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Seabury Quinn

Collected Works

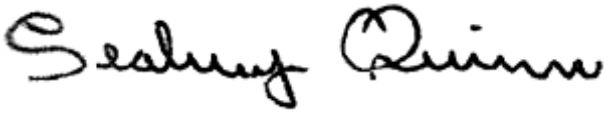
Series Fifteen

The Collected Works of

SEABURY QUINN

(1889-1969)

Contents



Version 1

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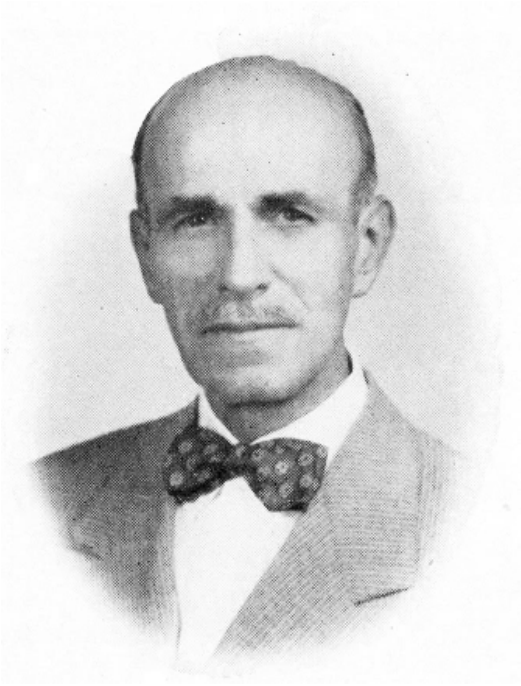
SEABURY QUINN



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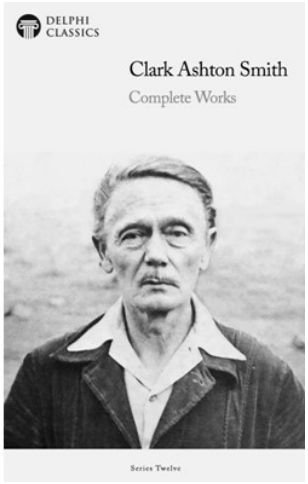

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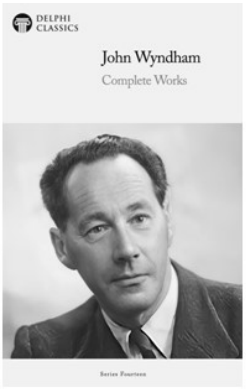
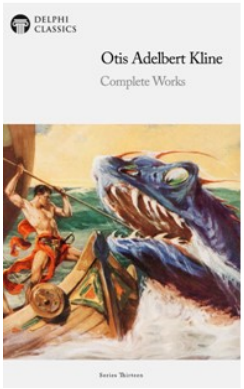
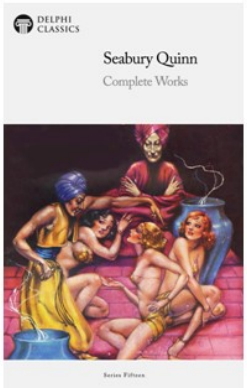
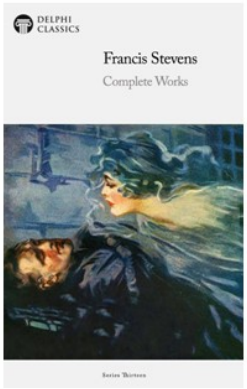








