ГАСТОН ЛЕРУ

# THE MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW ROOM

# Гастон Леру
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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I. In Which We Begin Not to Understand

It is not without a certain emotion that I begin to recount here the extraordinary adventures of Joseph Rouletabille. Down to the present time he had so firmly opposed my doing it that I had come to despair of ever publishing the most curious of police stories of the past fifteen years. I had even imagined that the public would never know the whole truth of the prodigious case known as that of "The Yellow Room", out of which grew so many mysterious, cruel, and sensational dramas, with which my friend was so closely mixed up, if, propos of a recent nomination of the illustrious Stangerson to the grade of grandcross of the Legion of Honour, an evening journal—in an article, miserable for its ignorance, or audacious for its perfidy—had not resuscitated a terrible adventure of which Joseph Rouletabille had told me he wished to be for ever forgotten.

"The Yellow Room"! Who now remembers this affair which

caused so much ink to flow fifteen years ago? Events are so quickly forgotten in Paris. Has not the very name of the Nayves trial and the tragic history of the death of little Menaldo passed out of mind? And yet the public attention was so deeply interested in the details of the trial that the occurrence of a ministerial crisis was completely unnoticed at the time. Now The Yellow Room trial, which, preceded that of the Nayves by some years, made far more noise. The entire world hung for months over this obscure problem—the most obscure, it seems to me, that has ever challenged the perspicacity of our police or taxed the conscience of our judges. The solution of the problem baffled everybody who tried to find it. It was like a dramatic rebus with which old Europe and new America alike became fascinated. That is, in truth—I am permitted to say, because there cannot be any author's vanity in all this, since I do nothing more than transcribe facts on which an exceptional documentation enables me to throw a new light—that is because, in truth, I do not know that, in the domain of reality or imagination, one can discover or recall to mind anything comparable, in its mystery, with the natural mystery of "The Yellow Room".

That which nobody could find out, Joseph Rouletabille, aged eighteen, then a reporter engaged on a leading journal, succeeded in discovering. But when, at the Assize Court, he brought in the key to the whole case, he did not tell the whole truth. He only allowed so much of it to appear as sufficed to ensure the acquittal of an innocent man. The reasons which he had for his reticence

no longer exist. Better still, the time has come for my friend to speak out fully. You are going to know all; and, without further preamble, I am going to place before your eyes the problem of The Yellow Room as it was placed before the eyes of the entire world on the day following the enactment of the drama at the Chateau du Glandier.

On the 25th of October, 1892, the following note appeared in the latest edition of the "Temps":

"A frightful crime has been committed at the Glandier, on the border of the forest of Sainte-Genevieve, above Epinay-sur-Orge, at the house of Professor Stangerson. On that night, while the master was working in his laboratory, an attempt was made to assassinate Mademoiselle Stangerson, who was sleeping in a chamber adjoining this laboratory. The doctors do not answer for the life of Mdlle. Stangerson."

The impression made on Paris by this news may be easily imagined. Already, at that time, the learned world was deeply interested in the labours of Professor Stangerson and his daughter. These labours—the first that were attempted in radiography—served to open the way for Monsieur and Madame Curie to the discovery of radium. It was expected the Professor would shortly read to the Academy of Sciences a sensational paper on his new theory,—the Dissociation of Matter,—a theory destined to overthrow from its base the whole of official science, which based itself on the principle of the Conservation of Energy. On the following day, the newspapers were full of the

tragedy. The "Matin," among others, published the following article, entitled: "A Supernatural Crime":

"These are the only details," wrote the anonymous writer in the "Matin"—"we have been able to obtain concerning the crime of the Chateau du Glandier. The state of despair in which Professor Stangerson is plunged, and the impossibility of getting any information from the lips of the victim, have rendered our investigations and those of justice so difficult that, at present, we cannot form the least idea of what has passed in The Yellow Room in which Mdlle. Stangerson, in her night-dress, was found lying on the floor in the agonies of death. We have, at least, been able to interview Daddy Jacques—as he is called in the country—a old servant in the Stangerson family. Daddy Jacques entered "The Yellow Room" at the same time as the Professor. This chamber adjoins the laboratory. Laboratory and Yellow Room are in a pavilion at the end of the park, about three hundred metres (a thousand feet) from the chateau.

