The Mystery of The Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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never before seen him, but I knew him well by reputation. At that time, before Rouletabille had given proof of his unique talent, Larsan was reputed as the most skillful unraveler of the most mysterious and complicated crimes. His reputation was worldwide, and the police of London and even of America often called him to their aid when their own national inspectors and detectives found themselves at the end of their wits and re-

No one was astonished, then, that the head of the Paris police had at the outset of the mystery of the yellow room telegraphed his precious subordinate in London, where he had heen sent on a big case of stolen securities, to return with all haste. Frederic had made all speed, doubtless knowing by experience that if he was interrupted in what he was doing it was because his services were urgently needed in another direction, so, as Rouletabille said, he was that morning already "at work." We soon found out in what it consisted.

What he was continually looking at in the palm of his right hand was nothing but his watch, the minute hand of which he appeared to be noting intently. Then he turned back, still running, stopping only when he reached the park gate, where he again consulted his watch and then put it away in his pocket, shrugging his shoulders with a gesture of discouragement. He pushed open the park gate, reclosed and locked it, raised his head and through the bars perceived us. Rouletabille rushed after him, and I followed. Frederic Larsan waited for

"M. Fred," said Rouletabille, raising his hat and showing the profound respect, based on admiration, which the young reporter felt for the celebrated detective, "can you tell me whether M. Robert Darzac is at the chateau at this moment? Here is one of his friends of the Paris bar, who desires to speak with him."

"I really don't know, M. Rouletabille," replied Fred, shaking hands with my friend, whom he had several times met in the course of his difficult investigations. "I have not seen him."

"The concierges will be able to inform us, no doubt?" said Rouletabille, pointing to the lodge, the door and windows of which were close shut.

"The concierges will not be able to give you any information, M. Rouleta-

"Why not?"

"Because they were arrested half an

"Arrested!" cried Rouletabille. "Then they are the murderers!"

Frederic Larsan shrugged his shoul-

"When you can't arrest the real murderer," he said, with an air of supreme frony, "you can always indulge in the hinry of discovering accomplices." "Did you have them arrested, M

"Not I! I haven't had them arrested. In the first place, I am pretty sure that they have not had anything to do with the affair and then because"-

"Because of what?" asked Rouleta-"Because of nothing," said Larsan

shaking his head. "Because there were no accomplices!" said Rouletabille.

"Aha! You have an idea, then, about this matter?" said Larsan, looking at Rouletabille intently, "yet you have seen nothing, young man-you have not yet gained admission here!"

"I shall get admission." "I doubt it. The orders are strict." "I shall gain admission if you let

me see M. Robert Darzac. Do that for me. You know we are old friends. I beg of you, M. Fred. Do you remember the article I wrote about you on the gold bar case?"

shaven. His upper lip, without mustache, was finely chiseled. His eyes were rather small and round, with a ly: look in them that was at once searching and disquieting. He was of middle height and well built, with a gen-

eral bearing elegant and gentlemanly. Larsan turned his head at the sound of a vehicle which had come from the chateau and reached the gate behind him. We recognized the cab which had conveyed the examining magistrate and his registrar from the station at Epinay.

"Ah!" said Frederic Larsan. "If you want to speak with M. Robert Darzac, he is here."

The cab was already at the park gate, and Robert Darzac was begging Frederic Larsan to open it for him, explaining that he was pressed for time to catch the next train leaving Epinay for Paris. Then he recognized me. While Larsan was unlocking the gate M. Darzac inquired what had brought me to the Glandier at such a tragic moment. I noticed that he was frightfully pale and that his face was | dacity, he said: lined as if from the effects of some terrible suffering.

"Is mademoiselle getting better?" I immediately asked.

"Yes." he said. "She will be saved perhaps. She must be saved!"

He did not add "or it will be my death." but I felt that the phrase trembled on his pale lips.

Rouletabille intervened: "You are in a hurry, monsieur, but I

must speak with you. I have something of the greatest importance to tell you." Frederic Larsan interrupted:

"May I leave you?" he asked of Robert Darzac. "Have you a key or do you wish me to give you this one?" "Thank you. I have a key and will lock the gate."