The Novels

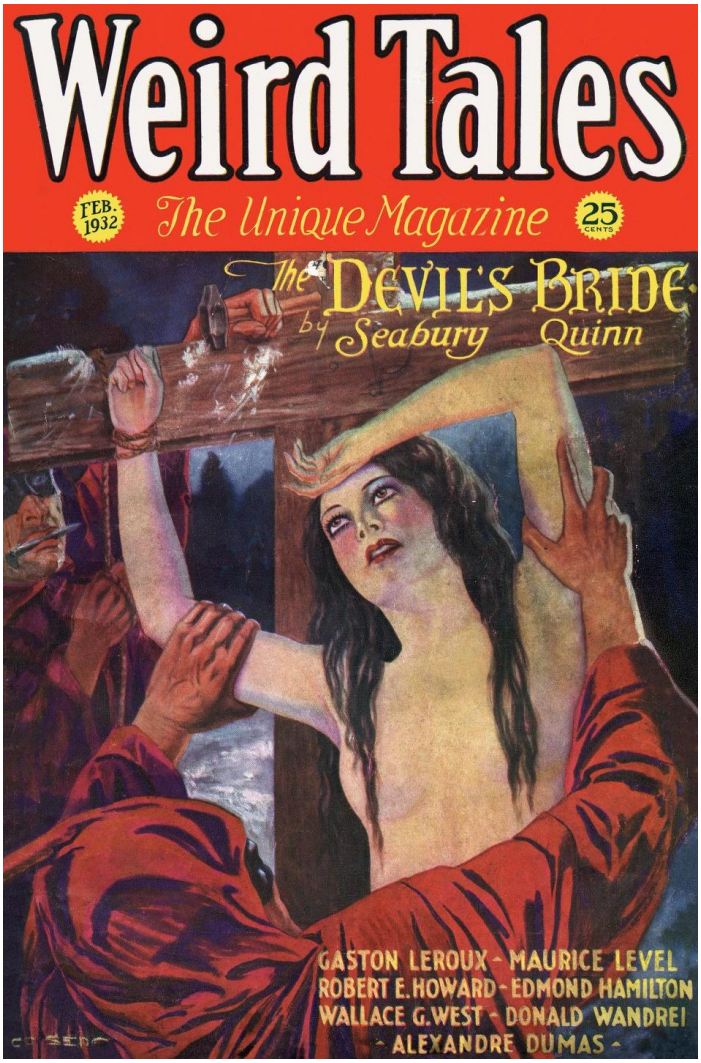
Washington D. C., 1889 — the year Seabury Quinn was born in the city

The Devil's Bride (1932)

This novel, Quinn's only long piece fiction to feature the detective Jules de Grandin, first appeared in six instalments of the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, from February to July 1932. It concerns an imperilled society girl — a stock feature of the de Grandin stories — being kidnapped at her wedding rehearsal by members of the wicked cult of Yezidees, as well as Satanists and Communists. The narrative describes a haunting family curse, several gory murders, a raid on a Black Mass and — in the dénouement — a police and army raid on a wide-spread cult orgy in West Africa. In short, it is a quintessential pulp classic, offering the best of ingredients to be expected in a work of that genre.

It turns out that the kidnapped girl is in fact the descendant of a Yezidee bride, promised long ago to Satan. The novel also introduces a bridal girdle, a family heirloom, which is partially composed of human skin. Many of the covers of *Weird Tales* were known for their depictions of semi-naked young women and Quinn was always mindful of that, providing in many of his tales vivid scenes where a scantily clad ingénue endures a direful situation.

These six issues of *Weird Tales* sold remarkably well, partly due to Quinn's gripping and colourful tale, which kept readers returning month after month, helping the magazine survive a particular turbulent time in its finances. Prior to the meteoric rise in popularity of Lovecraft, Howard and CAS, the Jules de Grandin stories served as indisputable pillars of the *Weird Tales* publishing venture and so new tales of the Frenchman appeared frequently, defining the very essence of the pulp magazine.



The pulp in which this novel was first published

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The Devil's Bride

By SEABURY QUINN

A thrilling tale of devil-worship, in which weirdness, adventure, humor, mystery and pathos are superbly mingled

1. "Alice, Where Are You?"

FIVE of us sat on the twin divans flanking the fireplace where the eucalyptus logs burned brightly on their polished-brass andirons, throwing kaleidoscopic patterns of highlights and shadows on the ivory-enameled woodwork and rug-strewn floor of the "Ancestors' Room" at Twelvetrees.

Old David Hume, who dug Twelvetrees' foundations three centuries ago, had planned that room as shrine and temple to his *lar familiaris*, and to it each succeeding generation of the house had

How the novel first opened in 'Weird Tales'

1. “Alice. Where Are You?”

