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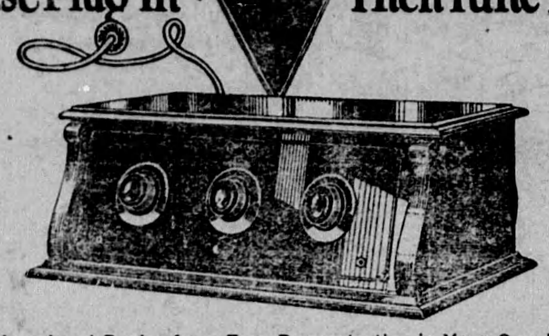

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The

Phantom of the Opera

BY GASTON LEROUX

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TORTURES BEGIN.

(The Persian's Narrative Continued.)

The voice repeated angrily: "What have you done with my bag? So it was to take my bag that you asked me to release you!"

We heard hurried steps, Christine running back to the Louis-Phillipe room, as though to seek shelter on the other side of our wall.

"What are you running away for?" asked the furious voice, which had followed her. "Give me back my bag, will you. Don't you know that it is the bag of life and death?"

"Listen to me, Erik," sighed the girl. "As it is settled that we are to live together . . . what difference can it make to you?"

"You know there are only two keys in it," said the monster. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to look at this room which I have never seen and which you have always kept from me. . . . It's woman's curiosity!" she said, in a tone which she tried to render playful.

But the trick was too childish for Erik to be taken in by it.

"I don't like curious women," he retorted, "and you had better remember the story of Blue-Beard and be careful. . . . Come, give me back my bag. . . . Give me back my bag! . . . Leave the key alone, will you, you inquisitive little thing?"

And he chuckled, while Christine gave a cry of pain. Erik had evidently recovered the bag from her.

At that moment, the viscount could not help uttering an exclamation of impotent rage.

"Why, what's that?" said the monster. "Did you hear, Christine?"

"No, no," replied the poor girl. "I heard nothing."

"I thought I heard a cry."

"A cry! Are you going mad, Erik? Whom do you expect to give a cry, in this house? . . . I cried out because you hurt me! I heard nothing."

"I don't like the way you said that! . . . . You're trembling. . . . . You're quite excited. . . . You're lying! . . . That was a cry, there was a cry! . . . There is some one in the torture-chamber! . . Ah, I understand now!"

"There is no one there, Erik!"

"Well, it won't take long to find out. Christine, my love, we need not open the door to see what is happening in the torture-chamber. Would you like to see? Would you like to see? Look here! If there is some one, if there is really some one there, you will see the invisible window light up at the top, near the ceiling. We need only draw the black curtain and put out the light in here. There, that's it. . ."

And that which I feared above all things began, automatically. We were suddenly flooded with light! Yes, on our side of the wall everything seemed aglow. The Vicomte de Chagny was so much taken aback that he staggered. And the angry voice roared:

"I told you there was some one! Do you see the window now? The lighted window, right up there? The man behind the wall can't see it! But you shall go up the folding steps: that is what they are there for! . . . You have often asked me to tell you; and now you know! . . . They are there to give a peep into the torture-chamber . . . you inquisitive little thing!"

"What tortures? . . . Who is being tortured? . . . Erik, Erik, say you are only trying to frighten me! . . . Say it, if you love me, Erik! . . . There are no tortures, are there?"

"Go and look at the little window, dear!"

I do not know if the viscount heard the swooning voice, for he was too much occupied by the astounding spectacle that now appeared before his distracted gaze.

We heard the steps being dragged against the wall.

"Up with you! . . . No! . . . No, I will go up myself, dear!"

At that moment, we distinctly heard these words above our heads:

"There is no one there, dear!"

" "No one? . . Are you sure there is no one?"

"Why, of course not . . no one!"

"Well, that's all right! . . . What's the matter, Christine? You're not going to faint, are you . . as there is no one there . . . Here . . come down . . there . . Pull yourself together . . . as there is no one there! . . But how do you like the landscape?"

"Oh, very much!"

"There' that's better! . . . You're better now, are you not? . . That's all right, you're better! . . No excitement! . . . And what a funny house, isn't it, with landscapes like that in it?"

