

The Mystery of The Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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CHAPTER IX.

Reporter and Detective.

ROULETABLE, Darzac and I went back toward the pavilion. At some distance from the building the reporter made us stop and, pointing to a small clump of trees to the right of us, said: "That's where the murderer came from to get into the pavilion."

As there were other patches of trees of the same sort between the great oaks, I asked why the murderer had chosen that one rather than any of the others. Roulettable answered me by pointing to the path which ran quite close to the thicket to the door of the pavilion.

"That path is, as you see, topped with gravel," he said. "The man must have passed along it going to the pavilion, since no traces of his steps have been found on the soft ground. The man didn't have wings; he walked, but he walked on the gravel, which left no impression of his tread. The gravel has, in fact, been trodden by many other feet, since the path is the most direct way between the pavilion and the chateau. As to the thicket, made of the sort of shrubs that don't flourish in the rough season—laurels and fuchsias—it offered the murderer a sufficient hiding place until it was time for him to make his way to the pavilion. It was while hiding in that clump of trees that he saw M. and Mme. Stangerson and then Daddy Jacques leave the pavilion. Gravel has been spread nearly, very nearly, up to the windows of the pavilion. The footprints of a man parallel with the wall, marks which we will examine presently and which I have already seen, prove that he only needed to make one stride to find himself in front of the vestibule window, left open by Daddy Jacques. The man drew himself up by his hands and entered the vestibule."

"After all, it is very possible," I said. "If I did not reason as I do in regard to this gravel," Roulettable went on, "I should have to assume a balloon. So don't say a thing is possible when it could not be otherwise. We know now how the man entered by the window, and we also know the moment at which he entered—during the 5 o'clock walk of the professor and his daughter. The fact of the presence of the chambermaid, who had come to clean up the yellow room, in the laboratory when M. Stangerson and his daughter returned from their walk at half past 1 permits us to affirm that at half past 1 the murderer was not in the chamber under the bed unless he was in collusion with the chambermaid. What do you say, M. Darzac?"

M. Darzac shook his head and said he was sure of the chambermaid's fidelity and that she was a thoroughly honest and devoted servant. "Besides," he added, "at 5 o'clock M. Stangerson went into the room to fetch his daughter's hat."

"There is that also," said Roulettable. "That the man entered by the window at the time you say, I admit," I said, "but why did he shut the window? It was an act which would necessarily draw the attention of those who had left it open."

"It may be the window was not shut at once," replied the young reporter. "But if he did shut the window it was because of the bend in the gravel path a dozen yards from the pavilion and on account of the three oaks that are growing at that spot."

"What do you mean by that?" asked M. Darzac, who had followed us and listened with almost breathless attention to all that Roulettable had said. "I'll explain all to you later on, monsieur, when I think the moment to be ripe for doing so. But I don't think I have anything of more importance to say on this affair if my hypothesis is justified."

"And what is your hypothesis?" "You will never know if it does not turn out to be the truth. It is of much too grave a nature to speak of it so long as it continues to be only a hypothesis."

"Have you at least some idea as to who the murderer is?" "No, monsieur, I don't know who the murderer is. But don't be afraid, M. Robert Darzac. I shall know."

I could not but observe that M. Darzac was deeply moved, and I suspected that Roulettable's confident assertion was not pleasing to him. Why, I asked myself, if he was really afraid that the murderer should be discovered, was he helping the reporter to find him? My young friend seemed to have received the same impression, for he said bluntly:

"M. Darzac, don't you want me to find out who the murderer was?" "Oh, I should like to kill him with my own hand!" cried Mlle. Stangerson's fiancée, with a vehemence that amazed me.

"I believe you," said Roulettable gravely. "But you have not answered my question."

We were passing by the thicket of which the young reporter had spoken to us a minute before. I entered it and pointed out evident traces of a

man who had been hidden there. Roulettable once more was right.

"Yes, yes," he said. "We have to do with a thing of flesh and blood, who uses the same means that we do. It'll all come out on those lines."

Having said this, he asked me for the paper pattern of the footprint which he had given me to take care of and applied it to a very clear footprint behind the thicket. "Aha!" he said, rising.

I thought he was now going to trace back the track of the murderer's footmarks to the vestibule window, but he led us instead far to the left, saying that it was useless ferreting in the mud and that he was sure now of the road taken by the murderer.