FIVE OF US sat on the twin divans flanking the fireplace where the eucalyptus logs burned brightly on their polished-brass andirons, throwing kaleidoscopic patterns of highlights and shadows on the ivory-enameled woodwork and the rug-strewn floor of the “Ancestors’ Room” at Twelvetrees.

Old David Hume, who dug Twelvetrees’ foundations three centuries ago, had planned that room as shrine and temple to his *lar familiaris*, and to it each succeeding generation of the house had added some memento of itself. The wide bay window at the east was fashioned from the carved poop of a Spanish galleon captured by a buccaneering member of the family and brought home to the quiet Jersey village where he rested while he planned new forays on the Antilles. The tiles about the fireplace, which told the story of the fall of man in blue-and-white Dutch delft, were a record of successful trading by another long dead Hume who flourished in the days when *Nieuw Amsterdam* claimed all the land between the Hudson and the Delaware, and held it from the Swedes till Britain with her lust for empire took it for herself and from it shaped the none too loyal colony of New Jersey. The carpets on the floor, the books and *bric-a-brac* on the shelves, each object of *vertu* within the glass-doored cabinets, had something to relate of Hume adventures on sea or land whether as pirates, patriots, traders or explorers, sworn enemies of law or duly constituted bailiffs of authority.

Adventure ran like ichor in the Hume veins, from David, founder of the family, who came none knew whence with his strange, dark bride and settled on the rising ground beside the Jersey meadows, to Ronald, last male of the line, who went down to flames and glory when his plane was cut out from its squadron and fell blazing like a meteor to the shell-scarred earth at Neuve Chapelle. His *croix de guerre*, posthumously awarded, lay in the cabinet beside the sword the Continental Congress had presented to his great-great-grandsire in lieu of long arrearage of salary.

Across the fire from us, between her mother and her fiancé, sat Alice, final remnant of the line, her half-humorous, half-troubled glance straying to each of us in turn as she finished speaking. She was a slender wisp of girlhood, with a mass of chestnut hair with deep, shadow-laden waves which clustered in curling tendrils at the nape of her neck, a pale, clear complexion, the ivory tones of which were enhanced by the crimson of her wide sensitive mouth and the long, silken lashes and purple depths of the slightly slanting eyes which gave her face a piquant, oriental flavor.

“You say the message is repeated constantly, Mademoiselle?” asked Jules de Grandin, my diminutive French friend, as he cast a fleeting look of unqualified approval at the slim satin slipper and silk-sheathed leg the girl displayed as she sat with one foot doubled under her.

“Yes, it’s most provoking when you’re trying to get some inkling of the future, especially at such a time as this, to have the silly thing keep saying—”

“Alice, dear,” Mrs. Hume remonstrated, “I wish you wouldn’t trifle with such silly nonsense, particularly now, when—” She broke off with what would unquestionably have been a sniff in anyone less certainly patrician than Arabella Hume, and glanced reprovingly at her daughter.

De Grandin tweaked the needle-pointed tips of his little blond mustache and grinned the gamin grin which endeared him to dowager and debutante alike. “It is

mysterious, as you have said, *Mademoiselle*," he agreed, "but are you sure you did not guide the board—"

"Of course I am," the girl broke in. "Just wait: I'll show you." Placing her coffee cup upon the Indian mahogany tabouret, she leaped petulantly from the couch and hurried from the room, returning in a moment with a ouija board and table.

"Now watch," she ordered, putting the contrivance on the couch beside her. "John, you and Doctor Trowbridge and Doctor de Grandin put your hands on the table, and I'll put mine between them, so you can feel the slightest tightening of my muscles. That way you'll be sure I'm not guiding the thing, even unintentionally. Ready?"

Feeling decidedly sheepish, I rose and joined them, resting my finger tips on the little three legged table. Young Davisson's hand was next mine, de Grandin's next to his, and between all rested Alice's slender, cream-white fingers. Mrs. Hume viewed the spectacle with silent disapproval.

