

THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK

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

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CHAPTER XI.

A Pistol Shot in the Night.

IT was a gloomy meal enough. Arthur Rance looked every moment in the direction of the Lady in Black. All the windows were open. A flash of lightning and a heavy clap of thunder came in rapid succession, and then the deluge. Mme. Edith reappeared just in time to escape being drenched by the furious rain, which beat down like cannon balls.

The young woman told in excited tones and with her hands clasped how she had found Old Bob bending over his desk with his head buried in his hands. He had refused to have anything to say to her. She had spoken to him affectionately, and he had treated her like a bear. Then, as he had held his hands to his ears, she had pricked one of his fingers with a little pin set with rubies which she used to fasten the lace scarf which she wore in the evening. Her uncle had turned upon her like a madman, had snatched the little pin from her and thrown it upon the desk. And then he had spoken to her—"brutally, rudely," she ejaculated. "Get out of here and leave me alone!" he said to her. She had turned her head for a last look at her old uncle and had been almost struck dumb by what she saw.

The "oldest skull in the history of the human race" was on the desk, and Old Bob, a handkerchief stained with blood in his hand, was spitting in the skull. He had always treated it with severe respect and had insisted that others do the same.

Darzac reassured her by telling her that what she had taken for blood was only paint.

I left to hurry out to Roulettable and escape Mathilde's glances. What had the Lady in Black been doing in my bedroom?

When I started out the thunder was pealing loudly and the rain falling with redoubled force. It took me only one bound to reach the postern. No Roulettable was there! I found him on the terrace B watching the entrance to the square tower and receiving the full strength of the storm at his back.

I entreated him to take shelter under the arch. "Leave me alone!" he said impatiently. "Leave me alone! This is the deluge. How good it is! Have you ever had a desire to roar with the thunder? I have, and I am roaring now."

And he plunged into the darkness, making the shadows resound with his savage clamors. I believed this time that he had surely gone mad. But in my heart I knew that the unhappy lady was breathing forth in these indistinct articulations of frightful anguish the misery that burned him and which he was constantly trying to hinder from burning up the heart and the soul in his body—the misery of being the son of Larsan.

I turned helplessly, and as I did so I felt a hand seize my wrist, and a dark form cried out: "Where is he?"

It was Mme. Darzac, who was also seeking Roulettable. A new peal of thunder burst, and we heard the boy in his mad delirium hurling wild shouts of defiance to the heavens. She heard him. She saw him. We were drenched with water from the rain and the breaking of the sea on the terrace. Mme. Darzac's clothing clung around her like a rag and her skirt dripped as she walked. I took the wretched woman's arm and held her up, for I saw that she was about to fall, and that moment in the midst of that terrible unchaining of the elements, in that mad tempest, under this terrible down-pour on the breast of the raging sea, I all at once breathed the perfume—the odor so sweet and penetrating and haunting that its fragrance has remained with me ever since—the perfume of the Lady in Black. I understood now how Roulettable had remembered it all these years.

Yes, it was a fragrance full of sadness—something like the perfume of an isolated flower which has been condemned to be seen by no one, but to blossom for itself all alone. A strange perfume! Surely it was that, for I had seen the Lady in Black hundreds of times without noticing it, and now that I had done so it was everywhere and above all things, and I knew that the memory of it would abide with me while life should last.

There in the night and the tempest the Lady in Black called aloud to Roulettable, and he fled from us and rushed farther into the night, shrieking aloud, "The perfume of the Lady in Black—the perfume of the Lady in Black!"

The unhappy woman sobbed. She struck with desperate hands at the door which Bernier opened to us.

She motioned me to enter the little parlor at the right, which was just outside the bedchamber of Old Bob. She took both my hands in hers and said in a voice which I shall never forget:

"You are my boy's friend. Tell him that he is not the only one who has suffered." And she added with a sob which shook her whole frame: "Why will he insist on not telling me the truth?"

I had not a word to say. What could I have answered? I had breathed the perfume of the Lady in Black.

