs gouged from their faces by unskilled hands which had torn the surround-

ing tissues as they ripped the optics from the quivering flesh.

"*Ha-room; ha-room!*" cried the old crone in a cracked treble, and the two blind boys seated themselves cross-legged on the marble floor. One of them raised a reed pipe to his lips, the other rested a sort of zither upon his knees, and each began trying his instrument tentatively, producing a sound approximating the complaints of a tom-cat suffering with cholera morbus.

"*Ha-room; ha-room!*" the hag cried again, and commenced beating a quick rhythm on her drum, using her fingertips and the heels of her hands alternately for drumsticks. "*Tauk-auk-a — tauk-auk-a — tauk-auk-a!*" the drum-beats boomed hollowly, the first stroke heavily accented, the second and third following in such quick succession that they seemed almost indivisible parts of one continuous thrumming.

Now the pipe and zither took up the tribrach tune, and a surge of fantastic music swirled and eddied through the marble-walled apartment. It was unlike anything I had ever heard, a repetitious, insistent, whining chant of tortured instruments, an air that pleaded with the hearers' evil nature to overthrow restraint and give the beast within him freedom, a harmony that drugged the senses like opium or the extract of the cola-nut. The music raced and soared, faster, shriller and higher, the painted-silk curtains swung apart and a girl glided out upon the tessellated pavement.

She was young—sixteen, or seventeen at the most—and the sinuous, lithe grace of her movements was as much due to healthy and perfectly co-ordinated muscles as to training. The customary *sarong* of the islands encased her nether limbs, but, instead of the native woman's jacket, her *sarong* was carried up beyond the gold six-inch-wide belt about her

waist and tightly wrapped about her bosom so that it formed a single comprehensive garment covering her from armpits to ankles. Save for a chaplet of blazing cabochon rubies about her slender throat, her neck and shoulders were bare, but ornaments in the form of flexible golden snakes with emerald eyes twined up each arm from elbow to shoulder, and bangles of pure, soft gold, hung with triple rows of tiny hawk-bells, circled her wrists. Other bangles, products of the finest goldsmiths of India, jangled about her white ankles above the pearl-encrusted slippers of amethyst velvet, while the diamond aigret fastened comb-fashion in her sleekly parted black hair was worth a king's ransom. Fit to ransom a monarch, too, was the superb blue-white diamond of her nose-stud, fixed in her left nostril, and the rope of pearls which circled her waist and hung swaying to the very hem of her *sarong* of Philippine pineapple gauze was fit to buy the Peacock Throne of the Grand Mogul himself.

Despite the lavishly applied cosmetics, the antimony which darkened her eyelids to the color of purple grape skins, the cochineal which dyed her lips and cheeks a brilliant scarlet and the powdered charcoal which traced her eyebrows in a continuous, fluted line across her forehead, she was beautiful with the rich, ripe beauty of the women who inspired Solomon of old to indite his *Song of Songs*. None but the Jewish race, or, perhaps, the Arabian, could have produced a woman with the passionate, alluring beauty of Miriam, the dancer in the house beneath the sea.

Back and forth across the checkered floor the girl wove her dance, tracing patterns intricate as lace from Canary or the looms of spiders over the marble with the soft soles of her velvet slippers, the chiming bells at her wrists and ankles keeping time to the calling, luring tune of the old hag

and her blind musicians with the consummate art of a Spanish castanet dancer following the music with her hand-cymbals.

At last the dance was done.

Shaking like a leaf with the intoxication of her own rhythmic movements, Miriam flung herself full length, face downward, before Goonong Besar, and lay upon the marble floor in utter, abject self-abasement.

What he said to her we did not understand, for the words were in harsh Malayan, but he must have given her permission to go, for she rose from her prostration like a dog expecting punishment when its master relents, and ran from the room, bracelets and anklets ringing time to her panic flight, pearls clicking together as they swayed with the motion of her *sarong*.

The old crone rose, too, and led her blind companions from the room, and we three sat staring at each other under the winking candles' light with the two impassive Malay guards standing motionless behind their master's chair.

"Do you think she is beautiful?" Goonong Besar asked as he lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke toward the copper ceiling.

"Beautiful?" de Grandin gasped, "*Mon Dieu, Monsieur*, she is wonderful, she is magnificent, she is superb. Death of my life, but she is divine! Never have I seen such a dancer; never such, such—*nom de Dieu*, I am speechless as the fish! In all the languages I know there are not words to describe her!"