Larsan hurried off in the direction of the chateau, the imposing pile of which could be perceived a few hundred yards away.

Robert Darzac, with knit brow, was beginning to show impatience. I presented Rouletabille as a good friend of mine, but as soon as he learned that the young man was a journalist he looked at me very reproachfully, excused himself under the necessity of having to reach Epinay in twenty minutes, bowed and whipped up his horse. But Rouletabille had seized the bridle and, to my utter astonishment, stopped the carriage with a vigorous hand. Then he gave utterance to a sentence which was utterly meaningless to me.

"The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its bright-

The words had hardly left the lips of Rouletabille than I saw Robert Darzac quail. Pale as he was, he became paler. His eyes were fixed on the young man in terror, and he immediately descended from the vehicle in an inexpressible state of agitation.

"Come-come in!" he stammered. Then suddenly and with a sort of fury he repeated:

"Let us go, monsieur."

He turned up by the road he had come from the chateau, Rouletabille still retaining his hold on the horse's bridle. I addressed a few words to M. Darzac, but he made no answer. My looks questioned Rouletabille, but his gaze was elsewhere.

CHAPTER VI.

In the Heart of the Oak Grove.

TATE reached the chateau and, as we approached it, saw four gendarmes pacing in front of a little door in the ground floor of the donjon. We soon learned that in this ground floor, which had formerly served as a prison, M. and Mme. Bernier, the concierges, were confined.

M. Robert Darzac led us into the modern part of the chateau by a large door, protected by a projecting awning -a "marquise" as it is called. Rouletabille, who had resigned the horse and the cab to the care of a servant, never Larsan might be about fifty years of took his eyes off M. Darzac. I folage. He had a fine head, his hair lowed his look and perceived that it turning gray, a colorless complexion was directed solely toward the gloved and a firm profile. His forehead was hands of the Sorbonne professor. prominent, his chin and cheeks clean When we were in a tiny sitting room fitted with old furniture, M. Darzac turned to Rouletabille and said sharp-

"What do you want?"

The reporter answered in an equally

"To shake you by the hand." Darzac shrank back.

"What does that mean?"

Evidently he understood, what I also understood, that my friend suspected him of the abominable attempt on the life of Mlle. Stangerson. The impression of the blood stained hand on the walls of the yellow room was in his mind. I looked at the man closely. His haughty face, with its expression ordinarily so straightforward, was at this moment strangely troubled. He held out his right hand and, referring to me, said:

"As you are a friend of M. Sainclair. who has rendered me invaluable services in a just cause, monsieur. I see no reason for refusing you my hand"-Rouletabille did not take the extended hand. Lying with the utmost au-

"Monsieur, I have lived several years in Russia, where I have acquired the habit of never taking any but an ungloved hand."

I thought that the Sorbonne professor would express his anger openly. but, on the contrary, by a visibly violent effort, he calmed himself, took off his gloves and showed his hands. They were unmarked by any cicatrice. "Are you satisfied?"

"No!" replied Rouletabille. "My dear friend," he said, turning to me, "I am obliged to ask you to leave us alone for a moment."

I bowed and retired, stupefied by what I had seen and heard. I could not understand why M. Robert Darzac had not already shown the door to my impertinent, insulting and stupid friend. I was angry myself with Rouletabille at that moment for his suspicions which had led to this scene of the gloves.

For some twenty minutes I walked about in front of the chateau, trying vainly to link together the different events of the day.

When Rouletabille came out of the chateau in the company of M. Robert Darzac, extraordinary to relate, I saw at a glance that they were the best of friends.

"We are going to the yellow room. Come with us," Rouletabille said to me. "You know, my dear boy, I am going to keep you with me all day. We'll breakfast together somewhere about here"-

"You'll breakfast with me here, gentlemen"-

"No, thanks," replied the young man. "We shall breakfast at the Donjon

"You'll fare very badly there. You'll

not find anything"-"Do you think so? Well, I hope to find something there," replied Rouletabille. "After breakfast we'll set to work again. I'll write my article, and if you'll be so good as to take it to the office for me"-

"Won't you come back with me to Paris?"

"No; I shall remain here."

