The Mystery of The Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

CHAPTER V. (Continued.)

Larsan might be about fifty years of age. He had a fine head, his hair turning gray, a colorless complexion and a firm profile. His forehead was prominent, his chin and cheeks clean shaven. His upper lip, without mustache, was finely chiseled. His eyes were rather small and round, with a look in them that was at once searching and disquieting. He was of middle height and well built, with a general bearing elegant and gentlemanly.

Larsan turned his head at the sound of a vehicle which had come from the chateau and reached the gate behind him. We recognized the cab which had conveyed the examining magistrate and his registrar from the station at Epinay.

"Ah!" said Frederic Larsan. "If you want to speak with M. Robert Darzac, he is here."

The cab was already at the park gate, and Robert Darzac was begging Frederic Larsan to open it for him, explaining that he was pressed for time to catch the next train leaving Epinay for Paris. Then he recognized me. While Larsan was unlocking the gate M. Darzac inquired what had brought me to the Glandier at such a tragic moment. I noticed that he was frightfully pale and that his face was lined as if from the effects of some terrible suffering.

"Is mademoiselle getting better?" I immediately asked.

"Yes," he said. "She will be saved perhaps. She must be saved!"

He did not add "or it will be my death," but I felt that the phrase trembled on his pale lips.

Rouletabille intervened:

"You are in a hurry, monsieur, but I must speak with you. I have something of the greatest importance to tell you."

Frederic Larsan interrupted:

"May I leave you?" he asked of Robert Darzac. "Have you a key or do you wish me to give you this one?"

"Thank you. I have a key and will lock the gate."

Larsan hurried off in the direction of the chateau, the imposing pile of which could be perceived a few hundred yards away.

Robert Darzac, with knit brow, was beginning to show impatience. I presented Rouletabille as a good friend of mine, but as soon as he learned that the young man was a journalist he looked at me very reproachfully, excused himself under the necessity of having to reach Epinay in twenty minutes, bowed and whipped up his horse. But Rouletabille had seized the bridle and, to my utter astonishment, stopped the carriage with a vigorous hand. Then he gave utterance to a sentence which was utterly meaningless to me.

"The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm nor the garden its brightness."

The words had hardly left the lips of Rouletabille than I saw Robert Darzac quail. Pale as he was, he became paler. His eyes were fixed on the young man in terror, and he immediately descended from the vehicle in an inexpressible state of agitation.

"Come—come in!" he stammered.

Then suddenly and with a sort of fury he repeated:

"Let us go, monsieur."

He turned up by the road he had come from the chateau, Rouletabille still retaining his hold on the horse's bridle. I addressed a few words to M. Darzac, but he made no answer. My looks questioned Rouletabille, but his gaze was elsewhere.

CHAPTER VI.

In the Heart of the Oak Grove.

WE reached the chateau and, as we approached it, saw four gendarmes pacing in front of a little door in the ground floor of the donjon. We soon learned that in this ground floor, which had formerly served as a prison, M. and Mme. Bernier, the concierges, were confined.

M. Robert Darzac led us into the modern part of the chateau by a large door, protected by a projecting awning—a "marquise" as it is called. Rouletabille, who had resigned the horse and the cab to the care of a servant, never took his eyes off M. Darzac. I followed his look and perceived that it was directed solely toward the gloved hands of the Sorbonne professor. When we were in a tiny sitting room fitted with old furniture, M. Darzac turned to Rouletabille and said sharply:

"What do you want?"

The reporter answered in an equally sharp tone:

"To shake you by the hand."

Darzac shrank back.

"What does that mean?"

Evidently he understood, what I also understood, that my friend suspected him of the abominable attempt on the life of Mlle. Stangerson. The impression of the blood stained hand on the walls of the yellow room was in his mind. I looked at the man closely. His haughty face, with its expression ordinarily so straightforward, was at this moment strangely troubled. He held out his right hand and, referring to me, said:

"As you are a friend of M. Sainclair, who has rendered me invaluable services in a just cause, monsieur, I see no reason for refusing you my hand"—

Rouletabille did not take the extended hand. Lying with the utmost audacity, he said:

"Monsieur, I have lived several years in Russia, where I have acquired the habit of never taking any but an ungloved hand."

