

# The Mystery of The Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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## CHAPTER XI.

In Which Frederic Larsan Explains How the Murderer Was Able to Get Out of the Yellow Room.

AMONG the mass of papers, legal documents, memoirs and extracts from newspapers which I have collected relating to the mystery of the yellow room there is one very interesting piece. It is a detail of the famous examination which took place that afternoon in the laboratory of Professor Stangerson before the chief of police. This narrative is from the pen of M. Maleine, the registrar, who, like the examining magistrate, had spent some of his leisure time in the pursuit of literature.

### THE REGISTRAR'S NARRATIVE.

The examining magistrate and I, says M. Maleine, found ourselves in the yellow room in the company of the builder who had constructed the pavilion after Professor Stangerson's designs. He had a workman with him, M. de Marquet had had the walls laid entirely bare—that is to say, he had had them stripped of the paper which had decorated them. Blows with a pick here and there satisfied us of the nonexistence of any sort of opening. The floor and the ceiling were thoroughly sounded. We found nothing. There was nothing to be found. M. de Marquet appeared to be delighted and never ceased repeating:

"What a case! What a case! We shall never know, you'll see, how the murderer was able to get out of this room!"

Then suddenly, with a radiant face, he called to the officer in charge of the gendarmes.

"Go to the chateau," he said, "and request M. Stangerson and M. Robert Darzac to come to me in the laboratory, also Daddy Jacques, and let your men bring here the two concierges."

Five minutes later all were assembled in the laboratory. The chief of police, who had arrived at the Glandier, joined us at that moment. I was seated at M. Stangerson's desk ready for work when M. de Marquet made us the following little speech, as original as it was unexpected:

"With your permission, gentlemen, as examinations lead to nothing, we will for once abandon the old system of interrogation. I will not have you brought before me one by one, but we will all remain here as we are—M. Stangerson, M. Robert Darzac, Daddy Jacques and the two concierges, the chief of police, the registrar and myself. We shall all be on the same footing. The concierges may for the moment forget that they have been arrested. We are going to confer together. We are on the spot where the crime was committed. We have nothing else to discuss but the crime. So let us discuss it freely, intelligently or otherwise, so long as we speak just what is in our minds. There need be no formality or method, since this won't help us in any way."

Then, passing before me, he said in a low voice:

"What do you think of that, eh? What a scene! Could you have thought of that? I'll make a little piece out of it for the vaudeville." And he rubbed his hands with glee.

I turned my eyes on M. Stangerson. The hope he had received from the doctor's latest reports, who had stated that Mlle. Stangerson might recover from her wounds, had not been able to efface from his noble features the marks of the great sorrow that was upon him. He had believed his daughter to be dead, and he was still broken by that belief. His clear, soft blue eyes expressed infinite sorrow.

"Now, M. Stangerson," said M. de Marquet, with somewhat of an important air, "place yourself exactly where you were when Mlle. Stangerson left you to go to her chamber."

M. Stangerson rose and, standing at a certain distance from the door of the yellow room, said in an even voice and without the least trace of emphasis, a voice which I can only describe as a dead voice:

"I was here. About 11 o'clock, after I had made a brief chemical experiment at the furnaces of the laboratory, needing all the space behind me, I had my desk moved here by Daddy Jacques, who spent the evening in cleaning some of my apparatus. My daughter had been working at the same desk with me. When it was her time to leave she rose, kissed me and bade Daddy Jacques good night. She had to pass behind my desk and the door to enter her chamber, and she could do this only with some difficulty—that is to say, I was very near the place where the crime occurred later."

"And the desk?" I asked, obeying, in thus mixing myself in the conversation, the express orders of my chief.

"As soon as you heard the cry of 'Murder' followed by the revolver shots, what became of the desk?"

Daddy Jacques answered:

"We pushed it back against the wall here, close to where it is at the present moment, so as to be able to get at the door at once."

I followed up my reasoning, to which, however, I attached but little

importance, regarding it as only a weak hypothesis, with another question.

"Might not a man in the room, the desk being so near to the door, by stooping and slipping under the desk have left it unobserved?"

"You are forgetting," interrupted M. Stangerson wearily, "that my daughter had locked and bolted the door, that the door had remained fastened, that we vainly tried to force it open when we heard the noise and that we were at the door while the struggle between the murderer and my poor child was going on immediately after we heard her stifled cries."

I rose from my seat and once more examined the door with the greatest care. Then I returned to my place, with a despairing gesture.

"If the lower panel of the door," I said, "could be removed without the whole door being necessarily open the problem would be solved. But unfortunately that last hypothesis is untenable after an examination of the door. It's of oak, solid and massive. You can see that quite plainly in spite of the injury done in the attempt to burst it open."

"Ah," cried Daddy Jacques. "It is an old and solid door that was brought from the chateau. They don't make such doors now. We had to use this bar of iron to get it open, all four of us, for the concierge, brave woman she is, helped us. It pains me to find them both in prison now."

Daddy Jacques had no sooner uttered these words of pity and protestation than tears and lamentations broke out from the concierges. I never saw two accused people crying more bitterly. I was extremely disgusted. Even if they were innocent, I could not understand how they could behave like that in the face of misfortune. A dignified bearing at such times is better than tears and groans, which most often are feigned.

"Now, then, enough of that sniveling," cried M. de Marquet, "and in your interest tell us what you were doing under the windows of the pavilion at the time your mistress was being attacked, for you were close to the pavilion when Daddy Jacques met you."

"We were coming to help!" they whined.

"If we could only lay hands on the murderer he'd never taste bread again!" the woman gurgled between her sobs.

