

The Mystery of The Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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CHAPTER XX Continued.

Like Larsen, Rance thought that Robert Darzac had something to do with the matter. He did not mention him by name, but there was no room to doubt whom he meant. He told us he was aware of the efforts young Roulettable was making to unravel the tangled skein of the yellow room mystery. He explained that M. Stangerson had related to him all that had taken place in the inexplicable gallery. He several times expressed his regret at M. Darzac's absence from the chateau on all these occasions and thought that M. Darzac had done cleverly in allying himself with M. Joseph Roulettable, who could not fail sooner or later to discover the murderer. He spoke the last sentence with unconcealed irony. Then he rose, bowed to us and left the inn.

Roulettable watched him through the window.

"An odd fish, that!" he said. "Do you think he'll pass the night at the Glandier?" I asked.

To my amazement the young reporter answered that it was a matter of entire indifference to him whether he did or not.

As to how we spent our time during the afternoon, all I need say is that Roulettable led me to the grotto of Sainte Genevieve and all the time talked of every subject but the one with which we were most interested. Toward evening I was surprised to find Roulettable making none of the preparations I had expected him to make. I spoke to him about it when night had come on and we were once more in his room. He replied that all his arrangements had already been made, and this time the murderer would not get away from him.

I expressed some doubt on this, reminding him of his disappearance in the gallery, and suggested that the same phenomenon might occur again. He answered that he hoped it would. He desired nothing more. I did not insist, knowing by experience how useless that would have been. He told me that, with the help of the concierges, the chateau had since early dawn been watched in such a way that nobody could approach it without his knowing it and that he had no concern for those who might have left it and remained without.

It was then 6 o'clock by his watch. Rising, he made a sign to me to follow him, and, without in the least trying to conceal his movements or the sound of his footsteps, he led me through the gallery. We reached the "right" gallery and came to the landing place, which we crossed. We then continued our way in the gallery of the left wing, passing Professor Stangerson's apartment.

At the far end of the gallery, before coming to the donjon, is the room occupied by Arthur Rance. We knew that, because we had seen him at the window looking on to the court. The door of the room opens on to the end of the gallery, exactly facing the east window, at the extremity of the "right" gallery, where Roulettable had placed Daddy Jacques, and commands an uninterrupted view of the gallery from end to end of the chateau.

"That 'off turning' gallery," said Roulettable, "I reserve for myself. When I tell you you'll come and take your place here."

And he made me enter a little dark, triangular closet built in a bend of the wall to the left of the door of Arthur Rance's room. From this recess I could see all that occurred in the gallery as well as if I had been standing in front of Arthur Rance's door, and I could watch that door too. The door of the closet, which was to be my place of observation, was fitted with panels of transparent glass. In the gallery, where all the lamps had been lit, it was quite light. In the closet, however, it was quite dark. It was a splendid place from which to observe and remain unobserved.

We returned along the gallery. On reaching the door of Mlle. Stangerson's apartment it opened from a push given by the steward who was waiting at the dinner table. (M. Stangerson had for the last three days dined with his daughter in the drawing room on the first floor.) As the door remained open, we distinctly saw Mlle. Stangerson, taking advantage of the steward's absence and while her father was stooping to pick up something he had let fall, pour the contents of a vial into M. Stangerson's glass.

CHAPTER XXI.

On the Watch.

THE act, which staggered me, did not appear to affect Roulettable much. We returned to the room, and, without even referring to what we had seen, he gave me his final instructions for the night. First we were to go to dinner. After dinner I was to take my stand in the dark closet and wait there as long as it was necessary—to look out for what might happen.

"If you see anything before I do," he explained, "you must let me know. If the man gets into the 'right' gal-

lery by any other way than the 'off turning' gallery you will see him before I shall, because you have a view along the whole length of the 'right' gallery, while I can only command a view of the 'off turning' gallery. All you need do to let me know is to undo the cord holding the curtain of the 'right' gallery window nearest to the dark closet. The curtain will fall of itself and immediately leave a square of shadow where previously there had been a square of light. To do this you need but stretch your hand out of the closet. I shall understand your signal perfectly."

"And then?"