I turned toward Rouletabille. He spoke quite seriously, and M. Robert Darzac did not appear to be in the least degree surprised.

We were passing by the donion and heard wailing voices. Rouletabille asked:

"Why have these people been ar rested?"

"It is a little my fault," said M. Darzac. "I happened to remark to the examining magistrate yesterday that it was inexplicable that the concierges had had time to hear the revolver shots, to dress themselves and to cover so great a distance as that which lies between their lodge and the pavilion in the space of two minutes, for not more than that interval of time had elapsed after the firing of the shots when they were met by Daddy Jacques."

"That was suspicious evidently," acquiesced Rouletabille. "And were they dressed?"

"That is what is so incredible. They were dressed completely-not one part of their costumes wanting. The woman wore wooden shoes, but the man had on laced boots. Now they assert that they went to bed as half past 9 On arriving this morning the examining magistrate brought with him from Paris a revolver of the same caliber as that found in the room, for he couldn't use the one held for evidence, and made his registrar fire two shots in

the yellow room while the doors and windows were closed. We were with him in the lodge of the concierges, and yet we heard nothing-not a sound. The concierges have lied, of that there can be no doubt. They must have been already waiting not far from the pavilion-waiting for something! Certainly they are not to be accused of being the authors of the crime, but their complicity is not improbable. That was why M. de Marquet had them arrested at once."

"If they had been accomplices," said Rouletabille, "they would not have been there at all. When people throw themselves into the arms of justice with the proofs of complicity on them. you can be sure they are not accomplices. I don't believe there are any accomplices in this affair."

"Then why were they abroad at midnight? Why don't they say?"

"They have certainly some reason for their silence. What that reason has to be found out, for, even if they are not accomplices, it may be of importance. Everything that took place on such a night is important."

We had crossed an old bridge thrown over the Douve and were entering the part of the park called the Cak grove. The oaks here were centuries old. Autumn had already shriveled their tawny leaves. This place, which mademoiselle found cheerful and in which she lived in the summer season, appeared to us as sad and funereal now

the soil was black and muddy from he recent rains and the rotting of the allen leaves. The trunks of the trees were black, and the sky above us was low, as if in mourning, charged with great, heavy clouds.

And it was in this somber and desoate retreat that we saw the white walls of the pavilion as we approachd. It was a queer looking building. without a window visible on the side by which we neared it. A little door tione marked the entrance to it. It hight have passed for a tomb, a vast nausoleum in the midst of a thick forest. As we came nearer we were able to make out its disposition. The building obtained all the light it needed from the south-that is to say, from the open country. The little door closed on the park. M. and Mile. Stangerson must have found it an ideal seilusion for their work and their freams.

The pavilion had a ground floor which was reached by a few steps, ind above it was an attic, with which we need not concern ourselves. The 'coms of the pavilion were as follows: The yellow room, with its one winlow and its one door opening into the

aboratory. The laboratory, with its two large parred windows and its doors, one serving for the vestibule, the other for the yellow room.

The vestibule, with its unbarred winlow and door opening into the park. The lavatory, between the vestibule and the yellow room.

Besides these chambers there was a light of stairs leading to the attic. The only chimney was the large one in the laboratory.

Before mounting the three steps leading up to the door of the pavilion Rouletabille stopped and asked M.

Darzac point blank: "What was the motive for the

"Speaking for myself, monsieur, there an be no doubt on the matter," said Ville Stangerson's fiance greatly discressed. "The marks of the ingers, the deep scratches on the chest and throat of Mile. Stangerson, show that the wretch who attacked her attempted to commit a frightful crime. The medical experts who examined these races yesterday affirm that they were made by the same hand as that which left its red imprint on the wall-an enormous hand, monsieur, much too 'arge to go into my gloves," he added, with an indefinable smile.

"Could not that blood stained hand," I interrupted, "have been the hand of Mlle. Stangerson, who, in the moment | tabille. of falling, had pressed it against the wall and, in slipping, enlarged the impression?"

"There was not a drop of blood on either of her hands when she was

lifted up," replied M. Darzac. "We are now sure," said I, "that it was Mlle. Stangerson who was armed with Daddy Jacques' revolver, since she wounded the hand of the murderer. She was in fear, then, of somebody or something."