"He went along the wall to the hedge and dry ditch, over which he jumped. See, just in front of the little path leading to the lake, that was his nearest way to get out."

"How do you know he went to the lake?"

"Because Frederic Larsan has not quitted the borders of it since this morning. There must be some important marks there."

A few minutes later we reached the lake. It was a little sheet of marshy water, surrounded by reeds, on which floated some dead water lily leaves. The great Fred may have seen us approaching, but we probably interested him very little, for he took hardly any notice of us and continued to be stirring with his cane something which we could not see.

"Look!" said Roulettable. "Here again are the footmarks of the escaping man. They skirt the lake here and finally disappear just before this path, which leads to the high road to Epinay. The man continued his flight to Paris."

"What makes you think that?" I asked, "since these footmarks are not continued on the path?" "What makes me think that? Why, these footprints, which I expected to find!" he cried, pointing to the sharply outlined imprint of a neat boot. "See!" And he called to Frederic Larsan.

"M. Fred, these neat footprints seem to have been made since the discovery of the crime."

"Yes, young man, yes. They have been carefully made," replied Fred without raising his head. "You see, there are steps that come and steps that go back."

"And the man had a bicycle!" cried the reporter.

Here, after looking at the marks of the bicycle, which followed, going and coming, the neat footprints, I thought I might intervene.

"The bicycle explains the disappearance of the murderer's big footprints," I said. "The murderer, with his rough boots, mounted a bicycle. His accomplice, the wearer of the neat boots, had come to wait for him on the edge of the lake with the bicycle. It might be supposed that the murderer was working for the other."

"No, no," replied Roulettable, with a strange smile. "I have expected to find these footmarks from the very beginning. These are not the footmarks of the murderer."

"Then there were two?" "No; there was but one, and he had no accomplice."

"Very good! Very good!" cried Frederic Larsan.

"Look!" continued the young reporter, showing us the ground where it had been disturbed by big and heavy heels. "The man seated himself there and took off his hobnailed boots which he had worn only for the purpose of misleading detection, and then no doubt, taking them away with him, he stood up in his own boots and quietly and slowly regained the high road, holding his bicycle in his hand, for he could not venture to ride it on this rough path. That accounts for the lightness of the impression made by the wheels along it in spite of the softness of the ground. If there had been a man on the bicycle the wheels would have sunk deeply into the soil. No, no; there was but one man there—the murderer on foot."

"Bravo! Bravo!" cried Fred again. And, coming suddenly toward us and planting himself in front of M. Robert Darzac, he said to him:

"If we had a bicycle here we might demonstrate the correctness of the young man's reasoning, M. Robert Darzac. Do you know whether there is one at the chateau?"

"No," replied M. Darzac, "there is not. I took mine four days ago to Paris, the last time I came to the chateau before the crime."

"That's a pity," replied Fred very coldly. Then, turning to Roulettable, he said: "If we go on at this rate we'll both come to the same conclusion. Have you any idea as to how the murderer got away from the yellow room?"

"Yes," said my young friend, "I have an idea."

"Yes, this afternoon. He is going to summon before the magistrate in the laboratory all those who have played any part in this tragedy. It will be very interesting. It is a pity you won't be able to be present."

"I shall be present," said Roulettable confidently.

"Really you are an extraordinary fellow for your age!" replied the detective in a tone not wholly free from irony. "You'd make a wonderful detective—if you didn't follow your instincts and that bump on your forehead. As I have already several times observed, M. Roulettable, you reason too much. You do not allow yourself to be guided by what you have seen. What do you say to the handkerchief full of blood and the red mark of the hand on the wall? You have seen the stain on the wall, but I have only seen the handkerchief."

"Bah!" cried Roulettable. "The murderer was wounded in the hand by Mlle. Stangerson's revolver."

"Defective observation—defective observation! The examination of the handkerchief, the numberless little round scarlet stains, the impression of drops which I found in the tracks of the footprints at the moment when they were made on the floor, prove to me that the murderer was not wounded at all. M. Roulettable, the murderer bled at the nose!"

The great Fred spoke quite seriously. However, I could not refrain from uttering an exclamation.

The reporter looked gravely at Fred, who looked gravely at him. And Fred immediately concluded:

"The man allowed the blood to flow into his hand and handkerchief and dried his hand on the wall. The fact is highly important," he added, "because there is no need of his being wounded in the hand for him to be the murderer."