"But tell me, Erik, why did you call that room the torture-chamber?"

"Oh, it's very simple. First of all, what did you see?"

"I saw a forest."

"And what is in a forest?"

"Trees."

"And what is in a tree?"

"Birds."

"Did you see any birds?"

"No, I did not see any birds?"

"Well, what did you see? Think! You saw branches! And what are the branches?" asked the terrible voice. "There's a gibbet! That is why I call my wood the torture-chamber! . . . You see, it's all a joke. I never express myself like other people. But I am very tired of it! . . I'm sick and tired of having a forest and a torture-chamber in my house and of living like a mountebank, in a house with a false bottom! . . . I'm tired of it! I want to have a nice, quiet flat, with ordinary doors and windows and a wife inside it, like anybody else! A wife whom I could love and take out on Sundays and keep amused on weekdays. . . . Tell me you love me! . . . No, you don't love me . . but no matter, you will! . . Once, you could not look at my mask because you knew what was behind. . . . And now you don't mind looking at it and you forget what is behind! . . . One can get used to everything . . . if one wishes. . . Plenty of young people who did not care for each other before marriage have adored each other since! Oh, I don't know what I am talking about! But you would have lots of fun with me. For instance, I am the foremost ventriloquist in the world! . . . You're laughing. . . Perhaps you don' believe me. Listen."

The wretch, who really was the greatest ventriloquist in the world, was only trying to divert the child's attention from the torture-chamber, but it was a stupid scheme, for Christine thought of nothing but us! She repeatedly besought him, in the gentlest tone which she could assume:

"Put out the light in the little window! . . . Erik, do put out the light in the little window!"

For she saw that this light, which appeared so suddenly and of which the monster had spoken in so threatening a voice, must mean something terrible. One thing must have pacified her a moment; and that was seeing the two of us behind the wall, in the midst of the resplendent light, alive and well. But she would certainly have left much easier if the light had been put out.

Meantime, the other had already begun to play the ventriloquist. He said:

"Here, I raise my mask a little. . . . Oh, only a little! . . . You see my lips, such lips as I have? They're not moving! . . . My mouth is closed—such mouth as I have—and yet you hear my voice. . . . Where will you have it? In your left ear? In your right ear? In the table? In those little ebony boxes on the mantelpiece? . . . Listen, dear, it's in the little box on the right of the mantelpiece: what does it say in the little box on the left? 'Shall I turn the scorpion?' . . . . And now, crack! Here it is in the little leather bag. . . What does it say? 'I am the little bag of life and death!'

"And now, crack! It is in Carlotta's throat, in Carlotta's golden throat, as I live! What does it say? It says, 'It's I, Mr. Toad, it's I singing! I feel without alarm—co-ack—with its melody enwind me—co-ack!' . . . And now, crack! It is on a chair in the ghost's box and it says, 'Madame Carlotta's singing to-night will bring the chandelier down!' And now, crack! Aha! Where is Erik's voice now? Listen, Christine, darling! Listen! It is behind the door of the torture-chamber! And what do I say? I say, 'Woe to them that have a nose, a real nose, and come to look around the torture-chamber! Aha, aha, aha!' "

Oh, the ventriloquist's terrible voice. It was everywhere, everywhere. It passed through the little invisible window, through the walls. It ran around us, between us. Erik was there, speaking to us! We made a movement as though to fling ourselves upon him. But, already, swifter, more fleeting than the voice of the echo, Erik's voice had leaped back behind the wall!

Soon we heard nothing more at all, for this is what happened:

"Erik! Erik!" said Christine's voice. You tire me with your voice. Don't go, on, Erik! Isn't it very hot here?"

"Oh, yes," replied Erik's voice, "the heat is unendurable!"

"But what does this mean? . . The wall is really getting quite hot! The wall is burning! . . ."

"I'll tell you, Christine, dear: it is because of the forest next door."

"Well, what has that to do with it? The forest?"

"Why, didn't you see that it was an African forest?"