As before, we were unable to get two connecting thoughts out of them. They persisted in their denials and swore by heaven and all the saints that they were in bed when they heard the sound of the revolver shot.

"It was not one, but two shots, that were fired. You see you are lying. If you had heard one you would have heard the other."

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur, it was the second shot we heard. We were sound asleep when the first shot was fired."

"Two shots were fired," said Daddy Jacques. "I am certain that all the cartridges were in my revolver. We found afterward that two had been exploded, and we heard two shots behind the door. Was not that so, M. Stangerson?"

"Yes," replied the professor, "there were two shots—one dull and the other sharp and ringing."

"Why do you persist in lying?" cried M. de Marquet, turning to the concierges. "Do you think the police are the fools you are? Everything points to the fact that you were out of doors and near the pavilion at the time of the tragedy. What were you doing there? So far as I am concerned," he said, turning to M. Stangerson, "I can only explain the escape of the murderer on the assumption of help from these two accomplices. As soon as the door was forced open and while you, M. Stangerson, were occupied with your unfortunate child the concierge and his wife facilitated the flight of the murderer, who, screening himself behind them, reached the window in the vestibule and sprang out of it into the park. The concierge closed the window after him and fastened the blinds, which certainly could not have closed and fastened of themselves. That is the conclusion I have arrived at. If any one here has any other idea let him state it."

M. Stangerson intervened:

"What you say was impossible. I do not believe either in the guilt or in the connivance of my concierges, though I cannot understand what they were doing in the park at that late hour of the night. I say it was impossible, because Mme. Bernier held the lamp and did not move from the threshold of the room, because I as soon as the door was forced open threw myself on my knees beside my daughter, and no one could have left or entered the room by the door without passing over her body and forcing his way by me! Daddy Jacques and the concierge had but to cast a glance around the chamber and under the bed, as I had done on entering, to see that there was nobody in it but my daughter lying on the floor."

"What do you think, M. Darzac?" asked the magistrate.

M. Darzac replied that he had no opinion to express.

M. Dax, the chief of police, who so far had been listening and examining the room, at length deigned to open his lips:

"While search is being made for the criminal we had better try to find out the motive for the crime. That will advance us a little," he said. Turning toward M. Stangerson, he continued in the even, intelligent tone indicative of a strong character, "I understand that mademoiselle was shortly to have been married?"

The professor looked sadly at M. Robert Darzac.

"With my friend here, whom I should have been happy to call my son—with M. Robert Darzac."

"Mlle. Stangerson is much better and is rapidly recovering from her wounds. The marriage is simply delayed, is it not, monsieur?" insisted the chief of police.

"I hope so."

"What! Is there any doubt about that?"

M. Stangerson did not answer. M. Robert Darzac seemed agitated. I saw that his hand trembled as it fingered his watch chain. M. Dax coughed, as did M. de Marquet. Both were evidently embarrassed.

"You understand, M. Stangerson," he said, "that in an affair so perplexing as this we cannot neglect anything. We must know all, even the smallest and seemingly most futile thing concerning the victim, information apparently the most insignificant. Why do you doubt that this marriage will take place? You expressed a hope, but the hope implies a doubt. Why do you doubt?"

M. Stangerson made a visible effort to recover himself.

"Yes, monsieur," he said at length. "You are right. It will be best that you should know something which if I concealed it might appear to be of importance. M. Darzac agrees with me in this."

M. Darzac, whose pallor at that moment seemed to me to be altogether abnormal, made a sign of assent. I gathered he was unable to speak.

"I want you to know, then," continued M. Stangerson, "that my daughter has sworn never to leave me and adheres firmly to her oath in spite of all my prayers and all that I have argued to induce her to marry. We have known M. Robert Darzac many years. He loves my child, and I believed that she loved him, because she only recently consented to this marriage, which I desire with all my heart. I am an old man, monsieur, and it was a happy hour to me when I knew that after I had gone she would have at her side one who loved her and who would help her in continuing our common labors. I love and esteem M. Darzac both for his greatness of heart and for his devotion to science. But two days before the tragedy, for I know not what reason, my daughter declared to me that she would never marry M. Darzac."

[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 "tete 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 blood stains 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.

IV—Shortly before the attack the announcement of the engagement of Mlle. Stangerson and M. Darzac had been made.

V—Rouletabille and Sainclair are informed by Frederic Larsan, a famous detective working on the case, that the

concierges have been arrested. Meeting M. Darzac, Rouletabille utters a mystic sentence. "The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm nor the garden its brightness," which seems to terrify Darzac.

VI—The arrest of the concierges is due to the fact that they were seemingly near the pavilion when the crime was committed. Their denial of guilt is doubted. Rouletabille and Darzac become friendly. A mutton bone such as is used by French assassins, has been found in Mlle. Stangerson's room and Rouletabille finds in one of the professor's retorts a partly burned paper bearing the strange sentence about the presbytery.

VII—In the yellow room Rouletabille finds a woman's hair, which he declares to be important evidence.

VIII—Mlle. Stangerson tells of her movements on the day of the attack. She feared something of the sort, she says, after seeing shadows pass in front of her window and therefore borrowed Daddy Jacques' revolver.

IX—Rouletabille and Larsan clash in their theory of the case. The latter tries to cast suspicion on Darzac.

X—At the Donjon Inn Rouletabille gains admission for himself and Sainclair by saying to the innkeeper, Daddy Mathieu, "We shall have to eat red meat—now." The landlord is jealous of his wife's friendliness with the green man, forest keeper for M. Stangerson.

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