"And you, Dr. Trowbridge, what do you think of my little Miriam?" Goonong addressed me.

"She is very lovely," I acknowledged, feeling the words foolishly inadequate.

"Ha, ha," he laughed good-naturedly. "Spoken with true Yankee conservatism, by Jove.

"And that, gentlemen," he continued, "leads us to an interesting little proposition I have to make you. But first you will smoke? You'll find these cigars really good. I import them from Havana." He passed the polished cedar humidor across the table and held a match for us to light our selections of the expensive tobacco.

"Now, then," he commenced, inhaling a deep lungful of smoke, "first a little family history, then my business proposition. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

De Grandin and I nodded, wondering mutely what the next chapter in this novel of incredible surprises would be.

"WHEN we met so auspiciously this afternoon," our host began in his pleasant voice, "I requested that you call me Goonong Besar. That, however, is what we might call, for want of a better term, merely my *nom de l'île*. Actually, gentlemen, I am the Almost Honorable James Abingdon Richardson.

"*Parbleu, Monsieur*," de Grandin demanded, "how is it you mean that, 'the Almost Honorable'?"

The young man blew a cloud of fragrant smoke toward the room's copper ceiling and watched it float upward a moment before he replied: "My father was an English missionary, my mother a native princess. She was not of the Malay blood, but of the dominant Arab strain, and was known as Laila, Pearl of the Islands.

"My father had alienated himself from his family when he and an elder sister deserted the Church of England and, embracing a dissenting creed, came to Malaya to spread the gospel of repentance or damnation among the heathen in their blindness."

He drew thoughtfully at his cigar and smiled rather bitterly as he re-

sumed: "He was a fine figure of a man, that father of mine, six feet tall, blue-eyed and curly-haired, with a deep, compelling voice and the fire of fanaticism burning in his heart. The natives, Arab and Malay alike, took to his fiery gospel as the desert dwellers of Arabia once listened to the preaching of Mohammed, the camel driver. My grandfather, a pirate prince with a marble palace and a thousand slaves of his own, was one of the converts, and came to the mission bringing his ten-year-old daughter, Laila, with him. He left her at the mission school to learn the gentle teachings of the Prophet of Nazareth. She stayed there four years."

Again our host paused, puffing silently at his cigar, seemingly attempting to marshal his thoughts. "I believe I said my father was a dissenting clergyman? Yes, so I did, to be sure. Had he been a member of the established church things might have been different. The established English clergy are bad enough, with their fox hunting and general worldliness, but they're usually sportsmen. When she was a scant fifteen years old—women of the East mature more rapidly than your Western women, you know—Laila, the Pearl of the Islands, came back to her father's palace of marble and cedar, bearing a little boy baby in her arms. The charitable Christian sister of the missionary had driven her out of the mission settlement when she learned that she (the sister) was about to have a little nephew whose birth was not pre-sanctified by a wedding ring.

"The old pirate prince was furious. He would have put his daughter and her half-caste child to death and swooped down on the mission with fire and dagger, but my mother had learned much of Christian charity during her stay at the school. She was sure, if she went to my father with as many pearls as her two hands could hold, and with a dowry of

rubies strung round her neck, he would receive her as his wife—er—make an honest woman of her, as the saying goes.

"However, one thing and another prevented her return to the mission for three years, and when we finally got there we found my reverend sire had taken an English lady to wife.

"Oh, he took the jewels my mother brought—no fear of his refusing—and in return for them he permitted us to live in the settlement as native hangers-on. She, a princess, and the daughter of generations of princesses, scrubbed floors and baked bread in the house presided over by my father's wife, and I, my father's first-born son, duly christened with his name, fetched and carried for my father's younger sons.

"They were hard, those days at the mission school. The white boys who were my half-brothers overlooked no chance to remind me of my mother's shame and my own disgrace. Humility and patience under affliction were the lessons my mother and I had ground into us day by day while we remained there.

"Then, when I was a lad of ten years or so, my father's cousin, Viscount Abingdon, broke his neck at a fox hunt, and, as he died without issue, my father became a member of England's landed gentry, and went back home to take over the title and the entails. He borrowed on his expectancy before he left and offered my mother money to have me educated as a clerk in some trader's store, but my mother, for all her years of servitude, was still a princess of royal blood. Also she remembered enough Scripture to quote, 'Thy money perish with thee.' So she spat in his face and went back to the palace of her father, telling him that her husband was dead.