And the monster laughed so loudly and hideously that we could no longer distinguish Christine's supplicating cries! The Vicomte de Chagny shouted and banged against the walls like a madman. I could not restrain him. But we heard nothing except the monster's laughter, and the monster himself can have heard nothing else. And then there was the sound of a body falling on the floor and being dragged along and a door slammed and then nothing, nothing more around us save the scorching silence of the south in the heart of a tropical forest!

CHAPTER XVII.

"BARRELS! BARRELS! ANY BARRELS TO SELL?

(The Persian's Narrative Continued.)

I have said that the room in which M. le Vicomte de Chagny and I were imprisoned was a regular hexagon, lined entirely with mirrors. Plenty of these rooms have been seen since, mainly at exhibitions: they are called "palaces of illusions," or some such name. But the invention belongs entirely to Erik, who built the first room of this kind under my eyes at the time of the rosy hours of Mazenderan. A decorative object, such as a column, for instance, was placed in one of the corners and immediately produced a hall of a thousand columns; for, thanks to the mirrors, the real room was multiplied by six hexagonal rooms, each of which, in its turn, was multiplied indefinitely. But the little sultana soon tired of this infantile illusion, whereupon Erik altered his invention into a "torture-chamber." For the architectural motive placed in one corner, he substituted an iron tree. This tree, with its painted leaves, was absolutely true to life and was made of iron so as to resist all the attacks of the "patient" who was locked into the torture-chamber. We shall see how the scene thus obtained was twice altered instantaneously into two successive other scenes, by means of the automatic rotation of the drums or rollers in the corners. These were divided into three sections, fitting into a decorative scheme that came into sight as the roller revolved upon its axis.

The walls of this strange room gave the patient nothing to lay hold of, because, apart from the solid decorative object, they were simply furnished with mirrors, thick enough to withstand any onslaught of the victim, who was flung into the chamber empty-handed and barefoot.

There was no furniture. The ceiling was capable of being lit up. An ingenious system of electric heating, which has since been imitated, allowed the temperature of the walls and room to be increased at will.

I am giving these details of a perfectly natural invention, producing, with a few painted branches, the supernatural illusion of an equatorial forest blazing under the tropical sun, so that no one may doubt the present balance of my brain or feel entitled to say that I am mad or lying or that I take him for a fool.

I now return to the facts where I left them. When the ceiling lit up and the forest became visible around us, the viscount's stupefaction was immense. That impenetrable forest, with its innumerable trunks and branches, threw him into a terrible state of consternation. He passed his hands over his forehead, as though to drive away a dream; his eyes blinked; and for a moment, he forgot to listen.

I have already said that the sight of the forest did not surprise me at all; and therefore I listened for the two of us to what was happening next door. Lastly, my attention was especially attracted, not so much to the scene, as to the mirrors that produced it. These mirrors were broken in parts. Yes, they were marked and scratched; they had been "starred," in spite of their solidity; and this proved to me that the torture-chamber in which we now were had already served a purpose.

Yes, some wretch, whose feet were not bare like those of the victims of the rosy hours of Mazendaran had certainly fallen into this "mortal illusion" and, mad with rage, had kicked against those mirrors which, nevertheless, continued to reflect his agony. And the branch of the tree on which he had put on end to his own sufferings was arranged in such a way that, before dying, he had seen, for his last consolation, a thousand men writhing in his company.

(To be continued.)

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In Safe Keeping.

A tailor called on one of his customers with his bill. The customer was in bed.

"You've brought your account, have you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; I want some money."

"Open my writing desk," said the customer. "You see that drawer?"

The tailor opened one, expecting to find it full of cash.

"No—not that one—the other!"

The tailor opened the second, which, like the first, was empty. He opened another.

"What do you see there?" asked the debtor.

"Papers—lots of them," said the caller.

"Ah, yes—that's right! They're bills. Put yours in with them. Good-bye!"

