

THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK

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

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CHAPTER VIII.

Wonderful Finds—and Vanishings.

OLD BOB took up the frightful object and began to caress it, his eyes sparkling and his thick lips parting once more in a broad smile. "Roulettable and I were unable longer to control ourselves and nearly split our sides with laughter—all the more because Old Bob every few moments would interrupt himself in the midst of a peal of merriment to demand of us what was the object of our mirth.

Suddenly Old Bob grew serious. He lifted the skull in his right hand and placed the forefinger of the left hand upon the forehead of his ancestor.

"When one looks at the skull from above one notices very clearly a pentagonal formation which is due to the notable development of the parietal bumps and the jutting out of the shell of the occipitals. The great breadth of the face comes from the exaggerated development of the zygomatic proportions, while in the head of the troglodytes of the Baoussé-Roussé what do we find?"

"I shall never know what it was that Old Bob found in the head of the troglodytes, for I did not listen to him, but I looked at him. And I had no further inclination for laughter. Old Bob seemed to me terrifying, horrible, as false as the father of lies, with his counterfeit gaiety and his scientific jargon. My eyes remained fixed upon him as if they were fascinated. It seemed to me that I could see his hair move, just as a wig might do. One thought—the thought of Larsan, which never left me completely—seemed to expand until it filled my entire brain. I felt as if I must speak it out when all at once I felt an arm locked in mine, and I saw Roulettable looking at me with an expression which I did not know how to read.

He drew me away from the table, and we walked toward the west boulevard. After he had looked closely on every side and made sure that no one was near us he said:

"You are in the right in seeing him everywhere around us. If he were not there a little while ago he is perhaps there now. Ah, he is stronger than the stones! He is stronger than anything else in the world. I fear him less within than without, for, Sainclair, I feel that he is here."

I said to Roulettable, scarcely daring to put into words what was in my mind:

"Old Bob?"

He did not answer. At the end of a few moments he said:

"Hold your left hand in your right for five minutes and then ask yourself, 'Is it you, Larsan?' And when you have replied to yourself do not feel too sure, for he may perhaps have lied to you, and he may be in your own skin without your knowing it."

With these words Roulettable left me alone in the west boulevard. It was there that Pere Jacques came to look for me. He brought me a telegram.

I was not in much of a hurry to open the dispatch which Pere Jacques had brought me, and in this I was wrong, for as soon as I cast my eyes over the words which it contained I realized that it was of the deepest importance. My friend at Paris, whom I had requested to keep an eye upon Brignolles, sent me word that the evening before he left Paris for the evening before for the Midi. He had taken the 10:35 train. My friend informed me that he had reason to believe that Brignolles had taken a ticket for Nice.

What should Brignolles be doing in Nice? I kept Brignolles to myself all alone and so well that when, assuming my most indifferent air, I rejoined Roulettable in the Court of Charles the Bold I never mentioned the subject.

His brow was dripping with perspiration; his arms were bared, his collar thrown off; a heavy hammer was in his hand. It seemed to me that he was devoting considerable time and energy to a comparatively simple task, and like a fool who does not see beyond the end of his own nose, I could not refrain from telling him so. But, no! I was only able to understand that, half an hour later, when I came upon him lying beside the ruins of the chapel, murmuring in his dreams the one word which betrayed the sorrow of his heart—"mother." Roulettable was dreaming of the Lady in Black! After having relieved his overcharged heart with that one word he left nothing more to be heard except his heavy breathing. He was completely exhausted. I believe that it was the first time he had really slept since we had come from Paris.

I left the chateau unseen, and soon, my dispatch in my pocket, I took the train for Nice. On the way I chanced to read this item on the first page of the Petit Nicols: "Professor Stangeron has arrived at Garavan, where he will spend a few weeks with M. Arthur Rance, the recent purchaser of the Fort of Hercules, who, aided by the beautiful Mme. Arthur Rance, will dispense hospitality to his friends in this medieval stronghold. Professor Stangeron's daughter, whose marriage to M. Robert Darzac has just taken place in Paris, has also arrived

at the Fort of Hercules with her husband, the brilliant young professor of La Sorbonne."

At Nice, hidden behind the blinds of a buffet, I awaited the arrival of the train from Paris by which Brignolles was due to arrive. And the next moment I saw him alighting from a carriage. I knew that there must be some strange reason for this journey of which he had not informed M. Darzac beforehand. And I knew that the trip was a secret one when I saw that Brignolles was bending his head as he hurried along, gliding rapidly as a pickpocket among the passengers. But I was behind him. I followed him. These maneuvers seemed to me more and more ambiguous. Finally Brignolles' carriage came out upon the Road de la Corniche, and I directed my coachman to take the same way. The numerous windings of this road, its accentuated curves, permitted me to see without being seen. Finally we reached the Beaulieu railway station, where I was astonished to see Brignolles' carriage stop and the man himself get out, pay the driver and enter the waiting room. He was going to take the train. For what purpose? He got into a passenger coach which was bound for the Italian frontier. I realized that all his movements were bringing him nearer to the Fort of Hercules. I got in the car behind his.