"I was sent to school in England—oh, yes, I'm a public school man, Winchester, you know—and I was down

from my first term at Cambridge when the war broke out in 1914.

"Why should I have fought for England? What had England or the English ever done for me? It was the call of the blood—the English blood—perhaps. At any rate I joined up and was gazetted to a London regiment. Everything was death or glory those days, you know, 'For King and Country,' and all that sort of tosh. Racial lines were wiped out, and every man, whatever his color or creed, was for the common cause. Rot!

"I came into the officers' mess one night after a hard day's drill, and was presented to a young man from one of the guards regiments. 'Lieutenant Richardson,' my captain said, 'this is Lieutenant Richardson. Queer coincidence, you chaps are both James Abingdon Richardson. Ought to be great pals on that account, what?'

"The other Lieutenant Richardson looked me over from head to foot, then repeated distinctly, so everyone in the room could hear and understand, 'James, my boots need polishing. Attend to it.' It was the same order he had given me at the mission school a hundred times when we were lads together. He was Lieutenant the Honorable James Abingdon Richardson, *legitimate* eldest son of Viscount Abingdon. I was——"

He broke off, staring straight before him a moment, then:

"There was a devil of a row. Officers weren't supposed to beat other officers into insensibility in company mess, you know. I was dismissed from the service, and came back to the islands.

"My grandfather was dead; so was my mother. I was monarch of all I surveyed—if I was willing not to look too far—and since my return I have consecrated my life to repaying my debt to my father on such of his race as crossed my path.

"The hunting has been fairly good, too. White men are such fools! Ship after ship has run aground on the rocks here, sometimes in answer to my signal rockets, sometimes mistaking the red and green lamps on the hill up yonder for ships' lights.

"It's been profitable. Nearly every ship so far has contained enough loot to make the game distinctly worth the trouble. I must admit your ship was somewhat of a disappointment in respect of monetary returns, but then I have had the pleasure of your company; that's something.

"I keep a crew of Papuans around to do the dirty work, and let 'em eat a few prisoners now and then by way of reward—don't mind an occasional helping of 'long pig' myself, as a matter of fact, provided it's a white one.

"But"—he smiled unpleasantly—"conditions aren't ideal, yet. I still have to install electricity in the house and rig up a wireless apparatus—I could catch more game that way—and then there's the question of women. Remember how Holy Writ says, 'It is not good for man to dwell alone'? I've found it out, already.

"Old Umera, the woman who played the drum tonight, and the slave girl, Miriam, are the only women in the establishment, thus far, but I intend to remedy that—soon. I shall send to one of the larger islands and buy several of the most beautiful maidens available within the next few months, and live as befits a prince—a pirate prince, even as my grandfather was.

"Now, white men"—his suave manner dropped from him like a mask let down, and implacable hatred glared from his dark eyes,— "this is my proposition to you. Before I establish my seraglio it is necessary that I possess suitable furniture. I can not spare any of my faith-

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The Isle of Missing Ships

(Continued from page 192)

ful retainers for the purpose of attending my women, but you two come into my hands providentially. Both of you are surgeons—you shall perform the necessary operations on each other. It is a matter of indifference to me which of you operates first—you may draw straws for the privilege, if you wish—but it is my will that you do this thing, and my will is law on this island.”

Both de Grandin and I looked at him in speechless horror, but he took no notice of our amazement. “You may think you will refuse,” he told us, “but you will not. Captain Van Thun, of the Dutch steamer *Van Damm*, and his first mate were offered the same chance and refused it. They chose to interview a little pet I keep about the premises as an alternative; but when the time for the interview came both would gladly have reconsidered their decision. This house is the one place in the world where a white man must keep his word, willy-nilly. Both of them were obliged to carry out their bargain to the letter—and I can not say the prestige of the pure Caucasian breed was strengthened by the way they did it.

“Now, I will give you gentlemen a greater opportunity for deliberation than I gave the Dutchmen. You shall first be allowed to see my pet, then decide whether you will accept my offer or not. But I warn you beforehand, whatever decision you make must be adhered to.

“Come.” He turned to the two armed Malays who stood behind his chair and barked an order. Instantly de Grandin and I were covered by their pistols, and the scowling faces behind the firearms’ sights told us we might expect no quarter if the order to fire were given.