"Then you will see me coming round the corner of the 'off turning' gallery."

"What am I to do then?"

"You will immediately come toward me, behind the man, but I shall already be upon him and shall have seen his face."

I attempted a feeble smile.

"Why do you smile? Well, you may smile while you have the chance, but I swear you'll have no time for that a few hours from now."

"And if the man escapes?"

"So much the better," said Roulettable coolly. "I don't want to capture him. He may take himself off any way he can. I will let him go after I have seen his face. That's all I want. I shall know afterward what to do, so that as far as Mlle. Stangerson is concerned he shall be dead to her even though he continues to live. If I took him alive Mlle. Stangerson and Robert Darzac would perhaps never forgive me. And I wish to retain their good will and respect."

"Seeing, as I have just now seen, Mlle. Stangerson pour a narcotic into her father's glass, so that he might not be awake to interrupt the conversation she is going to have with her assistant, you can imagine she would not be grateful to me if I brought the man of the yellow room and the inexplicable gallery bound and gagged to her father. I realize now that if I am to save the unhappy lady I must silence the man and not capture him. To kill a human being is no small thing. Besides, that's not my business unless the man himself makes it my business. On the other hand, to render him forever silent without the lady's assent and confidence is to act on one's own initiative and assume a knowledge of everything with nothing for a basis. Fortunately, my friend, I have guessed—no, I have reasoned it all out. All that I ask of the man who is coming tonight is to bring me his face so that it may enter—"

"Into the clinic?"

"Exactly! And his face won't surprise me!"

"But I thought you saw his face on the night when you sprang into the chamber?"

"Only imperfectly. The candle was on the floor, and his beard—"

"Will he wear his beard this evening?"

"I think I can say for certain that he will. But the gallery is light and now I know—or at least my brain knows—and my eyes will see."

"If we are here only to see him and let him escape, why are we armed?"

"Because, if the man of the yellow room and the inexplicable gallery knows that I know, he is capable of doing anything! We should then have to defend ourselves."

"And you are sure he will come tonight?"

"As sure as that you are standing there! This morning, at half past 10 o'clock, Mlle. Stangerson, in the clearest way in the world, arranged to have no nurses tonight. She gave them leave of absence for twenty-four hours, under some plausible pretext, and did not desire anybody to be with her but her father, while they are away. Her father, who is to sleep in the boudoir, has gladly consented to the arrangement. Darzac's departure and what he told me, as well as the extraordinary precautions Mlle. Stangerson is taking to be alone tonight, leaves me no room for doubt. She has prepared the way for the coming of the man whom Darzac dreads."

"And what we saw her do was done to send her father to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Then there are but two of us for tonight's work?"

"Four: the concierge and his wife will watch at all hazards. I don't set much value on them before, but the concierge may be useful after, if there's to be any killing!"

"Then you think there may be?"

"If he wishes it."

"Why haven't you brought in Daddy Jacques? Have you made no use of him today?"

"No," replied Roulettable sharply. "I kept silence for a while; then, anxious to know his thoughts, I asked him point blank:—"

"Why not tell Arthur Rance? He may be of great assistance to us?"

"Oh," said Roulettable crossly, "then you want to let everybody into Mlle. Stangerson's secrets? Come, let us go to dinner. It is time. This evening we dine in Frederic Larsen's room—at least if he is not on the heels of Darzac. He sticks to him like a leech. But, anyhow, if he is not there now I am quite sure he will be to-

night. He's the one I am going to knock over!"

"At this moment we heard a noise in the room near us."

"It must be he," said Roulettable. "I forgot to ask you," I said, "if we are to make any allusion to tonight's business when we are with this policeman. I take it we are not. Is that so?"

"Evidently. We are going to operate alone, on our own personal account."

"So that all the glory will be ours?" Roulettable laughed.

We dined with Frederic Larsen in his room. He told us he had just come in and invited us to be seated at table. We ate our dinner in the best of humors, and I had no difficulty in appreciating the feelings of certainty which both Roulettable and Larsen felt. Roulettable told the great Fred that I had come on a chance visit and that he had asked me to stay and help him in the heavy batch of writing he had to get through for the Epoque.