For a moment we bowed above the ouija board, waiting tensely for some motion of the table. Gradually a feeling of numbness crept through my hands and wrists as I held them in the strained and unfamiliar pose. Then, with a sharp and jerky start the table moved, first right, then left, then in an ever-widening circle till it swung sharply toward the upper left-hand corner of the board, pausing momentarily at the A, then traveling swiftly to the L, thence with constant acceleration back to I. Quickly the message was spelled out; a pause, and then once more the three-word sentence was repeated:

ALICE COME HOME

"There!" the girl exclaimed, a catch, half fright, half annoyance, in her voice. "It spelled those very words three times today. I couldn't get it to say anything else!"

"Rot. All silly nonsense," John Davisson declared, lifting his hands from the table and gazing almost resentfully at his charming fiancée. "You may believe you didn't move the thing, dear, but you must have, for—"

"Doctor de Grandin, Doctor Trowbridge," the girl appealed, "you held my hands just now. You'd have known if I'd made even the slightest move to guide the table, wouldn't you?" We nodded silent agreement, and she hurried on:

"That's just what's puzzling me. Why should a girl who's going to be married tomorrow be telling herself, subconsciously or otherwise, to 'come home'? If the board had spelt 'Go home,' perhaps it would have made sense, for we're going to our own place when we come back from our wedding trip; but why the constant repetition of 'Come home,' I'd like to know. Do you suppose—"

The raucous hooting of an automobile horn broke through her question and a moment later half a dozen girls accompanied by as many youths stormed into the big hall.

"Ready, old fruit?" called Irma Sherwood, who was to be the maid of honor. "We'd better be stepping on the gas; the church is all lit up and Doctor Cuthbert's got the organ all tuned and humming." She threw a dazzling smile at us and added, "This business of getting Alice decently married is more trouble than running a man down for myself, Doctor Trowbridge. One more rehearsal of these nuptials and I'll be a candidate for a sanitarium."

ST. CHRYSOSTAN'S WAS all alight when we arrived at the pentice and paused beside the baptismal font awaiting the remainder of the bridal party; for, as it ever is

with lovers, John and Alice had lagged behind the rest to exchange a few banalities of the kind relished only by idiots, little children and those engaged to wed.

"Sorry to delay the show, friends and fellow citizens," Alice apologized, as she leaped from Davisson's roadster and tossed her raccoon coat aside. "The fact is, John and I had something of importance to discuss, and" — she raised both hands to readjust her hat—" and so we lingered by the way to—"

"Alice!" Mrs. Hume's voice betokened shocked propriety and hopeless protest at the antics of her daughter's graceless generation. "You're *surely* not going to wear that — that thing in church?" Her indignant glance indicated the object of her wrath. "Why, it's hardly decent," she continued, then paused, as though vocabulary failed her while she pointed mutely to the silver girdle which was clasped about her daughter's slender waist.

"Of course, I shall, old dear," the girl replied. "The last time one of us was married she wore it, and the one before wore it, too. Hume women always wear this girdle when they're married. It brings 'em luck and insures big fam—"

"*Alice!*" the sharp, exasperated interruption cut her short. "If you have to be indelicate, at least you might remember where we are."

"All right, Mater, have it your own way, but the girdle gets worn, just the same," the girl retorted, pirouetting slowly, so that the wide belt's polished bosses caught flashes from the chandelier and flung them back in gleaming, lance-like rays.

"*Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle*, what is it that you wear? May I see it, may I examine it?" de Grandin demanded excitedly, bending forward to obtain a closer view of the shining corselet.

"Of course," the girl replied. "Just a moment, till I get it off." She fumbled at a fastening in front, undid a latch of some sort and put the gleaming girdle in his hand.