"'It was half-past twelve at night,' this honest old man told us, 'and I was in the laboratory, where Monsieur Stangerson was still working, when the thing happened. I had been cleaning and putting instruments in order all the evening and was waiting for Monsieur Stangerson to go to bed. Mademoiselle Stangerson had worked with her father up to midnight; when the twelve strokes of midnight had sounded by the cuckoo-clock in the laboratory, she rose, kissed Monsieur Stangerson and bade him good-night. To me she said "bon soir, Daddy Jacques" as she passed into The

Yellow Room. We heard her lock the door and shoot the bolt, so that I could not help laughing, and said to Monsieur: "There's Mademoiselle double-locking herself in,—she must be afraid of the 'Bete du bon Dieu!'" Monsieur did not even hear me, he was so deeply absorbed in what he was doing. Just then we heard the distant miawing of a cat. "Is that going to keep us awake all night?" I said to myself; for I must tell you, Monsieur, that, to the end of October, I live in an attic of the pavilion over The Yellow Room, so that Mademoiselle should not be left alone through the night in the lonely park. It was the fancy of Mademoiselle to spend the fine weather in the pavilion; no doubt, she found it more cheerful than the chateau and, for the four years it had been built, she had never failed to take up her lodging there in the spring. With the return of winter, Mademoiselle returns to the chateau, for there is no fireplace in The Yellow Room.

"'We were staying in the pavilion, then—Monsieur Stangerson and me. We made no noise. He was seated at his desk. As for me, I was sitting on a chair, having finished my work and, looking at him, I said to myself: "What a man!—what intelligence!—what knowledge!" I attach importance to the fact that we made no noise; for, because of that, the assassin certainly thought that we had left the place. And, suddenly, while the cuckoo was sounding the half after midnight, a desperate clamour broke out in "The Yellow Room". It was the voice of Mademoiselle, crying "Murder!—murder!—help!" Immediately afterwards revolver shots rang out and there was a great noise of tables and furniture

being thrown to the ground, as if in the course of a struggle, and again the voice of Mademoiselle calling, "Murder!—help! —Papa!—Papa!—"

"'You may be sure that we quickly sprang up and that Monsieur Stangerson and I threw ourselves upon the door. But alas! it was locked, fast locked, on the inside, by the care of Mademoiselle, as I have told you, with key and bolt. We tried to force it open, but it remained firm. Monsieur Stangerson was like a madman, and truly, it was enough to make him one, for we heard Mademoiselle still calling "Help!—help!" Monsieur Stangerson showered terrible blows on the door, and wept with rage and sobbed with despair and helplessness.

"'It was then that I had an inspiration. "The assassin must have entered by the window!" I cried;—"I will go to the window!" and I rushed from the pavilion and ran like one out of his mind.

"'The inspiration was that the window of "The Yellow Room" looks out in such a way that the park wall, which abuts on the pavilion, prevented my at once reaching the window. To get up to it one has first to go out of the park. I ran towards the gate and, on my way, met Bernier and his wife, the gate-keepers, who had been attracted by the pistol reports and by our cries. In a few words I told them what had happened, and directed the concierge to join Monsieur Stangerson with all speed, while his wife came with me to open the park gate. Five minutes later she and I were before the window of "The Yellow Room".

"'The moon was shining brightly and I saw clearly that no one

had touched the window. Not only were the bars that protect it intact, but the blinds inside of them were drawn, as I had myself drawn them early in the evening, as I did every day, though Mademoiselle, knowing that I was tired from the heavy work I had been doing, had begged me not to trouble myself, but leave her to do it; and they were just as I had left them, fastened with an iron catch on the inside. The assassin, therefore, could not have passed either in or out that way; but neither could I get in.

"'It was unfortunate,—enough to turn one's brain! The door of the room locked on the inside and the blinds on the only window also fastened on the inside; and Mademoiselle still calling for help!—No! she had ceased to call. She was dead, perhaps. But I still heard her father, in the pavilion, trying to break down the door.

"'With the concierge I hurried back to the pavilion. The door, in spite of the furious attempts of Monsieur Stangerson and Bernier to burst it open, was still holding firm; but at length, it gave way before our united efforts,—and then what a sight met our eyes! I should tell you that, behind us, the concierge held the laboratory lamp—a powerful lamp, that lit the whole chamber.