Roulettable seemed to be thinking deeply. After a moment he said: "There is something—a something, M. Frederic Larsan, much graver than the misuse of logic, the disposition of mind in some detectives which makes them in perfect good faith twist logic to the necessities of their preconceived ideas. Beware of judicial error, M. Fred; it will trip you up."

And, laughing a little in a slightly bantering tone, his hands in his pockets, Roulettable fixed his cunning eyes on the great Fred.

Frederic Larsan silently contemplated the young reporter who pretended to be as wise as himself. Shrugging his shoulders, he bowed to us and moved quickly away, hitting the stones on his path with his stout cane.

Roulettable watched his retreat and then turned toward us, his face joyous and triumphant.

"I shall beat him!" he cried. "I shall beat the great Fred, clever as he is! I shall beat them all!"

And he danced a double shuffle. Suddenly he stopped. My eyes followed his gaze. They were fixed on M. Robert Darzac, who was looking anxiously at the impression left by his feet side by side with the elegant footmarks. There was not a particle of difference between them!

We thought he was about to faint. His eyes, bulging with terror, avoided us, while his right hand, with a spasmodic movement, twitched at the beard that covered his honest, gentle and now despairing face. At length regaining his self-possession, he bowed to us and, remarking in a changed voice that he was obliged to return to the chateau, left us.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Roulettable. He also appeared to be deeply concerned. From his pocketbook he took a piece of white paper, as I had seen him do before, and with his scissors cut out the shape of the neat bootmarks that were on the ground. Then he fitted the new paper pattern with the one he had previously made. The two were exactly alike. Rising, Roulettable exclaimed suddenly, "The deuce!" Presently he added, "Yet I believe M. Robert Darzac to be an honest man." He then led me on the road to the Donjon inn, which we could see on the highway by the side of a small clump of trees.

CHAPTER X.

"We Shall Have to Eat Red Meat—Now."

THE Donjon inn was at least two centuries old, perhaps older. Under its signboard over the threshold a man with a crabbed looking face was standing, seemingly plunged in unpleasant thought, if the wrinkles on his forehead and the knitting of his brows were any indication.

When Roulettable and I were close to him he deigned to see us and asked us in a tone anything but engaging whether we wanted anything. He was no doubt the not very amiable landlord of this charming dwelling place. As we expressed a hope that he would be good enough to furnish us with a breakfast, he assured us that he had no provisions.

"You may take us in," Roulettable said to him. "We are not policemen."

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Siletz Decision Eagerly Awaited.
Portland—A proceeding that is attracting a great deal of attention from homesteaders and others interested in the acquisition of title to the public domain has been in progress all this week before the register and receiver of the Portland land office and several days longer may be required in the hearing of the issues involved.

It appears from the evidence already adduced that settlers in the vicinity of Euchre Mountain, in the former Siletz Indian reservation, commuted their homestead entries at the end of 14 months from the date of filing. The forestry service instituted a contest and is prosecuting the same on behalf of the government, on the ground that the submission of proof at the end of only eight months' residence is evidence of bad faith. If this contention is sustained by the local land office officials and confirmed by the land department, it is claimed that it will have the effect of establishing a dangerous precedent and place many other homestead claims in timbered districts in peril, as it has heretofore been common practice to accept eight months' actual and continuous residence as sufficient to sustain a commutation proof.

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"I'm not afraid of the police. I'm not afraid of any one," replied the man.

I had made my friend understand by a sign that we should do better not to insist; but, being determined to enter the inn, he slipped by the man on the doorstep and was in the common room. "Come on," he said. "It is very comfortable here."

A good fire was blazing in the chimney, and we held our hands to the warmth it sent out. It was a morning in which the approach of winter was unmistakable. The room was a tolerably large one, furnished with two heavy tables, some stools, a counter decorated with rows of bottles of strap and alcohol.

"That's a fine fire for roasting a chicken," said Roulettable.

"We have no chicken, not even a wretched rabbit," said the landlord.

"I know," said my friend slowly. "I know. We shall have to eat red meat now."

"I confess I did not in the least understand what Roulettable meant by what he had said, but the landlord as soon as he heard the words uttered an oath, which he at once stifled, and placed himself at our orders as obediently as M. Robert Darzac had done when he heard Roulettable's mysterious sentence. "The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm nor the garden its brightness."