Yes; she treated me as an old friend. She told me everything that I already knew in a few sentences as piteous and as simple as a mother's love itself, and she told me other things which Roulettable had kept a secret from me. The relationship between them had been guessed by the one as surely as by the other. Led by a sure instinct, Mme. Darzac had resolved to take means to learn who was this Roulettable who had saved her from death and who was of the age of her own son and who resembled the lad whom she had mourned as dead. And since her arrival at Mentone a letter had reached her containing the proof that Roulettable had lied to her in regard to his early life and had never set foot in any school at Bordeaux. Immediately she had sought the youth and had asked for an explanation, but he had hurried away without replying.

"Why did he not throw himself into my arms when I opened them to him?" she moaned. "Ah, my God! If he refuses to be Larsan's son, will he never consent to be mine?"

I was almost beside myself. I kissed her hands and entreated pardon for Roulettable. Here was the result of my friend's schemes to save her pain. Under the pretext of saving her from Larsan he had plunged a knife into her heart. I felt as though I had no wish to know any more of the story. I went out of the square tower cursing Roulettable roundly. I went to the court to look for him, but found it deserted.

At the postern gate Mattoni had come to take the 10 o'clock watch. I saw a light in Roulettable's room, and I hastened up the rickety stairway of the new castle and quickly found myself outside his door. I opened it without knocking. Roulettable looked up. I told him all that I had heard and my opinion of him for his actions.

"She didn't tell you everything, my friend," he replied coldly. "She did not tell you that she forbade me to touch that man. Do you know what she said to me yesterday? She ordered me to go away. She would rather die than see me take issue against my father."

And he laughed, laughed! Such laughter I hope not to hear again. His face was not a pleasant sight to see as he uttered the words, but suddenly it seemed to be transformed.

"She is afraid for me," he said softly. "And I—I am afraid for her—only for her. And I do not know my father. Ah! God help me!"

At that moment the sound of a shot rang out on the night, followed by a cry of mortal agony. Ah, it was again the cry that I had heard two years ago in the "inexplicable gallery." Roulettable tottered; then he bounded to the open window with a despairing burst of anguish:

"Mother, mother, mother!" I leaped after him and threw my arms around his body, dreading what he might attempt. Quickly he turned on me, threw me off and precipitated himself wildly through corridors, apartments, stairways and courts toward the accursed tower from which had come that same death cry that we both had heard a moment ago, and also two years before, when it had resounded through the "inexplicable gallery."

I was still there when the door of the square tower opened, and in its frame of light there appeared the form of the Lady in Black. She was standing upright, living and unharmed in spite of that cry of death, but her pale and ghastly visage reflected a terror like that of death itself. She stretched out her arms toward the night, and the darkness cast Roulettable into them, and the arms of the Lady in Black closed around him, and I heard no more, only sobs and moans and again the two syllables which the night repeated over and over, "Mother, mother!"

Strange to say, I found no one in the Court of the Bold when I crossed it. No one, then, had heard the pistol shot! No one had heard the cries! Where was M. Darzac? Where was Old Bob? And the Berniers? I saw neither of them.

Roulettable and the Lady in Black went into Old Bob's parlor.

And they were there alone, clasped in each other's arms, repeating over and over again, "Mother!" and "My little one!" And then they murmured broken sentences, phrases without end, with the divine foolishness of a mother and her child. And then how they embraced each other, as though to make up for all the years they had lost! I heard him murmur, "You know, mamma, it was not true that I stole!"

But where was Bernier? I entered the lodge from the left, for I wished to know the meaning of the cry and of the shot which I had heard.

Mere Bernier was at the back of the room, which was lighted only by a tiny taper. Her features were distorted with fear.

"Some one fired off a pistol!" I said. "What has happened?"

"I do not know," she responded. "I do not know! I heard some one open the door of the tower, and Pere Bernier stood on the threshold."

"Bernier! What has happened?" "Oh, nothing very serious, I am glad to say. An accident without any importance whatever. Darzac while placing his revolver on the stand beside his bed accidentally fired it off. Madame naturally was frightened and screamed, and as the window of their room was open she thought that you and M. Roulettable might have heard something and started out to tell you that it was nothing."

"Darzac has come in, then?" "He got here almost as soon as you had left the tower, M. Sainclair. And the shot was fired almost immediately after he entered his bedroom. You

can guess that I had a pretty fright. I rushed to the door. Darzac opened it himself. Happily no one was injured."