I was going back to Paris, he said, by the 11 o'clock train, taking his copy, which took a story form, recounting the principal episodes in the mysteries of the Glandier. Larsen smiled at the explanation like a man who was not fooled and politely refrained from making the slightest remark on matters which did not concern him.

With infinite precautions as to the words they used and even as to the tones of their voices, Larsen and Roulettable discussed for a long time Mr. Arthur Rance's appearance at the chateau and his past in America, about which they expressed a desire to know more, at any rate so far as his relations with the Stangersons. At one time Larsen, who appeared to me to be unwell, said, with an effort:—

"I think, M. Roulettable, that we're not much more to do at the Glandier and that we shan't sleep here many more nights."

"I think so, too, M. Fred."

"Then you think the conclusion of the matter has been reached?"

"I think, indeed, that we have nothing more to find out," replied Roulettable.

"Have you found your criminal?" asked Larsen.

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"So have I," said Roulettable.

"Can it be the same man?"

"I don't know if you have swerved from your original idea," said the young reporter. Then he added with emphasis, "M. Darzac is an honest man!"

"Are you sure of that?" asked Larsen.

"Well, I am sure he is not. So it's a fight, then?"

"Yes, it is a fight. But I shall beat you, M. Frederic Larsen."

"Youth never doubts anything," said the great Fred laughingly and held out his hand to me by way of conclusion.

Roulettable's answer came like an echo:—

"Not anything!"

Suddenly Larsen, who had risen to wish us good night, pressed both his hands to his chest and staggered. He was obliged to lean on Roulettable for support and to save himself from falling.

"Oh, oh!" he cried. "What is the matter with me? Have I been poisoned?"

He looked at us with haggard eyes. We questioned him vainly. He did not answer us. He had sunk into an armchair, and we could not get a word from him. We were extremely distressed, both on his account and on our own, for we had partaken of all the dishes he had eaten. He seemed to be out of pain, but his heavy head had fallen on his shoulder and his eyelids were tightly closed. Roulettable bent over him, listening for the beatings of his heart.

My friend's face, however, when he stood up, was as calm as it had been a moment before agitated.

"He is asleep," he said.

He led me to his chamber, after closing Larsen's room.

"The drug?" I asked. "Does Mlle. Stangerson wish to put everybody to sleep tonight?"

"Perhaps," replied Roulettable. But I could see he was thinking of something else.

"But what about us?" I exclaimed.

"How do we know that we have not been drugged?"

"Do you feel indisposed?" Roulettable asked me coolly.

"Not in the least."

"Do you feel any inclination to go to sleep?"

"None whatever."

"Well, then, my friend, smoke this excellent cigar."

And he handed me a choice Havana, one M. Darzac had given him, while he lit his brierwood—his eternal brierwood.

We remained in his room until about 10 o'clock without a word passing between us. Buried in an armchair, Roulettable sat and smoked steadily, his brow in thought and a faraway look in his eyes. On the stroke of 10 he took off his boots and signed me to do the same. Standing in our socks, he said in so low a tone that I guessed rather than heard the word:—

"Revolver."

I drew my revolver from my jacket

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pocket.

"Cook it," he said. I did as he directed.

Then, moving toward the door of his room, he opened it with infinite precaution; it made no sound. We were in the "off turning" gallery. Roulettable made another sign to me which I understood to mean that I was to take up my post in the dark closet.

When I was some distance from him he rejoined me and embraced me, and then I saw him, with the same precaution, return to his room. Astonished by his embrace and somewhat disquieted by it, I arrived at the "right" gallery without difficulty, crossing the landing place and reaching the dark closet.

Before entering it I examined the curtain cord of the window and found that I had only to release it from its fastening with my fingers for the curtain to fall by its own weight and hide the square of light from Roulettable, the signal agreed upon. The sound of a footstep made me halt before Arthur Rance's door. He was not yet in bed, then! How was it that, being in the chateau, he had not dined with M. Stangerson and his daughter? I had not seen him at table with them at the moment when we looked in.