I thought that the Sorbonne professor would express his anger openly, but, on the contrary, by a visibly violent effort, he calmed himself, took off his gloves and showed his hands. They were unmarked by any cicatrice.

"Are you satisfied?"

"No!" replied Rouletabille. "My dear friend," he said, turning to me, "I am obliged to ask you to leave us alone for a moment."

I bowed and retired, stupefied by what I had seen and heard. I could not understand why M. Robert Darzac had not already shown the door to my impertinent, insulting and stupid friend. I was angry myself with Rouletabille at that moment for his suspicions which had led to this scene of the gloves.

For some twenty minutes I walked about in front of the chateau, trying vainly to link together the different events of the day.

When Rouletabille came out of the chateau in the company of M. Robert Darzac, extraordinary to relate, I saw at a glance that they were the best of friends.

"We are going to the yellow room. Come with us," Rouletabille said to me. "You know, my dear boy, I am going to keep you with me all day. We'll breakfast together somewhere about here"—

"You'll breakfast with me here, gentlemen"—

"No, thanks," replied the young man. "We shall breakfast at the Donjon inn."

"You'll fare very badly there. You'll not find anything"—

"Do you think so? Well, I hope to find something there," replied Rouletabille. "After breakfast we'll set to work again. I'll write my article, and if you'll be so good as to take it to the office for me"—

"Won't you come back with me to Paris?"

"No; I shall remain here."

I turned toward Rouletabille. He spoke quite seriously, and M. Robert Darzac did not appear to be in the least degree surprised.

We were passing by the donjon and heard wailing voices. Rouletabille asked:

"Why have these people been arrested?"

"It is a little my fault," said M. Darzac. "I happened to remark to the examining magistrate yesterday that it was inexplicable that the concierges had had time to hear the revolver shots, to dress themselves and to cover so great a distance as that which lies between their lodge and the pavilion in the space of two minutes, for not more than that interval of time had elapsed after the firing of the shots when they were met by Daddy Jacques."

"That was suspicious evidently," acquiesced Rouletabille. "And were they dressed?"

"That is what is so incredible. They were dressed completely—not one part of their costumes wanting. The woman wore wooden shoes, but the man had on laced boots. Now they assert that they went to bed as half past 9. On arriving this morning the examining magistrate brought with him from Paris a revolver of the same caliber as that found in the room, for he couldn't use the one held for evidence, and made his registrar fire two shots in the yellow room while the doors and windows were closed. We were with him in the lodge of the concierges, and yet we heard nothing—not a sound. The concierges have lied, of that there can be no doubt. They must have been already waiting not far from the pavilion—waiting for something! Certainly they are not to be accused of being the authors of the crime, but their complicity is not improbable. That was why M. de Marquet had them arrested at once."

"If they had been accomplices," said Rouletabille, "they would not have been there at all. When people throw themselves into the arms of justice with the proofs of complicity on them, you can be sure they are not accomplices. I don't believe there are any accomplices in this affair."

"Then why were they abroad at midnight? Why don't they say?"

"They have certainly some reason for their silence. What that reason is has to be found out, for, even if they are not accomplices, it may be of importance. Everything that took place on such a night is important."

We had crossed an old bridge thrown over the Douve and were entering the part of the park called the Oak grove. The oaks here were centuries old. Autumn had already shriveled their tawny leaves. This place, which mademoiselle found cheerful and in which she lived in the summer season, appeared to us as sad and funereal now. The soil was black and muddy from the recent rains and the rotting of the fallen leaves. The trunks of the trees were black, and the sky above us was now, as if in mourning, charged with great, heavy clouds.

And it was in this somber and desolate retreat that we saw the white walls of the pavilion as we approached. It was a queer looking building, without a window visible on the side by which we neared it. A little door alone marked the entrance to it. It might have passed for a tomb, a vast mausoleum in the midst of a thick forest. As we came nearer we were able to make out its disposition. The building obtained all the light it needed from the south—that is to say, from the open country. The little door closed on the park. M. and Mlle. Stangerson must have found it an ideal seclusion for their work and their dreams.

The pavilion had a ground floor which was reached by a few steps, and above it was an attic, with which we need not concern ourselves. The rooms of the pavilion were as follows.

The yellow room, with its one window and its one door opening into the laboratory.

