

THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK

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

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CHAPTER X.

His Agony From the Perfume of the Lady in Black.

I PUT my head out of the window on waking next morning. Mme. Edith was walking in the court, chatting carelessly with Roulettable and twisting the stem of a beautiful rose between her pretty fingers. I followed Roulettable, whom I saw on his way to make his inspection of the square tower. I found him quite calm and entirely master of himself—and also entirely the master of his eyes. It was worth while to see the manner in which he looked at everything around him! Nothing escaped him. And the square tower, the abode of the Lady in Black, was the object of his constant surveillance. When M. and Mme. Darzac were not in their apartment, the only key which opened the door was in the keeping of the Berniers, and it was a special kind of key made purposely for the room within the last twenty-four hours in a place which no one but Roulettable knew. He had let no one into the secret.

Roulettable wished that the watch might be kept also upon the rooms of Old Bob, but the latter swore that he would not be treated like a prisoner, and he said that on no account would he give up the privilege of going and coming to his own rooms when he saw fit without asking the keys from the lodge keepers.

Mme. Edith had said, with her lips pressed together in a narrow little line, "But, M. Roulettable, my uncle doesn't think that any one is coming to carry him away?"

Roulettable, after asking after the health of Mere Bernier, who was gathering up potatoes and putting them in a bag, requested Pere Bernier to open the door of the Darzacs' room.

This was the first time that I had entered the apartment. The atmosphere was almost freezing. The large room, furnished with simplicity, contained a bed and a toilet table placed at one of the two openings in the wall around which there had formerly been loopholes. The two windows were fitted with bars of iron between which one could scarcely pass one's arm. Opposite in the angle of the tower was a panel. It would have been impossible for any one to hide in this chamber unless behind this panel. And the Berniers had received orders to look every time they visited the room both behind the panel and in the closet where Darzac hung his clothes.

"When we passed into the sleeping room of Mme. Darzac we were absolutely certain that we had left nothing behind us of which we did not know."

Mme. Darzac's room was smaller than that of her husband. But it was bright and well lighted from the way that the windows were placed. As soon as we set foot over the threshold I saw Roulettable turn pale, and he turned to me and said:

"Saluciar, do you perceive the perfume of the Lady in Black?"

I did not. I perceived nothing at all. Roulettable, after having looked under the bed, gave the signal for departure and motioned us from the room. He lingered for a moment, but no longer. Bernier locked the door with the tiny key, which he put in his inside pocket and tightly buttoned his coat over it. We made the tour of the corridors and also that of Old Bob's apartment, which consisted of a bedroom and sitting room, as easy to examine and as incapable of hiding any one as those of the Darzacs.

In short and in fact, nothing escaped Roulettable, and when we had made the rounds of the square tower we had left no one behind us save M. and Mme. Bernier. One would have said, too, that there could have been no human being in the apartment of the Darzacs before Bernier, a few minutes later, opened the door to Darzac himself, as I am now about to relate.

It was almost 5 o'clock when, leaving Bernier in his corridor in front of the door of the Darzacs' room, Roulettable and myself found ourselves again in the court.

torment for eight days!"

We followed him with our eyes to the door of the square tower. We could see from his looks that he could endure no more. Well, M. Darzac a little after this gave me cause to experience the most frightful thrill of terror which could freeze human bones.

Darzac went straight to the square tower, where, of course, he found Bernier, who opened the door for him. As Bernier had been keeping constant guard before the door of the room, as he had kept the key in his pocket and as we had proved by our investigation that the place was empty when we had left it we had established the fact that when Darzac entered his room there could be no one else there. And this is the truth.

At the moment that we saw Darzac go to his room we heard a clock strike 5. Roulettable and I remained chatting upon the platform of the tower B for another hour. Suddenly my friend struck me a little tap on the shoulder and exclaimed, "For my part I think"—and then, without completing the sentence, he started for the square tower. I followed him.

He thought of Mere Bernier's bag of potatoes which he emptied out on the white floor of the room to the great amazement of the good woman; then, satisfied with this act, which evidently corresponded to the state of his mind, he returned with me, while behind us we could hear Pere Bernier laughing as he picked up the potatoes.

As we reached the court we saw the face of Mme. Darzac appearing for a moment at the window of the room occupied by her father on the first story of la Louve.

The heat had become insupportable. We were threatened with a violent storm, and we believed that it would begin to lighten immediately and relieve us.

A few drops of water had begun to fall.

We turned to the door of M. Darzac's room. Bernier was smoking his pipe in the corridor, sitting astride a chair.

"Is M. Darzac still there?" asked Roulettable.

"He hasn't stirred since he went in," Bernier replied.

We knocked. We heard the heavy bolt drawn from the inside. (These bolts can only be used by the person within the room.)

Darzac was writing letters when we entered. He had been seated beside a little reading table facing the door.

Now mark well all our movements. Roulettable complained that the letter which he held in his hand confirmed the telegram which he had received in the morning and pressed him to return to Paris. His paper insisted upon his proceeding at once to Russia.

Darzac read indifferently the two or three letters which we had brought him and put them in his pocket. I now held out to Roulettable a letter which I had received. It was from my friend in Paris, who, after having given me some important details regarding the departure of Brignoles, informed me that the latter had left his address for mail to be forwarded to Sospel, the Hotel des Alps. This was extremely interesting, and Darzac and Roulettable were greatly excited over it. We decided to go to Sospel as soon as it could be arranged, and we went out of the room. The door of Mme. Darzac's sleeping room was not closed.

I have mentioned that Mme. Darzac was not in her own room.