The man pushed open a little side door and called to somebody to bring him half a dozen eggs and a piece of beefsteak. The commission was quickly executed by a strongly built young woman with beautiful blond hair and large, handsome eyes, who regarded us with curiosity.

The innkeeper said to her roughly: "Get out, and if the Green Man comes don't let me see him!"

She disappeared. Roulettable took the eggs, which had been brought to him in a bowl, and the meat, which was on a dish, placed all carefully beside him in the chimney, unhooked a frying pan and a gridiron and began to beat up our omelet before proceeding to grill our beefsteak. He then ordered two bottles of cider and seemed to take as little notice of our host as our host did of him. The landlord let us do our own cooking and set our table near one of the windows.

Suddenly I heard him mutter:

"Ah, there he is!"

His face had changed, expressing fierce hatred. He went and glued himself to one of the windows, watching the road. There was no need for me to draw Roulettable's attention. He had already left our omelet and had joined the landlord at the window. I went with him.

A man dressed entirely in green velvet, his head covered with a huntsman's cap of the same color, was advancing leisurely, lighting a pipe as he walked. He carried a fowling piece slung at his back. His movements displayed an almost aristocratic ease. He wore eyeglasses and appeared to be about five and forty years of age. His hair as well as his mustache were salt gray. He was remarkably handsome. As he passed near the inn he hesitated, as if asking himself whether or no he should enter it, gave a glance toward us, took a few whiffs at his pipe and then resumed his walk at the same nonchalant pace.

Roulettable and I looked at our host. His flashing eyes, his clinched hands, his trembling lips, told us of his tumultuous feelings.

"He has done well not to come in here today!" he hissed.

"Who is that man?" asked Roulettable, returning to his omelet.

"The Green Man," growled the innkeeper. "Don't you know him? Then all the better for you. He is not an acquaintance to make. Well, he is M. Stangerson's forest keeper."

"You don't appear to like him very much?" asked the reporter, pouring his omelet into the frying pan.

"Nobody likes him, monsieur. He's an upstart, who must once have had a fortune of his own, and he forgives nobody because in order to live he has been compelled to become a servant. A keeper is as much a servant as any other, isn't he? Upon my word, one would say that he is the master of the Glandier and that all the land and woods belong to him.

He'll not let a poor creature eat a morsel of bread on the grass—his grass!"

"Does he often come here?"

"Too often. But I've made him understand that his face doesn't please me, and for a month past he hasn't been here. The Donjon inn has never existed for him! He hasn't had time—been too much engaged in paying court to the landlady of the Three Lilies at Saint Michel. A bad fellow. There isn't an honest man who can bear him. Why, the concierges of the chateau would turn their eyes away from a picture of him!"

"The concierges of the chateau are honest people then?"

"Yes, they are, as true as my name's Mathieu, monsieur. I believe them to be honest."

"Yet they've been arrested?"

"What does that prove? But I don't want to mix myself up in other people's affairs."

"And what do you think of the affair?"

"Of the attack on poor Mlle. Stangerson? A good girl. Much loved everywhere in the country. That's what I think of it—and many things besides. But that's nobody's business."

"Not even mine?" insisted Roulettable.

The innkeeper looked at him sideways and said gruffly:

"Not even yours."

The omelet ready, we sat down at table and were silently eating when the door was pushed open and an old woman, dressed in rags, leaning on a stick, her head nodding, her white hair hanging loosely over her wrinkled forehead, appeared on the threshold.

"Ah, there you are, Mother Angenoux! It's long since we saw you last," said our host.

"I have been very ill, very nearly dying," said the old woman. "If ever you should have any scraps for the Bete du Bon Dieu—"

And she entered, followed by a cat larger than any I had ever believed could exist. The beast looked at us and gave so hopeless a miau that I shuddered. I had never heard so lugubrious a cry.

As if drawn by the cat's cry a man followed the old woman in. It was the Green Man. He saluted by raising his hand to his cap and seated himself at a table near to ours.

"A glass of cider, Daddy Mathieu," he said.

As the Green Man entered Daddy Mathieu had started violently, but visibly mastering himself he said:

"I've not more cider. I served the last bottles to these gentlemen."

"Then give me a glass of white wine," said the Green Man without showing the least surprise.