The laboratory, with its two large barred windows and its doors, one serving for the vestibule, the other for the yellow room.

The vestibule, with its unbarred window and door opening into the park.

The lavatory, between the vestibule and the yellow room.

Besides these chambers there was a flight of stairs leading to the attic. The only chimney was the large one in the laboratory.

Before mounting the three steps leading up to the door of the pavilion Rouletabille stopped and asked M. Darzac point blank:

"What was the motive for the crime?"

"Speaking for myself, monsieur, there can be no doubt on the matter," said Mlle. Stangerson's fiance, greatly distressed. "The marks of the fingers, the deep scratches on the chest and throat of Mlle. Stangerson, show that the wretch who attacked her attempted to commit a frightful crime. The medical experts who examined these traces yesterday affirm that they were made by the same hand as that which left its red imprint on the wall—an enormous hand, monsieur, much too large to go into my gloves," he added, with an indefinable smile.

"Could not that blood stained hand," I interrupted, "have been the hand of Mlle. Stangerson, who, in the moment of falling, had pressed it against the wall and, in slipping, enlarged the impression?"

"There was not a drop of blood on either of her hands when she was lifted up," replied M. Darzac.

"We are now sure," said I, "that it was Mlle. Stangerson who was armed with Daddy Jacques' revolver, since she wounded the hand of the murderer. She was in fear, then, of somebody or something."

"Probably."

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"No," replied M. Darzac, looking at Rouletabille.

Rouletabille then said to me:

"You must know, my friend, that the inquiry is a little more advanced than M. de Marquet has chosen to tell us. He not only knows that Mlle. Stangerson defended herself with the revolver, but he knows what the weapon was that was used to attack her. M. Darzac tells me it was a mutton bone. Why is M. de Marquet surrounding this mutton bone with so much mystery? No doubt for the purpose of facilitating the inquiries of the agents of the police. He imagines perhaps that the owner of this instrument of crime, the most terrible invented, is going to be found among those who are well known in the slums of Paris who use it."

"Has a mutton bone been found in the yellow room?" I asked him.

"Yes, monsieur," said Robert Darzac, "at the foot of the bed, but I beg of you not to say anything about it." (I made a gesture of assent.) "It was an enormous mutton bone, the top of which, or, rather, the joint, was still red with the blood of the frightful wound. It was an old bone, which may, according to appearances, have served in other crimes. That's what M. de Marquet thinks, who has had it sent to the municipal laboratory at Paris to be analyzed. In fact, he thinks he has detected on it not only the blood of the last victim, but other stains of dried blood, evidences of previous crimes."

"A mutton bone in the hand of a skilled assassin is a frightful weapon," said Rouletabille, "a more certain weapon than a heavy hammer."

"The scoundrel has proved it to be so," said M. Robert Darzac sadly. "The joint of the bone found exactly fits the wound inflicted. My belief is that the wound would have been mortal if the murderer's blow had not been arrested in the act by Mlle. Stangerson's revolver. Wounded in the hand, he dropped the mutton bone and fled. Unfortunately the blow had been already given, and mademoiselle was stunned after having been nearly strangled. If she had succeeded in wounding the man with the first shot of the revolver, she would doubtless have escaped the blow with the bone. But she had certainly employed her revolver too late. The first shot deviated and lodged in the ceiling. It was the second only that took effect."

Having said this, M. Darzac knocked at the door of the pavilion. I must confess to feeling a strong impatience to reach the spot where the crime had been committed. It was some time before the door was opened by a man whom I at once recognized as Daddy Jacques.

He appeared to be well over sixty years of age. He had a long white beard and white hair, on which he wore a flat Basque cap. He was dressed in a complete suit of chestnut colored velveteen, worn at the sides; sabots were on his feet. He had rather a waspish looking face, the expression of which lightened, however, as soon as he saw M. Darzac.

"Friends," said our guide. "Nobody in the pavilion, Daddy Jacques?"

"I ought not to allow anybody to enter, M. Robert, but of course the order does not apply to you. These gentlemen of justice have seen everything there is to be seen and made enough drawings and drawn up enough reports"—

"Excuse me, M. Jacques, one question before anything else," said Rouletabille.

"What is it, young man? If I can answer it"—

"Did your mistress wear her hair in bands that evening? You know what I mean—over her forehead?"