"Probably." "Do you suspect anybody?" "No," replied M. Darzac, looking a

Rouletabille. Rouletabille then said to me: "You must know, my friend, that the inquiry is a little more advanced than M. de Marquet has chosen to tell us. He not only knows that Mile. Stangerson defended herself with the revolver, but he knows what the weapon was that was used to attack her. M. into that presently." Darzac tells me it was a mutton bone.

Why is M. de Marquet surrounding | Notice to Investors tery? No doubt for the purpose of facilitating the inquiries of the agents of the police. He imagines perhaps that the owner of this instrument of crime, the most terrible invented, is going to be found among those who

are well known in the slums of Paris who use it." "Has a mutton bone been found in the yellow room?" I asked him.

"Yes, monsieur," said Robert Darzac, "at the foot of the bed, but I beg of you not to say anything about it." (I made a gesture of assent.) "It was an enormous mutton bone, the top of which, or, rather, the joint, was still red with the blood of the frightful wound. It was an old bone, which may, according to appearances, have served in other crimes. That's what M. de Marquet thinks, who has had it sent to the municipal laboratory at Paris to be analyzed. In fact, he thinks he has detected on it not only the blood of the last victim, but other stains of dried blood, evidences of previous crimes."

"A mutton bone in the hand of a skilled assassin is a frightful weapon," said Rouletabille, "a more certain weapon than a heavy hammer."

"The scoundrel has proved it to be so," said M. Robert Darzac sadly. "The joint of the bone found exactly fits the wound inflicted. My belief is that the wound would have been mortal if the murderer's blow had not been arrested in the act by Mlle. Stangerson's revolver. Wounded in the hand, he dropped the mutton bone and fled. Unfortunately the blow had been already given, and mademoiselle was stunned after having been nearly strangled. If she had succeeded in wounding the man with the first shot of the revolver, she would doubtless have escaped the blow with the bone. But she had certainly employed her revolver too late. The first shot deviated and lodged in the ceiling. It was the second only that took effect."

Having said this, M. Darzac knocked at the door of the pavilion. I must confess to feeling a strong impatience to reach the spot where the crime had been committed. It was some time before the door was opened by a man whom I at once recognized as Daddy Jacques.

He appeared to be well over sixty years of age. He had a long white beard and white hair, on which he wore a flat Basque cap. He was dressed in a complete suit of chestnut colored velveteen, worn at the sides; sabots were on his feet. He had rather a waspish looking face, the expression or which lightened, however, as soon as he saw M. Darzac.

"Friends," said our guide. "Nobody in the pavilion, Daddy Jacques?"

"I ought not to allow anybody to enter, M. Robert, but of course the order does not apply to you. These gentlemen of justice have seen everything there is to be seen and made enough drawings and drawn up enough re-

ports"-"Excuse me, M. Jacques, one question before anything else," said Roule-

"What is it, young man? If I can

"Did vour mistress wear her hair in bands that evening? You know what

I mean-over her forehead?" "No, young man. My mistress never wore her hair in the way you suggest, neither on that day nor on any other. She had her hair drawn up, as usual, so that her beautiful forehead could be seen, pure as that of an unborn child!"

Rouletabille grunted and set to work examining the door, finding that it fastened itself automatically. He satisfied himself that it could never remain open and needed a key to open it. Then we entered the vestibule, a small, well lit room paved with square red

"Ah, this is the window by which the murderer escaped!" said Roule-

"So they keep on saying, monsieur; so they keep on saying. But if he had gone off that way we should have been sure to have seen him. We are not blind, neither M. Stangerson nor I nor the concierges who are in prison. Why have they not put me in prison, too, on account of my revolver?"

Rouletabille had already opened the window and was examining the shut-

"Were these closed at the time of the crime?" "And fastened with the iron catch inside." said Daddy Jacques, "and

not get out that way." "Are there any blood stains?" "Yes-on the stones outside-but

am quite sure that the murderer did

blood of what?" "Ah," said Rouletabille, "there are footmarks visible on the path! The ground was very moist. I will look

(To Be Continued.)

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