It was a beautiful example of barbaric jewelry, a belt, perhaps a corset would be the better term, composed of two curved plates of hammered silver so formed as to encircle the wearer's abdomen from front to hips, joined together at the back by a wide band of flexible brown leather of exquisitely soft texture. In front the stomach-plates were locked together by four rings with a long silver pin which went through them like a loose rivet, with a little ball at the top fastened by a chain of cold-forged silver links. The metal was heavily bossed and rather crudely set with a number of big red and yellow stones. From each plate depended seven silver chains, each terminating in a heart-shaped ornament carved from the same kind of stones with which the belt was jeweled, and these clanked and jingled musically as the little Frenchman held the thing up to the light and gazed at it with a look of mingled fascination and repulsion. "*Grand Dieu!*" he exclaimed softly. "It is! I can not be mistaken; it is assuredly one of them, but—"

Alice bent smilingly across his shoulder. "Nobody knows quite what it is or where it comes from," she explained, "but there's a tradition in the family that David Hume's mysterious bride brought it with her as a part of her marriage portion. For years every daughter of the house wore it to be married, and it's been known as 'the luck of the Humes' for goodness knows how long. The legend is that the girl who wears it will keep her beauty and her husband's love and have an easy time in child—"

"Alice!" Once more her mother intervened.

"All right, Mother, I won't say it," her daughter laughed, "but even nice girls know you don't find babies in a cabbage-head nowadays." Then, to de Grandin:

“I’m the first Hume girl in three generations, and the last of the family in the bargain; so I’m going to wear the thing for whatever luck there is in it, no matter what anybody says.”

The answering smile de Grandin gave her was rather forced. “You do not know whence it comes, nor what its history is?” he asked.

“No, we don’t,” Mrs. Hume returned, before her daughter could reply, “and I’m heartily sorry Alice found the thing. I almost wish I’d sold it when I had the chance.”

“Eh?” he turned upon her almost sharply. “How is that, *Madame?*”

“A foreign gentleman called the other day and said he understood we had this thing among our curios and that it might be for sale. He was very polite, but quite insistent that I let him see it. When I told him it was not for sale he seemed greatly disappointed and begged me to reconsider. He even offered to allow me to set whatever price I cared to, and assured me there would be no quibble over it, even though we asked a hundred times the belt’s intrinsic worth. I fancy he was an agent with *carte blanche* from some wealthy collector, he seemed so utterly indifferent where money was concerned.”

“And did he, by any chance, inform you what this belt may be, or whence it came?” de Grandin queried.

“Why, no; he merely described it, and begged to be allowed to see it. One hardly likes to ask such questions from a chance visitor, you know.”

“*Précisément*. One understands, *Madame*,” he nodded.

THE PROCESSION WAS quickly marshaled, and attended by her maids, Alice marched serenely up the aisle. As she had no male relative to do the office, the duty of giving her in marriage was delegated to me, both she and her mother declaring that no one more deserved the honor than the one who had assisted her into the world and brought her through the measles, chickenpox and whooping cough.

“‘And we’ll have Trowbridge somewhere in the first one’s name, old dear,” Alice promised in a whisper as she patted my arm while we halted momentarily at the chancel steps.

“Now, when Doctor Bentley has pronounced the warning ‘if no one offers an impediment to the marriage,’” the curate who was acting as master of ceremonies informed us, “you will proceed to the communion rail and—”

Somewhere outside, faint and faraway-seeming, but gaining quickly in intensity, there came a high, thin, whistling sound, piercing, but so high one could scarcely hear it. Rather, it seemed more like a screaming heard inside the head than any outward sound, and strangely, it seemed to circle round the three of us — the bride, the bridegroom and me — and to cut us definitely off from the remainder of the party.

“Queer,” I thought. “There was no wind a moment ago, yet—” The thin, high whining closed tighter round us, and involuntarily I put my hands to my ears to shut out the intolerable sharpness of it, when with a sudden crash the painted window just above the altar burst as though a missile struck it, and through the ragged aperture came drifting a billowing yellow haze — a cloud of saffron dust, it seemed to me — which hovered momentarily above the unveiled cross upon the altar, then dissipated slowly, like steam evaporating in winter air.

I felt an odd sensation, almost like a heavy blow delivered to my chest, as I watched the yellow mist disintegrate, then straightened with a start as another sound broke on my hearing.

“Alice! Alice, where are you?” the bridegroom called, and through the bridal party ran a wondering murmur.

“Where’s Alice? She was right there a moment ago! Where *is* she? Where’s she gone?”

I blinked my eyes and shook my head. It was so. Where the bride had stood, her fingers resting lightly on my arm, a moment before, there was only empty space.