“Come,” Goonong Besar—or Richardson—repeated imperiously, “walk ahead, you two, and remember, the first attempt either of you makes to escape will mean a bullet through his brain.”

WE MARCHED down a series of identical corridors as bewildering as the labyrinth of Crete, mysterious stone doors thudding shut behind us from time to time, other doors swinging open in the solid walls as our guards pressed cunningly-concealed springs in the walls or floor. Finally we brought up on a sort of colonnaded porch, a tiled footpath bordered with a low stone parapet from which a row of carved stone columns rose to a concave ceiling of natural stone. Below the balcony’s balustrade stretched a long, narrow pool of dead-motionless water between abrupt vertical walls of rock, and, some two hundred feet away, through the arch of a natural cave, the starlit tropical sky showed like a little patch of freedom before our straining eyes. The haze which had thickened the air the previous night must have cleared away, for rays of the bright, full moon painted a “path to Spain” over the waters at the cavern’s mouth, and sent sufficient light as far back as our balcony to enable us to distinguish an occasional tiny ripple on the glassy surface below us.

“Here, pretty, pretty!” our captor called, leaning forward between two columns. “Come up and see the brave white men who may come to play with you. Here, pretty pet; come up, come up!”

We stared into the purple waters like lost souls gazing on the hell prepared for them, but no motion agitated the depths.

"Sulky brute!" the half-caste exclaimed, and snatched a pistol from the girdle of one of his attendants. "Come up," he repeated harshly. "Damn you, come when I call!" He tossed the weapon into the pool below.

De Grandin and I uttered a gasp of horror in unison, and I felt his nails bite into my arm as his strong, slender fingers gripped me convulsively.

As though the pistol had been superheated and capable of setting the water in the cave boiling by its touch, the deep, blue-black pool beneath us suddenly woke to life. Ripples—living, groping ripples—appeared on the pool's smooth face and long, twisting arms, sinuous as snakes, thick as fire-hose, seemed waving just under the surface, flicking into the air now and again and displaying tentacles roughened with great, wart-like protuberances. Something like a monster bubble, transparent-gray like a jelly-fish, yet, oddly, spotted like an unclean reptile, almost as big around as the umbrellas used by teamsters on their wagons in summertime, and, like an umbrella, ribbed at regular intervals, rose from the darker water, and a pair of monstrous, hideous white eyes, large as dinner plates, with black pupils large as saucers, stared greedily, unwinkingly, at us.

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" de Grandin breathed. "The sea-devil: the giant octopus!"

"Quite so," Goonong Besar agreed affably, "the giant octopus. What he grasps he holds forever, and he grasps all he can reach. A full-grown elephant thrown into that water would have no more chance of escape than a minnow—or, for unpleasant example, than you gentlemen would. Now, perhaps, you realize why Captain Van Thun and his first officer wished they had chosen to enter my

—er—employ, albeit in a somewhat extraordinary capacity. I did not afford them a chance of viewing the alternative beforehand, as I have you, however. Now that you have had your chance, I am sure you will take the matter under serious advisement before you refuse.

"There is no hurry; you will be given all tonight and tomorrow to arrive at a decision. I shall expect your answer at dinner tomorrow. Good night, gentlemen, my boys will show you to your room. Good night, and—er—may I wish you pleasant dreams?"

With a mocking laugh he stepped quickly back into the shadows, we heard the sound we had come to recognize as the closing of one of the hidden stone doors, and found ourselves alone upon the balcony overlooking the den of the giant octopus.

"*Bon Dieu!*" de Grandin cried despairingly, "Trowbridge, my friend, they make a mistake, those people who insist the devil dwells in hell. *Parbleu!* What is that?"

The noise which startled him was the shuffling of bare brown feet. The tongueless youths who acted as our *valets de chambre* were coming reluctantly toward us down the passageway, their eyes rolling in fearful glances toward the balustrade beyond which the devil of the sea lurked in his watery lair.

"*Eh bien,*" the Frenchman shrugged, "it is the two devilkins again. Lead on, *mes enfants*; any place is better than this threshold of hell.

"**A**ND NOW," he announced as he dropped into one of the bedroom's wicker chairs and lighted a cigarette, "we are in what you Americans would call a tight fix, Friend Trowbridge. To accede to that half-caste hellion's proposition would be to dishonor ourselves forever—that is

unthinkable. But to be eaten up by that so infernal octopus, that, too, is unthinkable. *Morbleu*, had I known then what I know now I should have demanded one thousand pounds a day from those Messieurs Lloyd and then refused their offer. As your so splendid soldiers were wont to say during the war, we are, of a surety, S. O. L., my friend."