I retired into the dark closet. I found myself perfectly situated. I could see along the whole length of the gallery. Nothing, absolutely nothing, could pass there without my seeing it.

I waited about an hour, and during all that time I saw nothing unusual. The rain, which had begun to come down strongly toward 9 o'clock, had now ceased.

My friend had told me that probably nothing would occur before mid night or 1 o'clock in the morning. It was not more than half past 11, however, when I heard the door of Arthur Rance's room open very slowly. The door remained open for a minute which seemed to me a long time. As it opened into the gallery—that is to say, outward—I could not see what was passing in the room behind the door.

At that moment I noticed a strange sound, three times repeated, coming from the park. Ordinarily I should not have attached any more importance to it than I would to the noise of cats on the roof. But the third time the mew was so sharp and penetrating that I remembered what I had heard about the cry of the Bete du Bon Dieu. As the cry had accompanied all the events at the Glandier I could not refrain from shuddering at the thought.

Directly afterward I saw a man appear on the outside of the door and close it after him. At first I could not recognize him, for his back was toward me, and he was bending over a rather bulky package. When he had closed the door and picked up the package, he turned toward the dark closet, and then I saw who he was. He was the forest keeper, the Green Man. He was wearing the same costume that he had worn when I first saw him on the road in front of the Donjon Inn. There was no doubt about his being the keeper. As the cry of the Bete du Bon Dieu came for the third time he put down the package and went to the second window, counting from the dark closet. I dared not risk making any movement, fearing I might betray my presence.

Arrived at the window, he peered out on to the park. The night was now light, the moon showing at intervals. The Green Man raised his arms twice, making signs which I did not understand; then, leaving the window, he again took up his package and moved along the gallery toward the landing place.

Roulettable had instructed me to undo the curtain cord when I saw anything. Was Roulettable expecting this? It was not my business to question. All I had to do was obey instructions. I unfastened the window cord, my heart beating the while as if it would burst. The man reached the landing place, but, to my utter surprise—I had expected to see him continue to pass along the gallery—I saw him descend the stairs leading to the vestibule.

What was I to do? I looked stupidly at the heavy curtain which had shut

the light from the window. The signal had been given, and I did not see Roulettable appear at the corner of the "off turning" gallery. Nobody appeared. I was exceedingly perplexed. Half an hour passed, an age to me. What was I to do now, even if I saw something? The signal once given, I could not give it a second time. To venture into the gallery might upset all Roulettable's plans. After all, I had nothing to reproach myself with, and if something had happened that my friend had not expected he could only blame himself. Unable to be of any further assistance to him by means of a signal, I left the dark closet and, still in my socks, picked my steps and made my way to the "off turning" gallery.

There was no one there. I went to the door of Roulettable's room and listened. I could hear nothing. I knocked gently. There was no answer. I turned the door handle and the door opened. I entered. Roulettable lay extended at full length on the floor.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Incredible Body.

I BENT in great anxiety over the body of the reporter and had the joy to find that he was deeply sleeping, the same unhealthily sleep that I had seen fall upon Frederic Larsen. He had succumbed to the influence of the same drug that had been mixed with our food. How was it, then, that I also had not been overcome by it? I reflected that the drug must have been put into our wine, because that would explain my condition. I never drink when eating. Naturally inclined to obesity, I am restricted to a dry diet. I shook Roulettable, but could not succeed in waking him. This, no doubt, was the work of Mlle. Stangerson.

She had certainly thought it necessary to guard herself against this young man as well as her father. I recalled that the steward in serving us had recommended an excellent Chablis which, no doubt, had come from the professor's table.

More than a quarter of an hour passed. I resolved under the pressing circumstances to resort to extreme measures. I threw a pitcher of cold water over Roulettable's head. He opened his eyes. I beat his face and raised him up. I felt him stiffen in my arms and heard him murmur, "Go on, go on, but don't make any noise." I pinched him and shook him until he was able to stand up. "We were saved!"

"They sent me to sleep," he said.

"Ah, I passed an awful quarter of an hour before giving way. But it is over now. Don't leave me."

He had no sooner uttered those words than we were thrilled by a frightful cry that rang through the chateau, a veritable death cry.

