

THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK

By GASTON LEROUX,
Author of "The Mystery of the Yellow Room."

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"It is here Simon. Ah, how old he has grown! Listen! This is the hour when he goes to superintend the study hour of the younger boys. Every one is in the classroom now. Oh, we are very lucky!"

Why was Roulettable so anxious to hide himself?

"I believe that I am going crazy!" he said with a short laugh. "But I can't help my feelings. They are stronger than I. To think that I am going to see the parlor—where she waited for me! I had been living only in the hope of seeing her, and after she had gone I fell into such a despondent state that after each of her visits they feared for my health. So from one visit to another I had her memory and her perfume to comfort me. Never having seen her dear face distinctly, I lived less with her image than with the heavenly odor. The perfume which she always used and which was indissolubly associated in my mind with her was the most subtle and the sweetest odor I have ever known, and I never breathed it again in all the years which followed until the day we first went to the Glandier."

"You mean the day that you met Mathilde Stangerson?"

"That is what I mean," responded the lad in a trembling voice.

(Ah, if I had known at that moment that Professor Stangerson's daughter as the result of her first marriage in America had had a child, a son, who would have been if he had lived the same age as Roulettable, perhaps I would have at last comprehended his emotion and grief and the strange reluctance which he showed to pronounce the name of Mathilde Stangerson there at the school to which in the past had come so often the Lady in Black!)

"And you have never known why the Lady in Black did not return?" I asked.

"She did return," he said. "But I ran away."

"Why—to look for her?"

"No, no—to see her."

"She may have been broken hearted at not finding you."

Roulettable raised his arms toward the sky and shook his head.

"How can I know? What an unhappy wretch I am! Hush, Sainclair! Here comes Pere Simon! Now he's gone again. Quick—to the parlor!"

As we entered the room his face became flushed, he advanced with short steps, turned to me and said in low tones:

"Oh, Sainclair, this is it—the parlor! Feel how my hands burn. My face is flushed, is it not? I was always flushed when I came here, knowing that I should find her. I used to run. I felt smothered. I do now. I was not able to wait. Oh, my heart beats just as it did when I was a little lad! I would come to the door—right here—and then I would pause, bashful and ashamed. But I would see her dark shadow in the corner. She would take me in her arms and hold me there in silence, and before we knew it we were both weeping as we clung together. How dear those meetings were! She was my mother, Sainclair. Oh, she never told me so! On the contrary, she used to say that my mother was dead and that she had been her friend. But she told me to call her mamma, and when she wept as I kissed her I knew that she really was my mother."

The poor lad could no longer contain himself. He rested his arms on the mantel and wept like a little child.

I saw him draw forth the letter which he had placed there in the train and tear it open. His hand fell, and he uttered a groan. His flushed face grew pallid. It seemed as though every drop of blood had left his heart. Finally his features took on the serenity which comes from assurance of victory.

"We must go now, Sainclair."

And he left the parlor without even looking back. I followed. In the deserted street I stopped him by asking anxiously:

"Well, did you find the perfume of the Lady in Black?"

"Yes," he said, very gravely—"yes, Sainclair, I found it." And he handed me the letter from Professor Stangerson's daughter.

I looked at him, doubting the evidence of my own senses, not understanding, because I knew nothing. Then he took my two hands and looked into my eyes.

"I am going to confide a secret to you, Sainclair—the secret of my life and perhaps some day the secret of my death. Let what will come, it must die with you and me. Mathilde Stangerson had a child—a son. He is dead—is dead to every one except to the two of us who stand here."

I recoiled, struck with horror under such a revelation. Roulettable the son of Mathilde Stangerson! In that case Roulettable must be the son of Larsen.

Oh, I understood now all the wretchedness of the boy!

Roulettable simply made a gesture which seemed to say, "And now you understand, Sainclair."

When we reached Paris, Roulettable handed me a new dispatch which had come from Valence and which was signed by Professor Stangerson. It said: "M. Darzac tells me that you

have a few days' leave. We should all be very glad if you could come and spend them with us. We will wait for you at Arthur Lancel's place, Rochers Rouges. He will be delighted to present you to his wife. My daughter will be pleased to see you. She joins me in kindest greetings."

A concierge from Roulettable's hotel came rushing up and handed us a third dispatch. This one was sent from Mentone and signed by Mathilde. It contained two words, "Rescue us."

CHAPTER III.

A Living Vision of the Dead Larsen.

NOW I knew all. As we continued on our journey Roulettable related to me the remarkable and adventurous story of his childhood, and I knew also why he dreaded nothing so much as that Mme. Darzac should penetrate the mystery which separated them.

Roulettable had died from school at five like a thief. He had been accused of stealing.