Beneath the bamboo bedstead across the room a slight rustling sounded. I looked apathetically toward the bed, indifferent to any fresh horror which might appear; but, wretched as I was, I was not prepared for the apparition which emerged.

Stripped of her gorgeous raiment of pineapple gauze, a *sarong* and jacket of the cheapest native cotton inadequately covering her glorious body, an ivory-wood button replacing her diamond nose-stud, her feet bare and no article of jewelry adorning her, Miriam, the dancer, crept forth and flung herself to her knees before de Grandin.

"Oh, *Monsieur*," she begged in a voice choked with tears, "have pity on me, I implore you. Be merciful to me, as you would have another in your place be pitiful to your sister, were she in mine."

"*Morbleu*, child, is it of me you ask pity?" de Grandin demanded. "How can I, who can not even choose my own death, show compassion to you?"

"Kill me," she answered fiercely. "Kill me now, while yet there is time. See, I have brought you this"—from the folds of her beauty *sarong* she drew a native *kris*, a wavy-bladed short sword with a razor edge and needle point.

"Stab me with it," she besought, "then, if you wish, use it on your friend and yourself; there is no other hope. Look about you, do not you see there is no way of dying in this prison room? Once on a time the

mirror was of glass, but a captive white man broke it and almost succeeded in cutting his wrists with the pieces until he died. Since then Goonong Besar has had a metal mirror in this room."

"*Pardieu*, you are right, child!" de Grandin agreed as he glanced at the dressing table over which the metal mirror hung. "But why do you seek death? Are you, too, destined for the octopus?"

She shuddered. "Some day, perhaps, but while I retain my beauty there is small fear of that. Every day old Umera, the one-eyed sh-devil, teaches me to dance, and when I do not please her (and she is very hard to please) she beats me with bamboo rods on the soles of my feet till I can scarcely bear to walk. And Goonong Besar makes me dance for him every night till I am ready to drop, and if I do not smile upon him as I dance, or if I grow weary too soon, so that my feet lag before he gives me permission to stop, he beats me.

"Every time a ship is caught in his trap he saves some of the officers and makes me dance before them, and I know they are to be fed to the fish-devil, yet I must smile upon them, or he will beat me till my feet bleed, and the old woman will beat me when he is weary of it.

"My father was French, *Monsieur*, though I, myself, was born in England of a Spanish mother. We lost all our money in the war, for my father kept a goldsmith's shop in Reims, and the *sale bocke* stole everything he had. We came to the islands after the war, and my father made money as a trader. We were returning home on the Dutch ship *Van Damm* when Goonong Besar caught her in his trap.

"Me he kept to be taught to dance the dances of the islands and to be tortured—see, he has put a ring in my

nose, like a native woman's." She lifted a trembling hand to the wooden button which kept the hole pierced in her nose from growing together when she was not wearing her jeweled stud. "My father—oh, God of Israel!—he fed to the devil-fish before my eyes and told me he would serve me the same way if I proved not submissive to his will in all things.

"And so, *Monsieur*," she ended simply, "I would that you cause me to die and be out of my unhappiness."

As the girl talked, de Grandin's face registered every emotion from amazement to horror and compassion. As she completed her narrative he looked thoughtful. "Wait, wait, my pretty one," he besought, as she would have forced the *kris* into his hand. "I must think. *Pardieu!* Jules de Grandin, you silly fool, you must think now as never before." He sank his face in his hands and bowed his chin nearly to his knees.

"Tell me, my little cabbage," he demanded suddenly, "do they let you out of this accursed house by daylight, *hein?*"

"Oh, yes," she responded. "I may go or come as I will when I am not practising my dances or being beaten. I may go anywhere on the island I wish, for no one, not even the cannibals who live on the shore, would dare lay his little finger on me for fear of the master. I belong to Goonong Besar, and he would feed anyone who touched his property to the great fish-devil."

"And why have you never sought to die by your own hand?" de Grandin asked suspiciously.

"Jews do not commit suicide," she answered proudly. "To die by another's hand is not forbidden—Jephthah's daughter so died—but to go from life with your hands reddened with your own blood is against the law of my fathers."