"Did Mme. Darzac go to her own room as soon as I left the tower?" "At once. She heard M. Darzac when he came in and followed him directly to their apartments. They went in almost at the same moment."

"And Darzac—is he still in his room?" "Here he is now."

I turned and saw Robert Darzac. Despite the gloom of the place I saw that his face was ghastly pale. He made me a sign and then said very calmly and quietly:

"Listen, Sainclair! Bernier told you about our little accident. It is not worth mentioning to any one unless some one should speak of it to you. The others perhaps have not heard the shot. It would be useless to frighten all these good people. Don't you think so? Now I have a little favor to ask of you. It is only to persuade Roulettable to go to bed. When he is gone my wife will calm herself and will try to get the rest that she needs. Every one of us has need of rest—and silence."

I pressed his hand with a force which attested my sentiments toward him. I was persuaded that both he and Bernier were concealing something from us—something very grave.

Darzac re-entered his room, and I went to find Roulettable in the sitting room of Old Bob.

But upon the threshold of the apartment I jostled against the Lady in Black and her son, who were passing out. They were both so silent and wore an expression so unexpected to me, who had overheard their exclamations of love and joy only a few moments before, that I stood before them without saying a word or making a movement. The extremity which induced Mme. Darzac to leave Roulettable so soon under such extraordinary circumstances as those which had attended their reunion puzzled me greatly. Mathilde pressed a kiss upon the lad's forehead and murmured "Good night, my darling!" in a voice so soft, so sweet and at the same time so solemn that it seemed to me that it must resemble the leave taking of one who was about to die. Roulettable without answering his mother took my arm and led me out of the tower. He was trembling like a leaf.

It was the Lady in Black herself who closed the door of the square tower. I was sure that something strange was passing within those walls. The account of the pistol shot which had been given me satisfied me not at all.

We were at that moment not far from a window in which a light was still burning and which opened upon the sitting room of Old Bob and sloped out upon the sea. This window was not closed, and it was this, doubtless, which had permitted us to hear so distinctly in spite of the thickness of the walls of the tower the pistol shot and the cry of agony that had followed it. The storm was past, but the waters were not yet appeased, and the waves broke on the rocks of the peninsula with a violence that would have rendered the approach of any vessel impossible. The thought of a vessel crossed my mind, because I believed for an instant that I could see the shadow of a vessel of some sort appearing or disappearing in the gloom. But what could it be?

We stood there motionless for more than five minutes before we heard a sigh—a groan, deep as an expiration, like a moan of agony; a heavy sob, like the last breath of a departing soul—which reached our ears from that window and brought the sweat of terror to our brows. And then nothing more—nothing except the intermittent sobbings of the sea. And suddenly the light in the window went out.

My friend and I grasped each other's hand as if instinctively commanding each other by this mute communication to remain motionless and silent. Some one was dying there in that tower! Some one whom they had hidden. Why? And who? Some one who was neither M. Darzac nor Mme. Darzac nor Pere Bernier nor Mere Bernier nor—almost beyond the shadow of a doubt—Old Bob; some one who could not have been in the tower.

(To be continued.)

REAL ESTATE TRANSFERS.

- Clara E. Wick to Troy Woodward, part of lot 24, Myer addition to Ashland . . . \$ 10
- W. H. Miller to C. T. Davidson, one-fifth interest in 20 acres in section 30, township 37, 4 west . . . 20
- S. A. Pattison to Martha Carter, lot 3, block 2, Pattison addition to Central Point. . . 100
- C. E. Denning to Sylvia S. Robinson, 200 acres in section 25, township 35, 2 west . . . 10
- T. B. Roberts to E. J. Davidson, one-third interest to land in section 30, township 37, 4 west . . . 1
- A. Bailey to I. Worthington, 80 acres in section 23, township 36, 2 west . . . 1
- Emma Gagnon to T. L. Devore, part block 56, Jacksonville . . . 1,000
- A. Lawrentz to S. V. Davis, lots 7 and 8, block 18, Medford . . . 1
- R. H. Hicks to J. H. Doran, 1.35 acres D. L. C. 40, township 39, 1 east . . . 10
- S. M. Osgood to W. M. Scott, 160 acres section 17, township 39, 1 east . . . 20

Sam Sandry of Woodville was in Medford Thursday night. He was one of the fawns upon whom antlers were fitted by the B. P. O. E.