"No, young man. My mistress never wore her hair in the way you suggest, neither on that day nor on any other. She had her hair drawn up, as usual, so that her beautiful forehead could be seen, pure as that of an unborn child!"

Rouletabille grunted and set to work examining the door, finding that it fastened itself automatically. He satisfied himself that it could never remain open and needed a key to open it. Then we entered the vestibule, a small, well lit room paved with square red tiles.

"Ah, this is the window by which the murderer escaped!" said Rouletabille.

"So they keep on saying, monsieur; so they keep on saying. But if he had gone off that way we should have been sure to have seen him. We are not blind, neither M. Stangerson nor I nor the concierges who are in prison. Why have they not put me in prison, too, on account of my revolver?"

Rouletabille had already opened the window and was examining the shutters.

"Were these closed at the time of the crime?"

"And fastened with the iron catch inside," said Daddy Jacques, "and I am quite sure that the murderer did not get out that way."

"Are there any blood stains?"

"Yes—on the stones outside—but blood of what?"

"Ah," said Rouletabille, "there are footmarks visible on the path! The ground was very moist. I will look into that presently."

"Nonsense!" said Daddy Jacques. "The murderer did not go that way."

"Which way did he go, then?"

"How do I know?"

Rouletabille looked at everything, smelled everything. He went down on his knees and rapidly examined every one of the paving tiles. Daddy Jacques went on:

"Ah, you can't find anything, monsieur. Nothing has been found. And now it is all dirty. Too many persons have tramped over it. They wouldn't let me wash it, but on the day of the crime I had washed the floor thoroughly, and if the murderer had crossed it with his hobnailed boots I should not have failed to see where he had been. He has left marks enough in mademoiselle's chamber."

Rouletabille rose.

"When was the last time you washed these tiles?" he asked, and he fixed on Daddy Jacques a most searching look.

"Why—as I told you—on the day of the crime, toward half past 5—while mademoiselle and her father were taking a little walk before dinner here in this room. They dined in the laboratory. The next day the examining magistrate came and saw all the marks there were on the floor as plainly as if they had been made with ink on white paper. Well, neither in the laboratory nor in the vestibule, which were both as clean as a new pin, were there any traces of a man's footmarks. Since they have been found near this window outside, he must have made his way through the ceiling of the yellow room into the attic, then cut his way through the roof and dropped to the ground outside the vestibule window. But there's no hole, neither in the ceiling of the yellow room nor in the roof of my attic; that's absolutely certain. So, you see, we know nothing—nothing. And nothing will ever be known! It's a mystery of the devil's own making."

Rouletabille went down upon his knees again almost in front of a small lavatory at the back of the vestibule. In that position he remained for about a minute.

"Well?" I asked him when he got up.

"Oh, nothing very important. A drop of blood," he replied, turning toward Daddy Jacques as he spoke. "While you were washing the laboratory and this vestibule was the vestibule window open?" he asked.

"No, monsieur, it was closed. But after I had done washing the floor I lit some charcoal for monsieur in the laboratory furnace, and as I lit it with old newspapers it smoked, so I opened both the windows in the laboratory and this one to make a current of air. Then I shut those in the laboratory and left this one open when I went out. When I returned to the pavilion this window had been closed and monsieur and mademoiselle were already at work in the laboratory."

"M. or Mlle. Stangerson had no doubt shut it?"

"No doubt."

"You did not ask them?"

"No."

After a close scrutiny of the little lavatory and of the staircase leading up to the attic Rouletabille—to whom we seemed no longer to exist—entered the laboratory. I followed him. I was, I confess, in a state of great excitement. Robert Darzac lost none of my friend's movements. As for me, my eyes were drawn at once to the door of the yellow room. It was closed and, as I immediately saw, partially shattered and out of commission.

My friend, who went about his work methodically, silently studied the room in which we were. It was large and well lighted. Two big windows—almost bays—were protected by strong iron bars and looked out upon a wide extent of country.

The whole of one side of the laboratory was taken up with a large chimney, crucibles, ovens and such implements as are needed for chemical experiments; tables loaded with vials, papers, reports, an electrical machine—an apparatus, as M. Darzac informed me, employed by Professor Stangerson to demonstrate the dissociation of matter under the action of solar light—and other scientific implements.