Wonderingly at first, then eagerly, at last with a frenzy bordering on madness, we searched for her. Nowhere, either in the church or vestry room or parish house, was sign or token of the missing bride, nor could we find a trace of her outside the building. Her coat and motor gloves lay in a crumpled heap within the vestibule; the car in which she came to the church still stood beside the curb; an officer whose beat had led him past the door two minutes earlier declared he had seen no one leave the edifice — had seen no one on the block, for that matter. Yet, discuss and argue as we might, search, seek and call, then tell ourselves it was no more than a silly girl’s prank, the fact remained: Alice Hume was gone — vanished as utterly as though absorbed in air or swallowed by the earth, and all within less time than the swiftest runner could have crossed the chancel, much less have left the church beneath the gaze of half a score of interested people for whom she was the center of attraction.

“She must have gone home,” someone suggested as we paused a moment in our search and gazed into each other’s wondering eyes. “Of course, that’s it! She’s gone back to Twelvetrees!” the others chorused, and by the very warmth of their agreement gave tokens of dissent.

At last the lights were dimmed, the church deserted, and the bridal party, murmuring like frightened children to each other, took up their way toward Twelvetrees, to which, we were agreed, the missing bride had fled.

But as we started on our way, young Davisson, with lover’s prescience of evil to his loved one, gave tongue to the question which trembled silently on every lip. “Alice!” he cried out to the unresponsive night, and the tremor in his voice was eloquent of his heart’s agony, “Alice, beloved — *where are you?*”

2. Bulala-Gwai

"COMING?" I ASKED AS the sorrowful little motorcade began its pilgrimage to Twelvetrees.

De Grandin shook his head in short negation. "Let them go on," he ordered. "Later, when they have left, we may search the house for Mademoiselle Alice, though I greatly doubt we shall find her. Meanwhile, there is that here which I would investigate. We can work more efficiently when there are no well-meaning nincompoops to harass us with senseless questions. Come." He turned on his heel and led the way back into the church.

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he began as we walked up the aisle, "when that window yonder broke, did you see, or seem to see, a cloud of yellowness drift through the opening?"

"Why, yes, I thought so," I replied. "It looked to me like a puff of muddy fog — smoke, perhaps — but it vanished so quickly that—"

"*Très bien*," he nodded. "That is what I wished to know. None of the others mentioned seeing it and our eyes play strange tricks on us at times. I thought perhaps I might have been mistaken, but your testimony is enough for me."

With a murmuring of excuse, as though apologizing for the sacrilege, he moved the bishop's chair to a point beside the altar, mounted nimbly on its tall, carved back, and examined the stone casing of the broken window intently. From my station outside the communion rail I could hear him swearing softly and excitedly in mingled French and English as he drew a card from his pocket, scraped something from the window-sill upon the card, then carefully descended from his lofty perch.

"Behold, regard, attend me, if you will, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "Observe what I have found." As he extended the card toward me I saw a line of light, yellow powder, like pollen from a flower, gathered along one edge.

"*Regardez!*" he commanded sharply, raising the slip of pasteboard level with my face. "Now, if you please, what did I do?"

"Eh?" I asked, puzzled.

"Your hearing functions normally. What is it that I did?"

"Why, you showed me that card, and—"

"Precisely. And —?" He paused with interrogatively arched brows.

"And that's all."

"*Non*. Not at all. By no means, my friend," he denied. "Attend me: First I did, as you have said, present the card to you. Next, when it was fairly level with your nostrils, I did blow on it, oh so gently, so that some of the powder on it was inhaled by you. Next I raised my arms three times above my head, lowered them again, then capered round you like a dancing Indian. Finally, I did tweak you sharply by the nose."

"Tweak me by the nose!" I echoed aghast. "You're crazy!"

"Like the fox, as your slang so drolly expressed it," he returned with a nod. "My friend, it has been exactly one minute and forty seconds by my watch since you did inhale that so tiny bit of dust, and during all that time you were as utterly oblivious to all that happened as though you had been under ether. Yes. When first I saw I suspected. Now I have submitted it to the test and am positive it is so."

"What on earth are you talking about?" I asked.