Then the three of us went out of the square tower, leaving Pere Bernier in his corridor like the good watchdog that he never ceased to bark until the last day of his life.

It was about half past 6 o'clock when, in emerging from the square tower, we went to pay a visit to Old Bob in the round tower, Roulettable, Darzac and I. As soon as we entered the low basement Darzac uttered an exclamation of surprise at seeing the destruction which had been wrought upon a wash drawing upon which he had been working and which represented the plan for a great scaling ladder for the Fort of Hercules of the kind which had existed in the fifteenth century. This drawing had been gashed with a knife and paint had been smeared over it. He endeavored in vain to obtain some explanation from Old Bob.

As Old Bob seemed to be in a churlish humor, we left him—that is, Roulettable and myself did. M. Darzac remained gazing at his spoiled drawing, but thinking, doubtless, of altogether different things.

As we went out we raised our eyes to the sky, which was rapidly becoming covered with great black clouds. The tempest was near at hand.

"I am going to lie down in my room," I said. "I can't stand any more of this. Perhaps it may be cooler there with all the windows open."

Roulettable followed me into the new castle. Suddenly, as we reached the first landing of our winding staircase, he stopped me:

"Ah," he said in a low voice, "she is there—the Lady in Black! Can't you smell the perfume?"

And he hid himself behind a door, motioning me to continue without waiting for him.

What was my amazement in opening the door of my room to find myself face to face with Mathilde!

She uttered a low cry and disappeared in the shadow, gliding away like a surprised bird. She swept down the steps like a ghost. She soon gained the ground floor, and I saw below me the face of Roulettable, who, leaning over the rail of the first landing, looked at her too.

He mounted the steps to my side.

"Oh, my God!" he cried. "What did I tell you?"

He seemed to be in the greatest agitation.

"This thing must be ended in twenty-four hours or I shall no longer have strength to act."

He threw himself into a chair as if exhausted. "I can't breathe!" he moaned. He tore his collar away from his throat. "Water!" he entreated. "I want the water from the heavens! I must have it!" And he waved his hands toward the dark skies.

For ten minutes he remained stretched out in the chair, thinking. What surprised me was that he asked no question or uttered no conjecture as to what the Lady in Black had been seeking in my room. I would not have known how to answer if he had done so. At length he rose and went to take the guard at the postern.

He would not even come in to dinner and sent word to have some soup brought out to him. The dinner was served in la Louve at 8:30. Darzac, who came to the table from Old Bob's workroom, said that the latter refused to dine also. Mme. Edith, fearing that her uncle might be ill, went immediately to the round tower.

The Lady in Black came in on the arm of her father. She cast on me a look of sorrowful reproach which disturbed me greatly. Her eyes seemed never to wander from me.

(To be continued.)

CALIFORNIA SHERIFF SHOT BY ROBBER

Berkeley Officer Probably Fatally Wounded While Stopping Saloon Holdup in the Early Morn.

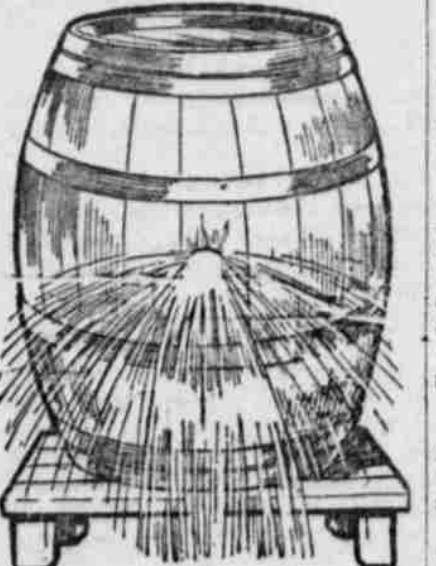
BERKELEY, Cal., Jan. 13.—(Dep. Sheriff Andrew W. Lindquist was shot and perhaps fatally wounded by a masked man who attempted to hold up the saloon of Albert Moore near the Contra Costa county line, north of this city early yesterday.

Lindquist was wounded in the shoulder and another bullet penetrated the walls of his stomach. He was taken to the Roosevelt hospital, where it was announced an operation would be necessary to save his life.

The officer was standing at the bar in the saloon talking with Moore when the highwayman entered. Leveling a revolver at each man, he ordered them to hold up their hands.

Lindquist swung the heavy umbrella he carried striking the thug on the head. The man then fired twice at the officer, and escaped through a rear door. Efforts of the police to find him met with no success.

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Name to Fit the Trade.
Old newspapers give us many instances of men's names fitting their callings. Thus we have Last, a shoemaker of Exeter, and Treadway, who plied the same trade in Hammsmith. There was a Bristol schoolmaster named Rod. Dodge and Wynne, attorneys at law of Liverpool, must have been the butts of their fellow townsmen, while few could have a more appropriate name than the Primitive Methodist preacher River Jordan.—London Chronicle.

No Escape Via Temperament.
"Mabel is getting past the marriageable age, isn't she?"
"Yes, and it's too bad she hasn't any talents."

A Foolish Question.
A reader of the New York World writes to that paper to ask whether it is proper for a young man to send candy to a girl whom he has met but once. What a question! Why, most young men begin handing a girl taffy as soon as they are introduced to her.—Washington Post.

Frits.
Mrs. Crabshaw—The new girl I have said she had taken a course in domestic science. Mrs. Crawford—Is she different from the other girls you've had?
Mrs. Crabshaw—Only in one way; she wanted \$5 a month more.—Lippincott's.

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