Brignolles did not get off until we reached Mentone. I saw him alight. He had turned up the collar of his overcoat and pulled his hat down over his eyes. He cast a stealthy glance around the quay and then mingled with the other passengers. Once outside the train shed he got into a shabby old stage which was standing by the sidewalk. I inquired of an em-

The old Castillon was no longer inhabited, and for a good reason. It had been entirely ruined—destroyed by the earthquake of 1887. What a silence there was all around me! With a thousand precautions I searched through the ruins, contemplating with horror the depth of the crevices which the earthquake had opened in the rocks.

Had I been the victim of an illusion? I could no longer see my two shadows. Was I also the plaything of my imagination when I stooped and picked up from the road a bit of letter paper which looked to me singularly like that which Darzac used at La Sorbonne?

Upon this bit of paper I deciphered two syllables which I believed Brignolles had written. These syllables seemed to be the end of a word the beginning of which was missing. All that was possible to make out was "bounet."

Two hours later I re-entered the Fort of Hercules and told my story to Roulettable, who placed the bit of paper in his portfolio and entreated me to be as silent as the grave in regard to my expedition.

Astonished at having produced so different an effect from the one which I had anticipated at the discovery which I believed so important, I stared at Roulettable. He turned his head away. His eyes were filled with tears. "Roulettable!" I exclaimed.

But again he motioned me not to speak.

They had waited dinner for me. It was late. We scarcely attempted to hide the deep anxiety which froze our hearts. One would have said that each one of us was resigned to the blow which was threatening. At 10



I COULD PERCEIVE TWO FORMS THAT HASTENED.

ployee, who told me that that carriage was the stage to Sospel.

Sospel is a picturesque little city lost between the last counterforts of the Alps, two hours and a half from Mentone by coach. No railroad passes through there. It is one of the most retired and quietest corners of France, the most dreaded by revenue officers and by the Alpine hunters. Why was Brignolles going to Sospel? I must find out. I hired a carriage from the station, and in a few moments I, too, was climbing over the rocks to the valley of Carel. How I regretted not having spoken of my telegram to Roulettable! The strange behavior of Brignolles would have given him ideas, useful and reasonable, while for my part I had not the slightest idea of how to reason. I only knew how to follow this Brignolles as a dog follows his master. I reached Castillon ten minutes later than Brignolles. Castillon is at the highest point of the road between Mentone and Sospel. I descended from the carriage, and at the entrance of a tunnel through which it was necessary to pass to reach the opposite turn of the mountain I beheld Brignolles and Frederic Larsan.

I stood staring at them, my feet as helpless as though they had taken root in the soil. I could not utter a sound nor make a gesture. I had been the only one to guess that the companionship of this devil of a Brignolles had been of the gravest danger to Darzac. If they would have listened to me he would have got rid of the creature's presence long ago. Brignolles, the tool of Larsan, the accomplice of Larsan—what a discovery! Why, I had known all along that those accidents in the laboratory had not happened by chance! They would believe me now. I had seen with my own eyes Larsan and Brignolles talking and consulting together at the entrance of the Castillon tunnel. I had seen them. But where were they gone now? For I saw them no longer. They must be in the tunnel. I hastened my steps, leaving my coachman behind me, and reached the tunnel in a few moments, drawing my revolver from my pocket. My state of mind was beyond description.

But where were they? I walked through the dark tunnel. No Larsan, no Brignolles! Not a living creature! But upon my left, toward ancient Castillon, it seemed to me that I could perceive two forms that hastened. They disappeared. I ran after them. I arrived at the ruins. I stopped. Who could say that those two figures were not lying in wait for me behind a wall?

o'clock I went to take up my station at the tower of the gardener. While I was in the little room where we had consulted together the night before the Lady in Black and Roulettable passed beneath the arch. The glimmer of the lantern fell on their faces. Mme. Darzac was greatly excited. She was urging Roulettable to something which I could not hear. The conversation between them looked like an argument, and I caught only one word of Roulettable's, "Thief!"

The two entered the Court of the Bold. The Lady in Black stretched her arm toward the young man, but he did not see it, for he left her immediately and went toward his own room. She remained standing alone for a moment in the court, leaning against the trunk of the eucalyptus tree in an attitude of unutterable sadness; then, with slow steps, she entered the square tower.

It was now the 10th of April. The attack of the square tower occurred on the night between the 11th and 12th.

(To be continued.)

Breaking the News.

Mrs. Bingo (severely)—I should like to know where you were last night.

Bingo—Well, if the truth must be told, I was playing chess with Kingley, and, my dear, the last game I bet him a new bonnet for you against a new bonnet for his wife.

Mrs. Bingo—Yes, my dear, and who won?

Bingo—Well, you just wait until you see his wife next Sunday!

A Hindrance.

Nursemaid—I'm going to leave next week, mum.

Mistress—Why, what's the matter? Don't you like the baby?

Nursemaid—Yes'm, but he is so afraid of a policeman that I can't get near one.—London Tatler.

His Only Love.

McJigger—What's the book you're reading?

Thingumbob—It's the story of the only man the author ever loved.

McJigger—Ah! By a woman, eh?

Thingumbob—No; by a man. It's his autobiography.

The Result.

Goodart—You didn't actually tell him that I didn't think him much of a poet? Wiseman—I did. Goodart—Oh, I wouldn't have had you do that for the world! Wiseman—Nonsense! That doesn't hurt him. It only makes him pity you.

Where She Took It.

"Sohe broke off the engagement, eh? Did she take it to heart?" "No; to court!"

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