"Ah, yes, I understand," he agreed with a short nod. "You children of Jacob shame us so-called Christians in the way you keep your precepts, child. *Eh bien*, 'tis fortunate for all us you have a strong conscience, my beautiful.

"Attend me: In your walks about this never-enough-to-be-execrated island have you observed, near the spot where the masts which carry the false ship's lights stand, certain plants growing, plants with shining leaves and a fruit like the unripe apple which grows in France—a low bush with fruit of pale green?"

The girl wrinkled her white forehead thoughtfully, then nodded twice. "Yes," she replied, "I have seen such a plant."

"*Très bien*," he nodded approvingly, "the way from this evil place seems to open before us, *mes amis*. At least, we have the sporting chance. Now listen, and listen well, my little half-orange, for upon your obedience rests our chance of freedom.

"Tomorrow, when you have a chance to leave this vestibule of hell, go you to the place where those fruits like apples grow and gather as many of them as you can carry in your *sarong*. Bring these fruits of the *Cocculus indicus* to the house and mash them to a pulp in some jar which you must procure. At the dinner hour, pour the contents of that jar into the water where dwells the devil-fish. Do not fail us, my little pigeon, for upon your faithful performance of your trust our lives, and yours, depend. *Pardieu!* If you do but carry out your orders we shall feed that *Monsieur Octopus* such a meal as he will have small belly for, *parbleu!*

"When you have poured all the crushed fruit into the water, secrete yourself in the shadows near by and wait till we come. You can swim? Good. When we do leap into the water, do you leap also, and together

we shall swim to that boat I was about to borrow when we met this so excellent Monsieur Goonong-Besar-James - Abingdon - Richardson-Devil. *Cordieu*, I think that Jules de Grandin is not such a fool as I thought he was!

"Good night, fairest one, and may the God of your people, and the gentle Mary, too, guard you this night and all the nights of your life."

"GOOD evening, gentlemen," Goonong Besar greeted as we entered the dining room next evening; "have you decided upon our little proposition?"

"But certainly," de Grandin assured him. "If we must choose between a few minutes' conversation with the octopus and a lifetime, or even half an hour's, sight of your neither-black-nor-white face, we cast our vote for the fish. He, at least, does what he does from nature; he is no vile parody of his kind. Let us go to the fish-house *tout vite, Monsieur*. The sooner we get this business completed, the sooner we shall be rid of you!"

Goonong Besar's pale countenance went absolutely livid with fury. "You insignificant little fool," he cried, "I'll teach you to insult me! *Ha-room!*" he sent the call echoing through the marble-lined cave. "You'll not be so brave when you feel those tentacles strangling the life out of your puny body and that beak tearing your flesh off your bones before the water has a chance to drown you."

He poured a string of burning orders at his two guards, who seized their rifles and thrust them at us "Off, off to the grotto!" he shrieked, beside himself with rage. "Don't think you can escape the devil-fish by resisting my men. They won't shoot to kill; they'll only cripple you and drag you to the pool. Will you walk,

or shall we shoot you first and pull you there?"

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin drew himself proudly erect, "a gentleman of France fears no death a Malay *bâtard* can offer. Lead on!"

Biting his pale lips till the blood ran to keep from screaming with fury, Goonong Besar signaled his guards, and we took up our way toward the sea monster's lair.

"*Le bon Dieu grant la belle juive* has done her work thoroughly," de Grandin whispered as we came out upon the balcony. "I like not this part of our little playlet, my friend. Should our plan have failed, *adieu*." He gave my hand a hasty pressure.

"Who goes first?" Goonong Besar asked as we halted by the balustrade.

"*Pardieu*, you do!" de Grandin shouted, and before anyone was aware of his intention he dashed one of his small, hard fists squarely into the astonished half-caste's face, seized him about the waist and flung him bodily into the black, menacing water below.

"In, Friend Trowbridge!" he called, leaping upon the parapet. "Dive and swim—it is our only chance!"

I waited no second bidding, but jumped as far outward as possible, striking out vigorously toward the far end of the cave, striving to keep my head as near water-level as possible, yet draw an occasional breath.

Horror swam beside me. Each stroke I took I expected one of the monster's slimy tentacles to seize me and drag me under; but no great, gray bubble rose from the black depths, no questing arms reached toward me. For all we could observe to the contrary, the pool was as harmless as any of the thousands of rocky caves which dot the volcanic coast of Malaya.