"Malheur!" roared Roulettable. "We shall be too late!"

He tried to rush to the door, but he was too dazed and fell against the wall. I was already in the gallery, revolver in hand, rushing like a madman toward Mlle. Stangerson's room. The moment I arrived at the intersection of the "off turning" gallery and the "right" gallery I saw a figure leaving her apartment, which in a few strides had reached the landing place.

I was not master of myself. I fired. The report from the revolver made a deafening noise, but the man continued his flight down the stairs. I ran behind him, shouting: "Stop! Stop, or I will kill you!" As I rushed after him down the stairs I came face to face with Arthur Rance coming from the left wing of the chateau, yelling: "What is it? What is it?" We arrived almost at the same time at the foot of the staircase. The window of the vestibule was open. We distinctly saw the form of a man running away. Instinctively we fired our revolvers in his direction. He was not more than ten paces in front of us. He staggered, and we thought he was going to fall. We had sprung out of the window, but the man dashed off with renewed vigor. I was in my socks, and the American was barefooted. There being no hope of overtaking him, we fired our last cartridges at him. But he still kept on running, going along the right side of the court toward the

end of the right wing of the chateau, which had no other outlet than the door of the little chamber occupied by the forest keeper.

The man, though he was evidently wounded by our bullets, was now twenty yards ahead of us. Suddenly, behind us, and above our heads, a window in the gallery opened and we heard the voice of Roulettable crying out desperately:—

"Fire, Bernier! Fire!"

At that moment the clear moonlight night was further lit by a broad flash. By its light we saw Daddy Bernier with his gun on the threshold of the donjon door.

He had taken good aim. The shadow fell. But as it had reached the end of the right wing of the chateau, it fell on the other side of the angle of the building—that is to say, we saw it about to fall, but not the actual sinking to the ground. Bernier, Arthur Rance and myself reached the other side twenty seconds later. The shadow was lying dead at our feet.

Aroused from his lethargy by the cries and reports, Larsen opened the window of his chamber and called out to us. Roulettable, quite awake now, joined us at the same moment, and I cried out to him:—

"He is dead—is dead!"

"So much the better," he said. "Take him into the vestibule of the chateau." Then as if on second thought, he said: "No—no! Let us put him in his own room."

Roulettable knocked at the door. Nobody answered. Naturally, this did not surprise me.

"He is evidently not there, otherwise he would have come out," said the reporter. "Let us carry him to the vestibule then."

Since reaching the dead shadow, a thick cloud had covered the moon and darkened the night, so that we were unable to make out the features. Daddy Jacques, who had now joined us, helped us to carry the body into the vestibule, where we laid it down on the lower step of the stairs. On the way, I had felt my hands wet from the warm blood flowing from the wounds.

Daddy Jacques flew to the kitchen and returned with a lantern. He held it close to the face of the dead shadow, and we recognized the keeper, the man called by the landlord of the Donjon Inn the Green Man, whom an hour earlier I had seen come out of Arthur Rance's chamber carrying a parcel. But what I had seen I could only tell Roulettable later when we were alone.

Roulettable and Frederic Larsen experienced a cruel disappointment at the result of the night's adventure. They could only look in consternation and stupefaction at the body of the Green Man.

Daddy Jacques showed a stupidly sorrowful face and with silly lamentations kept repeating that we were mistaken—the keeper could not be the assassin. We were obliged to compel him to be quiet. He could not have shown greater grief had the body been that of his own son. I noticed, while all the rest of us were more or less undressed and barefooted, that he was fully clothed.

Roulettable had not left the body. Kneeling on the flagstones by the light of Daddy Jacques' lantern, he removed the clothes from the body and laid bare its breast. Then, snatching the lantern from Daddy Jacques, he held it over the corpse and saw a gaping wound. Rising suddenly, he exclaimed in a voice filled with savage irony:—

"The man you believe to have been shot was killed by the stab of a knife in his heart!"

I thought Roulettable had gone mad, but, bending over the body, I quickly satisfied myself that Roulettable was right. Not a sign of a bullet anywhere. The wound, evidently made by a sharp blade, had penetrated the heart.

(Continued next week)

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