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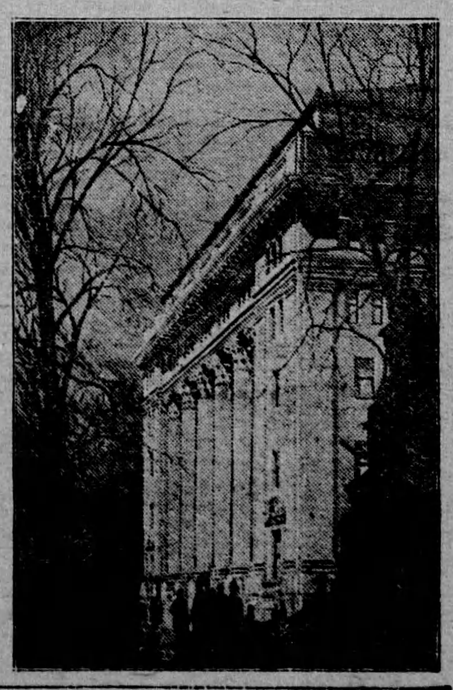
Total Income - - - - - - - An Increase of $6,901,000	69,147,000
Payments to Policyholders and Beneficiaries	35,441,000
Total Payments Since Organization -	219,239,000
Reserve for Unforeseen Contingencies	10,000,000
Surplus over all Liabilities and Contingency Reserve - An Increase of $6,532,000	28,640,000
ASSETS at December 31, 1925 An Increase of $28,925,000	303,056,000

Policies in Force, Excluding Group Policies - - 411,492
Employees of Firms Protected by Group Policies 42,755

Dividends to Policyholders increased for sixth successive year



EXTRACTS FROM DIRECTORS' REPORT

Your Directors present the fifty-fifth annual report for your approval.

The Company's statements have for years reflected its constantly increasing expansion and prosperity, but this year marks an epoch in the life of the organization. It has now passed the Billion Dollars mark in assurance in force, the amount after deducting reassurances being $1,021,097,101.94.

Applications for new assurances have been the largest in our history, aggregating $220,834,526.67. The new policies paid for numbered 57,944, for the amount of $193,477,007.26, after deducting amounts re-assured. The new business for the year exceeds the total amount of business the Company had in force only thirteen years ago.

The gratifying evidences of growth and expansion exhibited in the accompanying statement are paralleled in regard to strength and profitableness. Notwithstanding the general decline in interest rates, the Company has been able not merely to continue, but to slightly increase its record in this connection, the rate earned during the year on the mean invested assets having been 6.47 per cent.

Several factors have contributed to produce this result, not the least important being an increase in the dividends paid by some of the corporations in which the Company has substantial stock holdings.

Even more important than interest yield has been the advance in the market value of our securities. For many years we have specialized in long term bonds and preferred and common stocks of outstanding corporations, both in Canada and in the United States. We are now reaping the rewards of this policy. On actual sales of municipal debentures and other securities which had risen to high premiums, we have realized a net profit of $2,215,772.41, while the increase in the value of securities still held has been much greater.

The profits earned by the Company during the year, based on the increase in the valuation of our securities as made by the government authorities, has been $21,866,284.00. We have not thought it wise, however, to take credit for this entire amount, and . . . have made a deduction of $3,000,000 from the official valuation placed on our assets. We have, moreover, added $2,500,000 to our Contingency Accounts, bringing them up to a total of $10,000,000.

Following the practice of recent years, we have written off $750,000 from the book value of our Head Office and Branch Buildings, and other real estate.

We have also, by setting aside an additional $350,000, further strengthened the special reserve to provide for possible greater longevity among annuitants, bringing the total amount under this heading up to $1,100,000 in excess of government requirements.

During the year we have paid or allotted $7,662,784.35 as profits to our policyholders. After deducting this sum, and the accretions to shareholders' account, and making the foregoing heavy allocations, we have yet been able to add $6,832,642.75 to our undivided profits bringing the total surplus over all liabilities, Contingency Accounts and Capital up to $28,640,000.69.

For the sixth consecutive year we are able to announce an increase in the scale of profits to be distributed to our policyholders in the ensuing year.

. . . . To provide for the expansion of our business, it has been necessary to make an extension of the Head Office building, which has now been completed, and will be formally opened on the day of our Annual Meeting. The building is devoted exclusively to the use of the Company, but it is already evident that we must at once provide for further enlargement. . .

SUN LIFE ASSURANCE
COMPANY OF CANADA