Bullets whipped and tore the water around us, striking the rocky walls

and singing off in vicious ricochets; but the light was poor, and the Malay marksmen emptied their pieces with no effect.

"*Triomphe!*" de Grandin announced, blowing the water from his mouth in a great, gusty sigh of relief as we gained the shingle outside the cave. "Miriam, my beautiful one, are you with us?"

"Yes," responded a voice from the darkness. "I did as you bade me, *Monsieur*, and the great fish-devil sank almost as soon as he thrust his snake-arms into the fruit as it floated on the water. But when I saw he was dead I did not dare wait; but swam out here to abide your coming."

"It is good," de Grandin commended. "One of those bullets might easily have hit you. They are execrable marksmen, those Malays, but accidents do occur.

"Now, *Monsieur*," he addressed the limp bundle he towed behind him in the water, "I have a little business proposition to make to you. Will you accompany us, and be delivered to the Dutch or British to be hanged for the damned pirate you are, or will you fight me for your so miserable life here and now?"

"I can not fight you now," Goonong Besar answered, "you broke my arm with your cowardly ju-jitsu when you took advantage of me and attacked me without warning."

"Ah, so?" de Grandin replied, helping his captive to the beach. "That is unfortunate, for—*mordieu*, scoundrel, would you do so!"

The Eurasian had suddenly drawn a dagger from his coat and lunged viciously at de Grandin's breast.

With the agility of a cat the Frenchman evaded the thrust, seized his antagonist's wrist, and twisted the knife from his grasp. His foot shot out, he drove his fist savagely into Goonong's throat, and the half-caste sprawled helplessly on the sand.

“Attend *Mademoiselle!*” de Grandin called to me. “It is not well for her to see what I must do here.”

There was the sound of a scuffle, then a horrible gargling noise, and the beating of hands and feet upon the sands.

“*Fini!*” de Grandin remarked nonchalantly, dipping his hands in the water and cleansing them of some dark stains.

“You——?” I began.

“*Mais certainement,*” he replied matter-of-factly. “I slit his throat. What would you have? He was a mad dog; why should he continue to live?”

Walking hurriedly along the beach, we came to the little power-boat moored in the inlet and set her going.

“Where to?” I asked as de Grandin swung the trim little craft around a rocky promontory.

“Do you forget, *cher* Trowbridge, that we have a score to settle with those cannibals?” he asked.

We settled it. Running the launch close inshore, de Grandin shouted defiance to the Papuans till they came tumbling out of their cone-shaped huts like angry bees from their hives.

“*Sa ha, messires,*” de Grandin called, “we give you food of another sort this night. Eat it, *sacré canaille*; eat it!” The Lewis machine-gun barked and sputtered, and a chorus of cries and groans rose from the beach.

“It is well,” he announced as he resumed the wheel. “They eat no more white women, those ones. Indeed, did I still believe the teachings of my youth, I should say they were even now partaking of the devil’s hospitality with their late master.”

“But see here,” I demanded as we chugged our way toward the open water, “what was it you told Miriam to put in the water where the octopus was, de Grandin?”

He chuckled. “Had you studied as

much biology as I, Friend Trowbridge, you would recognize that glorious plant, the *Cocculus indicus*, when you saw it. All over the Polynesian islands the lazy natives, who desire to obtain food with the minimum of labor, mash up the berry of that plant and spread it in the water where the fish swim. A little of it will render the fish insensible, a little more will kill him as dead as the late lamented Goonong Besar. I noticed that plant growing on the island, and when our lovely Jewess told me she could go and come at will I said to me, 'By the George, why not have her poison that great devil-fish and swim to freedom?' *Voilà tout!*"

A PASSING Dutch steamer picked us up two days later.

The passengers and crew gaped widely at Miriam's imperial beauty, and wider still at de Grandin's account of our exploits. "*Pardieu!*" he confided to me one night as we walked the deck, "I fear those Dutchmen misbelieve me, Friend Trowbridge. Perhaps I shall have to slit their ears to teach them to respect the word of a Frenchman."

IT WAS six months later that a Western Union messenger entered my consulting room at Harrisonville and handed me a blue-and-white envelope. "Sign here," he ordered.

I tore the envelope open, and this is what I read:

**MIRIAM MADE BIG SENSATION IN FOLIES
BERGERES TONIGHT. FELICITATIONS.
DE GRANDIN.**