At the age of nine he had an extraordinary intelligence and could arrive easily at the solution of perplexing problems. By logical deductions of an almost amazing kind he astonished his professor of mathematics. He had never been able to learn his multiplication tables and always counted upon his fingers. He would usually get the answers to the problems himself, leaving the working out to be done by his fellow pupils. But first he would show them exactly how the example ought to be done. He applied his admirable faculties of reasoning to his daily life as well as to his studies, using the rules both materially and morally. For example, an act had been committed in the school—I have forgotten whether it was cheating or talebearing—by one of ten persons whom he knew, and he picked out the right one with a divination which seemed almost supernatural, simply by deduction. He later found in this ab-

normal fashion a small sum of money which had been stolen from the superintendent, who refused to believe that the discovery was due only to the lad's intelligence and clearness of insight. They tried to make him acknowledge his fault. He defended himself with such indignation and anger that it drew upon him a severe punishment. The principal held an investigation and a trial, at which Joseph Josephin, as he was called, was accused by some of his youthful comrades in that spirit of falsehood which children sometimes possess. The fact that the boy seemed to have no relatives and that no one knew where he came from made him particularly likely in that little world to be suspected of crime. Finally the superintendent told the lad that if he did not confess his guilt it was decided not to keep him in the school and that a letter would be written to the lady who interested herself in him to tell her to come after him.

The child allowed himself to be taken to his little room a prisoner. Upon the morrow he had disappeared. He had run away. He had felt that the principal was no longer his friend since he believed him guilty of theft. And he could see no reason why the Lady in Black would not believe it too. To appear as a thief in the sight of the Lady in Black! He would rather die. So he climbed over the wall of the garden at night. He rushed to the canal, with a prayer, uttered as much to the Lady in Black as to God himself, and threw himself in the water. Being a good swimmer, he soon landed and led a gypsy life as one of the "orange fishers" of the port of Marseilles, subsisting on fruits that fell overboard and sleeping where his fancy pleased.

One day Joseph Josephin met a man who gave him a bright new hundred sou piece. With his hundred sous he bought himself a fine new bootblack's box and installed himself in business opposite the Bregallion. With the feeling of ownership which his box and his business had brought him, ambition had entered his mind. He had received too good an education not to understand that if he did not

himself finish what others had begun for him he would be deprived of the best chance which he had of making for himself a place in the world.

His customers grew interested in the little bootblack, who always had on his box some work of history or mathematics, and a harness maker became attached to him and took him into his shop.

Soon Roulettable was promoted to the dignity of working in leather and was able to save. At the age of sixteen, having a little money, he took the train for Paris—to look for the Lady in Black.

As soon as he reached the capital he looked up his benefactor, who was a newspaper man, and recalled himself to the latter's memory, telling him that he had decided to become a journalist.

The editor tried to turn the youth from his project. At last, tired of his persistent requests, the editor said:

"Well, my lad, since you have nothing special to do just now, go and find the left foot of the body in the Rue Oberkampf."

And with these strange words he turned away, leaving poor Roulettable with half a dozen young reporters tittering around him. But the boy was not daunted. He searched through the files and found that the Epoch was offering a large reward to the person finding the foot missing from the mutilated body of a woman found in the Rue Oberkampf.

In "The Mystery of the Yellow Room" I told how Roulettable succeeded and in what manner there revealed itself to him his own singular calling—that of always beginning to reason a matter out from the point where others had finished.

I have told by what chance he was led to the Elysee, where he inhaled as he passed the perfume of the Lady in Black. He realized then that it was Mme. Stangerson who had been his visitor at the school. What more need I add? Why speak of the sensations which his knowledge as to the wearer

"Do you know what I have been thinking of?" he said. "Of the dispatch that came to us from Bourg and was signed 'Darzac' and the other dispatch which came from Valence and was signed 'Stangerson'."

"And the more I think of them the stranger they seem to me. At Bourg M. and Mme. Darzac were not with Stangerson, who left them at Dijon. Besides, the dispatch says, 'We are going to rejoin Stangerson.' But the Stangerson dispatch proves that Stangerson, who had continued on his journey toward Marseilles, is again with the Darzacs. The Darzacs might have rejoined Stangerson on the way to Marseilles, but if that were so the professor must have stopped on the road. Why was this?"

We consulted the time table.

Finally we reasoned that Darzac must have sent his wife from Bourg one minute before leaving for Lyons by the 9:29 train. But this train reached Lyons at 10:23 o'clock, while Stangerson's train reached Lyons at 10:24. After changing their plans and leaving the train at Bourg, M. and Mme. Darzac must have rejoined Stangerson at Lyons, which they reached one minute before him. Now, what had upset their plans? We could only think of the most terrible hypotheses, every one of which, alas, had as its basis the reappearance of Larsen. The fact which gave the greatest color to this idea was the desire expressed by each of our friends not to frighten any one.