"'I must also tell you, monsieur, that "The Yellow Room" is a very small room. Mademoiselle had furnished it with a fairly large iron bedstead, a small table, a night-commode; a dressing-table, and two chairs. By the light of the big lamp we saw all at a glance. Mademoiselle, in her night-dress, was lying on the floor in the midst of the greatest disorder. Tables and chairs had

been overthrown, showing that there had been a violent struggle. Mademoiselle had certainly been dragged from her bed. She was covered with blood and had terrible marks of finger-nails on her throat,—the flesh of her neck having been almost torn by the nails. From a wound on the right temple a stream of blood had run down and made a little pool on the floor. When Monsieur Stangerson saw his daughter in that state, he threw himself on his knees beside her, uttering a cry of despair. He ascertained that she still breathed. As to us, we searched for the wretch who had tried to kill our mistress, and I swear to you, monsieur, that, if we had found him, it would have gone hard with him!

"'But how to explain that he was not there, that he had already escaped? It passes all imagination!—Nobody under the bed, nobody behind the furniture!—All that we discovered were traces, blood-stained marks of a man's large hand on the walls and on the door; a big handkerchief red with blood, without any initials, an old cap, and many fresh footmarks of a man on the floor,—footmarks of a man with large feet whose boot-soles had left a sort of sooty impression. How had this man got away? How had he vanished? Don't forget, monsieur, that there is no chimney in "The Yellow Room". He could not have escaped by the door, which is narrow, and on the threshold of which the concierge stood with the lamp, while her husband and I searched for him in every corner of the little room, where it is impossible for anyone to hide himself. The door, which had been forced open against the wall, could not conceal anything behind it, as we assured

ourselves. By the window, still in every way secured, no flight had been possible. What then?—I began to believe in the Devil.

"'But we discovered my revolver on the floor!—Yes, my revolver! Oh! that brought me back to the reality! The Devil would not have needed to steal my revolver to kill Mademoiselle. The man who had been there had first gone up to my attic and taken my revolver from the drawer where I kept it. We then ascertained, by counting the cartridges, that the assassin had fired two shots. Ah! it was fortunate for me that Monsieur Stangerson was in the laboratory when the affair took place and had seen with his own eyes that I was there with him; for otherwise, with this business of my revolver, I don't know where we should have been,—I should now be under lock and bar. Justice wants no more to send a man to the scaffold!'"

The editor of the "Matin" added to this interview the following lines:

"We have, without interrupting him, allowed Daddy Jacques to recount to us roughly all he knows about the crime of "The Yellow Room". We have reproduced it in his own words, only sparing the reader the continual lamentations with which he garnished his narrative. It is quite understood, Daddy Jacques, quite understood, that you are very fond of your masters; and you want them to know it, and never cease repeating it—especially since the discovery of your revolver. It is your right, and we see no harm in it. We should have liked to put some further questions to Daddy Jacques—Jacques—Louis Moustier—but the inquiry

of the examining magistrate, which is being carried on at the chateau, makes it impossible for us to gain admission at the Glandier; and, as to the oak wood, it is guarded by a wide circle of policemen, who are jealously watching all traces that can lead to the pavilion, and that may perhaps lead to the discovery of the assassin. "We have also wished to question the concierges, but they are invisible. Finally, we have waited in a roadside inn, not far from the gate of the chateau, for the departure of Monsieur de Marquet, the magistrate of Corbeil. At half-past five we saw him and his clerk and, before he was able to enter his carriage, had an opportunity to ask him the following question:

"'Can you, Monsieur de Marquet, give us any information as to this affair, without inconvenience to the course of your inquiry?'

"'It is impossible for us to do it,' replied Monsieur de Marquet. 'I can only say that it is the strangest affair I have ever known. The more we think we know something, the further we are from knowing anything!'