HOOD RIVER WOULD HAVE NORMAL SCHOOL

HOOD RIVER, Or., Jan. 14.—The new directors of the Hood River Commercial club Saturday night elected Charles Hall president and Calvin Skinner secretary. E. H. Hartwig and J. H. Osborne are vice-president and treasurer, respectively. Mr. Hall is interested in many local enterprises, having recently gained control of the Home Telephone company. Mr. Skinner came to Hood River last year from Hamilton, Or., and has been engaged in orchard development. This will be a great year for the Commercial club and for Hood River. The new First National bank building, nearing completion, will contain quarters which will be fitted up in good style for the club. It is expected to get into them by early spring, and the annual banquet has been postponed until after that time. The club will hold a meeting tonight, at which will be outlined plans for the coming year. The normal school committee, which has been investigating the feasibility of inviting the state to establish a normal school at Hood River, will make its report, which will be favorable.

CZAR GREETES THE NEW AMERICAN AMBASSADOR

ST. PETERSBURG, Jan. 14.—Emperor Nicholas today received W. W. Rockhill, who presented his credentials as American ambassador to Russia. The emperor engaged the diplomat in private conversation for half an hour, after which Mr. Rockhill presented Montgomery Schuyler, Jr., secretary of the American embassy. Both Mr. Rockhill and Mr. Schuyler lunched at the palace. The customary ceremonial attending the reception of newly appointed diplomats was observed. The carriages of the ambassador and the secretary were provided by the state, which also provided an escort and bodyguard of Cossacks.

FOUR OTHERS MEMBERS OF COMMERCIAL CLUB

Through some error the following names were accidentally omitted from the roll of honor in the issue

You Can Sell Real Estate If You Can Advertise Real Estate!

The problem in selling real estate is to find the ONE—and there's only one—person to whom the property would be WORTH MOST.

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of the Mail Tribune of January 10, when a complete list of the names of members of the Medford Commercial club was published. These members whose names follow are all in good standing and it was purely accidental in compiling the list that they were left out. They are:

- E. W. Anderson.
- E. B. Davis.
- L. P. Hubbard.
- T. W. Osgood.

Savoy Theatre

TONIGHT

BACHELOR AND MAID
(A Comedy of Errors)
A PAIR OF SLIPPERS
(A Laugh Every Second)
IF LOVE BE TRUE
(Romantic Drama)
Doors Open 7 P. M. ONE DIME.

Baker's vs. Home Made Bread

We have home-made bread. Which would you rather eat, home-made or bakers? A foolish question to ask, for most people would be willing to pay twice the price for home-made bread they pay for bakers, but you can buy the good old-fashioned home-made bread at the Rex Grocery for the same price as baker's. Large, well browned loaves, both nourishing and palatable, and baked from the best flour in the city.

"Yakima Best"

Take a loaf home with you and be convinced.

Rex Grocery Co.

Do You Want to Sell?

If you want to sell your business of any kind, or if you want to sell your property, and will make the price right, I would like to hear from you. Give description and price. Address J. E. SMITH, 513 Chamber Commerce, Portland, Oregon.

THE ROGUE RIVER LAND COMPANY

NO. 11 NORTH CENTRAL AVENUE

Offers an especially good foothill orchard for a low price and on good terms. In these days of advancing prices, it will pay to look into this.

It pays to deal with the "Man Who Knows." When the Rogue River Land Company sold the Tronson & Guthrie orchard at Eagle Point to the prize winning owners, four years ago, the salesman, W. M. Holmes, assured the purchasers those Spitzenberg trees would produce the world's best apples, and subsequent events prove the soundness of his judgment. By the way: Did it ever occur to you that most of the men who have won out in the Rogue River Valley, bought their winning orchards through the Rogue River Land Company?

W. M. Holmes, Manager, is always at your service for a good buy.

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