Darzac in his message, Mme. Darzac in here, had not endeavored to conceal the gravity of the situation. As to Stangerson, we asked ourselves whether he had been made aware of the new developments.

When we reached Toulon our impatience became extreme, and at Cannes we were scarcely surprised at all to see Darzac upon the platform, anxiously looking for us. He could scarcely have received the dispatch which Roulettable had sent him from Dijon, announcing the hour at which we would reach Mentone. Having arrived there with Mme. Darzac and M. Stangerson the day before at 10 o'clock in the morning, he must have left Mentone almost at once and have come to meet us at Cannes. His face looked worn. Somehow it frightened us only to look at him.

"Trouble?" questioned Roulettable briefly.

"No, not yet," was the reply.

"God be praised!" exclaimed Roulettable, heaving a deep sigh. "We have come in time!"

Darzac pressed both our hands in silence, following us into our compartment, in which we locked ourselves, taking care to draw the curtains.

Our friend's voice trembled.

"Well," he said, "he is not dead. I have seen him."

"And has Mme. Darzac seen him?"

"Alas, yes! But it is necessary that we should use every means to make her believe that it was an illusion. I could not bear it if she were to lose her mind again, poor girl! Ah, my friends, what has this man come back to do to us?"

I looked at Roulettable. His face was even more full of grief than that of Darzac. There was a brief pause, and then Darzac spoke again:

"Listen! This man must disappear—he must be got rid of. We must ask what it is that he wants. If he will not go I shall kill him. It is very simple. We don't think so too?"

We could not answer. Darzac told us that the event which had changed the face of his existence had taken place at Bourg. Two compartments of the sleeping car had been reserved by Darzac, and these compartments were joined by a little dressing room. In one had been placed the traveling bag with the toilet articles of Mme. Darzac and in the other the smaller packages. It was in the latter compartment that the Darzacs and Professor Stangerson had traveled from Paris to Dijon, where the three had left the train and had dined at the buffet. They had arrived at 6:27 o'clock, exactly on time, and M. Stangerson had left Dijon at eight minutes after 7 and the Darzacs at just 7 o'clock.

The professor had bidden adieu to his daughter and his son-in-law upon the platform of the station. The Darzacs had returned to one of their compartments and remained at the window, chatting with the professor until the train started. As it steamed out the pair waved their hands to Stangerson, who was standing on the platform throwing kisses.

From Dijon to Bourg neither M. nor Mme. Darzac had occasion to enter the adjacent compartment, where Mme. Darzac's night bag had been placed. The door had not been locked either upon the outside with a key by the porter nor on the inside with the bolt by the Darzacs. The curtain of the glass door had been drawn over the pane from the inside by M. Darzac in such a way that no one could look into the compartment from the corridor. But the curtain between the two compartments had not been drawn. All of these circumstances were brought out by the questions asked by Roulettable of M. Darzac.

When they reached Bourg our travelers learned that on account of an accident on the line at Culos the train would be delayed for an hour and a half. M. and Mme. Darzac alighted and took a stroll on the platform. Darzac while talking with his wife mentioned the fact that he had forgotten to write important letters before leaving Paris. Both entered the buffet, and Darzac asked for writing materials. Mathilde sat beside him for a few moments and then remarked that she would take a little walk through the station while he finished his letters.

"Very well," replied Darzac. "As soon as I have finished I will join you."

From that point I will quote Dar-

zac's own words.

"I had finished writing," he said, "and I arose to go and look for Mathilde when I saw her approaching the buffet pallid and trembling. As soon as she perceived me she uttered a shriek and threw herself into my arms. 'Oh, my God,' she cried, 'oh, my God!' It seemed impossible for her to utter any other words. She was shaking from head to foot. I tried to calm her, and I begged her to take some restorative. Her teeth chattered as though she had an ague. At length she told me that she had started to walk about the station, but that she had not dared to go far lest I should find my writing and look for her. Then she went upon the platform, when she noticed the sleeping car porters making up the bed in a berth near our own. She remembered immediately that her night traveling bag, in which she had put her jewels, was standing unlooked at, and she decided to go and lock it up without delay. She entered the car, walked down the corridor and came to the glass door of the compartment reserved for her. She opened the door and instantly uttered a cry of horror. No one heard her, for there was no one in that part of the car, and a train which passed at that moment drowned the sound of her voice with the clamor of the locomotive. What had happened to alarm her?"

"The little door opening upon the dressing cabinet was half drawn toward the interior of the section, cutting off diagonally the view of whoever might enter. This little door was ornamented by a mirror. There in the glass Mathilde beheld the face of Larsen."

(To be continued.)

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MRS. ELLA SHOULTS,
Secretary.

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ALFRED D. GORDEN,
Prospect, Ore.

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