"We asked Monsieur de Marquet to be good enough to explain his last words; and this is what he said,—the importance of which no one will fail to recognise:

"'If nothing is added to the material facts so far established, I fear that the mystery which surrounds the abominable crime of which Mademoiselle Stangerson has been the victim will never be brought to light; but it is to be hoped, for the sake of our human reason, that the examination of the walls, and of the ceiling of "The Yellow Room"—an examination which I shall to-

morrow intrust to the builder who constructed the pavilion four years ago—will afford us the proof that may not discourage us. For the problem is this: we know by what way the assassin gained admission,—he entered by the door and hid himself under the bed, awaiting Mademoiselle Stangerson. But how did he leave? How did he escape? If no trap, no secret door, no hiding place, no opening of any sort is found; if the examination of the walls —even to the demolition of the pavilion—does not reveal any passage practicable—not only for a human being, but for any being whatsoever—if the ceiling shows no crack, if the floor hides no underground passage, one must really believe in the Devil, as Daddy Jacques says!""

And the anonymous writer in the "Matin" added in this article —which I have selected as the most interesting of all those that were published on the subject of this affair—that the examining magistrate appeared to place a peculiar significance to the last sentence: "One must really believe in the Devil, as Jacques says."

The article concluded with these lines: "We wanted to know what Daddy Jacques meant by the cry of the Bete Du Bon Dieu." The landlord of the Donjon Inn explained to us that it is the particularly sinister cry which is uttered sometimes at night by the cat of an old woman,—Mother Angenoux, as she is called in the country. Mother Angenoux is a sort of saint, who lives in a hut in the heart of the forest, not far from the grotto of Sainte-Genevieve.

""The Yellow Room", the Bete Du Bon Dieu, Mother

Angenoux, the Devil, Sainte-Genevieve, Daddy Jacques,—here is a well entangled crime which the stroke of a pickaxe in the wall may disentangle for us to-morrow. Let us at least hope that, for the sake of our human reason, as the examining magistrate says. Meanwhile, it is expected that Mademoiselle Stangerson —who has not ceased to be delirious and only pronounces one word distinctly, 'Murderer! Murderer!'—will not live through the night."

In conclusion, and at a late hour, the same journal announced that the Chief of the Surete had telegraphed to the famous detective, Frederic Larsan, who had been sent to London for an affair of stolen securities, to return immediately to Paris.

# CHAPTER II. In Which Joseph Rouletabille Appears for the First Time

I remember as well as if it had occurred yesterday, the entry of young Rouletabille into my bedroom that morning. It was about eight o'clock and I was still in bed reading the article in the "Matin" relative to the Glandier crime.

But, before going further, it is time that I present my friend to the reader.

I first knew Joseph Rouletabille when he was a young reporter. At that time I was a beginner at the Bar and often met him in the corridors of examining magistrates, when I had gone to get a "permit to communicate" for the prison of Mazas, or for Saint-Lazare. He had, as they say, "a good nut." He seemed to have taken his head—round as a bullet—out of a box of marbles, and it is from that, I think, that his comrades of the press—all determined billiard-players—had given him that nickname, which was to stick to him and be made illustrious by him. He was always as red as a tomato, now gay as a lark, now grave as a judge. How, while still so young—he was only sixteen and a half years old when I saw him for the first time—had he already won his way on the press? That was what everybody who came into contact with him might have asked, if they had not known

his history. At the time of the affair of the woman cut in pieces in the Rue Oberskampf—another forgotten story—he had taken to one of the editors of the "Epoque,"—a paper then rivalling the "Matin" for information,—the left foot, which was missing from the basket in which the gruesome remains were discovered. For this left foot the police had been vainly searching for a week, and young Rouletabille had found it in a drain where nobody had thought of looking for it. To do that he had dressed himself as an extra sewer-man, one of a number engaged by the administration of the city of Paris, owing to an overflow of the Seine.

When the editor-in-chief was in possession of the precious foot and informed as to the train of intelligent deductions the boy had been led to make, he was divided between the admiration he felt for such detective cunning in a brain of a lad of sixteen years, and delight at being able to exhibit, in the "morgue window" of his paper, the left foot of the Rue Oberskampf.

"This foot," he cried, "will make a great headline."

Then, when he had confided the gruesome packet to the medical lawyer attached to the journal, he asked the lad, who was shortly to become famous as Rouletabille, what he would expect to earn as a general reporter on the "Epoque"?

"Two hundred francs a month," the youngster replied modestly, hardly able to breathe from surprise at the proposal.