"*Bulala-Gwai*, no less."

"Bu — *what?*"

He seated himself in the bishop's chair, crossed his knees and regarded me with the fixed, unwinking stare which always reminded me of an earnest tomcat. "Attend me," he commanded. "My duties as an army medical officer and as a member of *la Sûreté*, have taken me to many places off the customary map of tourists. The Congo Français, by example. It was there that I first met *bulala-gwai*, which was called by our gendarmes the snuff of death, sometimes *la petite mort*, or little death.

"*Barbe d'un rat vert*, but it is well named, my friend! A traveler journeying through the interior once lay down to rest on his camp bed within his tent. He meant to sleep for thirty minutes only. When he awoke he found that twenty-six hours had gone — likewise all his paraphernalia. Native robbers had inserted a tube beneath his tent flap, blown a minute pinch of their death snuff into the enclosure, then boldly entered and helped themselves to all of his effects. Again, a tiny paper torpedo of the stuff was thrown through the window of a locomotive cab while it stood on a siding. Both engineer and fireman were rendered unconscious for ten hours, during which time the natives denuded the machine of every movable part. So powerful an anesthetic is *bulala-gwai* that so much of it as can be gotten on a penknife's point, if blown into a room fourteen feet square will serve to paralyze every living thing within the place for several minutes.

"The secret of its formula is close-guarded, but I have been assured by witch-men of the Congo that it can be made in two strengths, one to kill at once, the other to stupefy, and it is a fact to which I can testify that it is sometimes used successfully to capture both elephants and lions alive.

"I once went with the local inspector of police to examine premises which had been burglarized with the aid of this so powerful sleeping-powder, and on the window-sill we did behold a minute quantity of it. The inspector scooped it up on a card and called a native gendarme to him, then blew it in the negro's face. The stuff had lost much potency by exposure to the air, but still it was so powerful that the black was totally unconscious for upward of five minutes, and did not move a muscle when the inspector struck him a stinging blow on the cheek and even touched a lighted cigarette against his hand. Not only that, when finally he awakened he did not realize he had been asleep at all, and would not believe us till we showed him the blister where the cigarette had burned him.

"Very good. It is twenty years and more since I beheld this powder from the Devil's snuff-box, but when I saw that yellow cloud come floating through the broken window, and when I realized Mademoiselle Alice had decamped unseen by us before our very eyes, I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, here, it seems, is evidence of *bulala-gwai*, and nothing else.'

"'You may be right, Jules de Grandin,' I answered me, 'but still you are not sure. Wait until the others have departed with their silly gabble-gabble, then ask Friend Trowbridge if he also saw the yellow cloud. He knows nothing of *bulala-gwai*, but if he saw that fog of yellowness, you may depend upon it there was such a thing.'

"And so I waited, and when you did agree with me, I searched, and having searched I found that which I sought and — forgive me, good friend! — as there was no other laboratory material at hand, I did test the stuff on you, and now I am convinced. Yes, I damn know how they spirited Mademoiselle Alice away while our eyes were open and unseeing. Who it was that stole her, and why he did it — that is for us to discover as quickly as may be."

He felt for his cigarette case and thoughtfully extracted a "Maryland," then, remembering where he was, replaced it. "Let us go," he ordered. "Perhaps the chatterers have become tired of useless searching at Twelvetrees, and we can get some information from Madame Hume."

"But if this *bulala* — this sleeping-powder, whatever its native name is — was used here, it's hardly likely Alice has gone back to Twelvetrees, is it?" I objected. "And what possible information can Mrs. Hume give? She knows as little about it all as you or I."

"One wonders," he replied, as we left the church and climbed into my car. "At any rate, perhaps she can tell us more of that *sacré* girdle which Mademoiselle Alice wore."

"I noticed you seemed surprised when you saw it," I returned. "Did you recognize it?"

"Perhaps," he answered cautiously. "At least, I have seen others not unlike it."

"Indeed? Where?"

"In Kurdistan. It is a Yezidee bridal belt, or something very like it."

"A what?"

"A girdle worn by virgins who — but I forget, you do not know.