"I've no more white wine—no more anything," said Daddy Mathieu surlily.

"How is Mme. Mathieu?"

"Quite well, thank you."

So the young woman with the large, tender eyes which we had just seen was the wife of this repugnant and brutal rustic whose jealousy seemed to embitter his mental ugliness.

Stammering behind him, the innkeeper left the room. Mother Angenoux was still standing, leaning on her stick, the cat at her feet.

"You've been ill, Mother Angenoux? Is that why we have not seen you for the last week?" asked the Green Man.

"Yes M. Keeper. I have been able to get up but three times to go to pray to St. Genevieve, our good patroness, and the rest of the time I have been lying on my bed. There was no one to care for me but the Bete du Bon Dieu!"

"Did she not leave you?"

"Neither by day nor by night."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As I am of paradise."

"Then how was it, Mme. Angenoux, that all through the night of the murder nothing but the cry of the Bete du Bon Dieu was heard?"

Mother Angenoux planted herself in front of the forest keeper and struck the floor with her stick.

"I don't know anything about it," she said. "But shall I tell you some thing? There are no two cats in the world that cry like that. Well, on the night of the murder I also heard the cry of the Bete du Bon Dieu outside, and yet she was on my knees and did not mew once, I swear. I crossed my

self when I heard that, as if I had heard the devil!"

I looked at the keeper when he put the last question, and I am much mistaken if I did not detect an evil smile on his lips. At that moment the noise of loud quarrelling reached us. We even thought we heard a dull sound of blows, as if some one was being beaten. The Green Man quickly rose and hurried to the door by the side of the fireplace, but it was opened by the landlord, who appeared and said to the keeper:

"Don't alarm yourself, monsieur. It is my wife. She has the tooth-ache." And he laughed. "Here, Mother Angenoux; here are some scraps for your cat."

He held out a packet to the old woman, who took it eagerly and went out of the door, closely followed by her cat.

"Then you won't serve me?" asked the Green Man.

Daddy Mathieu's face was placid and no longer retained its expression of hatred.

"I've nothing for you—nothing for you. Take yourself off."

The Green Man quietly refilled his pipe, lit it, bowed to us and went out. No sooner was he over the threshold than Daddy Mathieu slammed the door after him, and turning toward us, with eyes blood hot and frothing at the mouth, he hissed to us, shaking his clinched fist at the door he had just shut on the man he evidently hated:

"I don't know who you are who tell me 'We shall have to eat red meat now,' but if it will interest you to know it—that man is the murderer!"

With which words Daddy Mathieu immediately left us. Roulettable returned toward the fireplace and said:

"Now we'll grill our steak. How do you like the cider? It's a little tart, but I like it."

We saw no more of Daddy Mathieu that day, and absolute silence reigned in the inn when we left it after placing 5 francs on the table in payment for our feast.

Roulettable at once set off on a three mile walk around Professor Stangerson's estate. He halted for some ten minutes at the corner of a narrow road black with soot near to some charcoal burners' huts in the forest of St. Genevieve, which touches on the road from Epinay to Corbeil, to tell me that the murderer had certainly passed that way before entering the grounds and concealing himself in the little clump of trees.

"You don't think, then, that the keeper knows anything of it?" I asked.

"We shall see that later," he replied.

"For the present I'm not interested in what the landlord said about the man. The landlord hates him. I didn't take you to breakfast at the Donjon inn for the sake of the Green Man."

Then Roulettable, with great precaution, guided, followed by me, toward the little building which, standing near the park gate, served for the home of the concierges who had been arrested that morning. With the skill of an expert he got into the lodge by an upper window which had been left open and returned ten minutes later. He said only "Ah!" a word which in his mouth signified many things.

We were about to take the road leading to the chateau when a considerable stir at the park gate attracted our attention. A carriage had arrived, and some people had come from the chateau to meet it. Roulettable pointed out to me a gentleman who descended from it.

"That's the chief of the Paris police," he said. "Now we shall see what Frederic Larsan has up his sleeve and whether he is so much cleverer than anybody else."

The carriage of the chief was followed by three or four vehicles containing reporters, who were also desirous of entering the park. But two gendarmes stationed at the gate had evidently received orders to refuse admission to anybody. The chief of police calmed their impatience by undertaking to furnish to the press that evening all the information he could give that would not interfere with the judicial inquiry.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Read the advertisements.