Along the walls were cabinets, plain or glass fronted, through which were visible microscopes, special photographic apparatus and a large quantity of crystals.

Rouletabille, who was ferreting in the chimney, put his fingers into one of the crucibles. Suddenly he drew himself up and held up a piece of half consumed paper in his hand. He stepped up to where we were talking by one of the windows.

"Keep that for us, M. Darzac," he said.

I bent over the piece of scorched paper which M. Darzac took from the hand of Rouletabille and read distinctly the only words that remained legible:

"Presbytery—lost nothing—charm, nor the gar—its brightness."

Twice since the morning these same meaningless words had struck me, and for the second time I saw that they produced on the Sorbonne professor the same paralyzing effect. M. Darzac's first anxiety showed itself when he turned his eyes in the direction of Daddy Jacques. But, occupied as he was at another window, he had seen nothing. Then, tremblingly opening his pocketbook, he put the piece of paper into it, sighing, "My God!"

During this time Rouletabille had mounted into the opening of the firegrate—that is to say, he had got upon the bricks of a furnace—and was attentively examining the chimney, which grew narrower toward the top, the outlet from it being closed with sheets of iron fastened into the brickwork, through which passed three small chimneys.

"Impossible to get out that way," he said, jumping back into the laboratory. "Besides, even if he had tried to do it, he would have brought all that ironwork down to the ground. No, no; it is not on that side we have to search."

Rouletabille next examined the furniture and opened the doors of the cabinets. Then he came to the windows, through which, he declared, no one could possibly have passed. At the second window he found Daddy Jacques in contemplation.

"Well, Daddy Jacques," he said, "what are you looking at?"

"That policeman who is always going round and round the lake. Another of those fellows who think they can see better than anybody else!"

"You don't know Frederic Larsan, Daddy Jacques, or you wouldn't speak of him in that way," said Rouletabille in a melancholy tone. "If there is any one who will find the murderer it will be he." And Rouletabille heaved a deep sigh.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—A mysterious attempt is made at midnight to murder Mlle. Stangerson, daughter and assistant of Prof. Stangerson, who is at work on his theory of the dissociation of matter in a pavilion near his chateau. Pistol shots and the young woman's cries for help are heard behind the locked and bolted door of her chamber, the yellow room. The cries are answered by Professor Stangerson and Daddy Jacques, an aged servant. Aided by the concierges, Bernier and his wife, they break open the door and find Mlle. Stangerson swooning and half strangled, with a wound in her temple, but find no trace of her assailant. The only possible outlet from the yellow room is the door. The weird cry of the "bete du bon Dieu," a cat belonging to Mother Angenoux, a recluse, is heard just before Mlle. Stangerson's cries. II—Joseph Rouletabille, a reporter-detective, is introduced to the reader by M. Sainclair, the narrator of the story. Rouletabille declares the revolver was fired by Mlle. Stangerson, wounding her assailant in the hand. Sainclair is to use his friendship with M. Darzac, Mlle. Stangerson's lover, to introduce Rouletabille into the chateau. III—Rouletabille induces M. de Marquet, the examining magistrate, and M. de Maleine, his registrar, to talk about the case. The only possible point of egress from the pavilion for the murderer has been the window of the pavilion's vestibule, near which bloodstains have been found. The window, however, was found latched after the assassin's escape. A bullet hole is found in the ceiling of the yellow room.

GAME LAWS.

Any person knowing of any violation of the game or fish laws of the state, or of persons not properly keeping screens over irrigation ditches, are requested to notify

JOE CLEMONS,
Deputy State Game and Forest Warden, Zumwalt, Oregon. 42tf

Girls' Feet.

"Yes, miss," the shoemaker admitted, "you have rather large feet now, but they'll get smaller. How old are you? About sixteen, aren't you?"

"Yes; just. And will my feet really and truly get smaller? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Young girls of your age," said the shoemaker, "have feet one or even two sizes bigger than they have when they are quite grown up—are twenty or twenty-one, say. The feet at sixteen are fat and puffy. You might say they aren't shaped yet. They're like the waist. But they soon get trim and firm. They keep so till the age of forty. Then they swell again. Bigger and bigger, fatter and softer they get till the owner dies."