"The work of pacifying subject people is one requiring all the white man's ingenuity, my friend, as your countrymen who have seen service in the Philippines will tell you. In 1922 when French authority was flouted in Arabia, I was dispatched there on a secret mission. Eventually my work took me to Deir-er-Zor, Anah, finally to Baghdad and across British Irak to the Kurdish border. There — no matter in what guise — I penetrated Mount Lalesh and the holy city of the Yezidees.

"These Yezidees are a mysterious sect scattered throughout the Orient from Manchuria to the Near East, but strongest in North Arabia, and feared and loathed alike by Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Taoist and Moslem, for they are worshippers of Satan.

"Their sacred mountain, Lalesh, stands north of Baghdad on the Kurdish border near Mosul, and on it is their holy and forbidden city which no stranger is allowed to enter, and there they have a temple, reared on terraces hewn from the living rock, in which they pay homage to the image of a serpent as the beguiler of man from pristine innocence. Beneath the temple are gloomy caverns, and there, at dead of night, they perform strange and bloody rites before an idol fashioned like a peacock, whom they call Malek Taos, the viceroy of Shaitan — the Devil — upon earth.

"According to the dictates of the Khitab Asward, or Black Scripture, their Mir, or pope, has brought to him as often as he may desire the fairest daughters of the sect, and these are his to do with as he chooses. When the young virgin is prepared for the sacrifice she dons a silver girdle, like the one we saw on Mademoiselle Alice tonight. I saw one on Mount Lalesh. Its front is hammered silver, set with semi-precious stones of red and yellow — never blue, for blue is heaven's color, and therefore is accursed among the Yezidees who worship the Arch-Demon. The belt's back is of leather, sometimes from the skin of a lamb untimely taken from its mother, sometimes of a kid's skin, but in exceptional cases, where the woman to be offered is of noble birth and notable lineage, it is made of tanned and carefully prepared human skin — a murdered babe's by preference. Such was the leather of Mademoiselle Alice's girdle. I recognized it instantly. When one has examined a human hide tanned into leather he can not forget its feel and texture, my friend."

"But this is dreadful — unthinkable!" I protested. "Why should Alice wear a girdle made of human skin?"

“That is precisely what we have to ascertain tonight, if possible,” he told me. “I do not say Madame Hume can give us any direct information, but she may perchance let drop some hint that will set us on the proper track. No,” be added as he saw protest forming on my lips, “I do not intimate she has wilfully withheld anything she knows. But in cases such as this there are no such things as trifles. Some bit of knowledge which she thinks of no importance may easily prove the key to this so irritating mystery. One can but hope.”

ANOTHER CAR, A LITTLE roadster of modish lines, opulent with gleaming chromium, drew abreast of us as we halted at the gateway of the Hume house. Its driver was a woman, elegantly dressed, sophisticated, *chic* from the crown of her tightly fitting black felt hat to the tips of her black leather gloves. As she slackened speed and leaned toward us, our headlights’ rays struck her face, illuminating it as an actor’s features are picked out by the spotlight on a darkened stage. Although a black lace veil was drawn across her chin and cheeks after the manner of a Western desperado’s handkerchief mask, so filmy was the tissue that her countenance was alluringly shadowed rather than obscured. A beautiful face it was, but not a lovely one. Skin light and clear as any blond’s was complemented by hair as black and bright as polished basalt, black brows circumflexed superciliously over eyes of almost startling blueness. Her small, petulant mouth had full, ardent lips of brilliant red.

There was a slightly amused, faintly scornful smile on her somewhat vixenish mouth, and her small teeth, gleaming like white coral behind the vivid carmine of her lips, seemed sharp as little sabers as she called to us in a rich contralto: “Good evening, gentlemen. If you’re looking for someone, you’ll save time and trouble by abandoning the search and going home.”

The echo of a cynical, disdainful laugh floated back to us as she set speed to her car and vanished in the dark.

Jules de Grandin stared after her, his hand still halfway to the hat he had politely touched when she first addressed us. Astonishingly, he burst into a laugh. “*Tiens*, my friend,” he exclaimed when he regained his breath, “it seems there are more locks than one for which we seek the keys tonight.”

End of Sample