"You shall have two hundred and fifty," said the editor-in-chief; "only you must tell everybody that you have been engaged on the paper for a month. Let it be quite understood that it was

not you but the 'Epoque' that discovered the left foot of the Rue Oberskampf. Here, my young friend, the man is nothing, the paper everything."

Having said this, he begged the new reporter to retire, but before the youth had reached the door he called him back to ask his name. The other replied:

"Joseph Josephine."

"That's not a name," said the editor-in-chief, "but since you will not be required to sign what you write it is of no consequence."

The boy-faced reporter speedily made himself many friends, for he was serviceable and gifted with a good humour that enchanted the most severe-tempered and disarmed the most zealous of his companions. At the Bar cafe, where the reporters assembled before going to any of the courts, or to the Prefecture, in search of their news of crime, he began to win a reputation as an unraveller of intricate and obscure affairs which found its way to the office of the Chief of the Surete. When a case was worth the trouble and Rouletabille—he had already been given his nickname—had been started on the scent by his editor-in-chief, he often got the better of the most famous detective.

It was at the Bar cafe that I became intimately acquainted with him. Criminal lawyers and journalists are not enemies, the former need advertisement, the latter information. We chatted together, and I soon warmed towards him. His intelligence was so keen, and so original!—and he had a quality of thought such

as I have never found in any other person.

Some time after this I was put in charge of the law news of the "Cri du Boulevard." My entry into journalism could not but strengthen the ties which united me to Rouletabille. After a while, my new friend being allowed to carry out an idea of a judicial correspondence column, which he was allowed to sign "Business," in the "Epoque," I was often able to furnish him with the legal information of which he stood in need.

Nearly two years passed in this way, and the better I knew him, the more I learned to love him; for, in spite of his careless extravagance, I had discovered in him what was, considering his age, an extraordinary seriousness of mind. Accustomed as I was to seeing him gay and, indeed, often too gay, I would many times find him plunged in the deepest melancholy. I tried then to question him as to the cause of this change of humour, but each time he laughed and made me no answer. One day, having questioned him about his parents, of whom he never spoke, he left me, pretending not to have heard what I said.

While things were in this state between us, the famous case of The Yellow Room took place. It was this case which was to rank him as the leading newspaper reporter, and to obtain for him the reputation of being the greatest detective in the world. It should not surprise us to find in the one man the perfection of two such lines of activity if we remember that the daily press was already beginning to transform itself and to become what it is to-day—the gazette of crime.

Morose-minded people may complain of this; for myself I regard it a matter for congratulation. We can never have too many arms, public or private, against the criminal. To this some people may answer that, by continually publishing the details of crimes, the press ends by encouraging their commission. But then, with some people we can never do right. Rouletabille, as I have said, entered my room that morning of the 26th of October, 1892. He was looking redder than usual, and his eyes were bulging out of his head, as the phrase is, and altogether he appeared to be in a state of extreme excitement. He waved the "Matin" with a trembling hand, and cried:

"Well, my dear Sainclair,—have you read it?"

"The Glandier crime?"

"Yes; "The Yellow Room"!—What do you think of it?"

"I think that it must have been the Devil or the Bete du Bon Dieu that committed the crime."

"Be serious!"

"Well, I don't much believe in murderers[1] who make their escape through walls of solid brick. I think Daddy Jacques did wrong to leave behind him the weapon with which the crime was committed and, as he occupied the attic immediately above Mademoiselle Stangerson's room, the builder's job ordered by the examining magistrate will give us the key of the enigma and it

[1] Although the original English translation often uses the words "murder" and "murderer," the reader may substitute "attack" and "attacker" since no murder is actually committed.

will not be long before we learn by what natural trap, or by what secret door, the old fellow was able to slip in and out, and return immediately to the laboratory to Monsieur Stangerson, without his absence being noticed. That, of course, is only an hypothesis."

Rouletabille sat down in an armchair, lit his pipe, which he was never without, smoked for a few minutes in silence—no doubt to calm the excitement which, visibly, dominated him—and then replied:

"Young man," he said, in a tone the sad irony of which I will not attempt to render, "young man, you are a lawyer and I doubt not your ability to save the guilty from conviction; but if you were a magistrate on the bench, how easy it would be for you to condemn innocent persons!—You are really gifted, young man!"

He continued to smoke energetically, and then went on:

"No trap will be found, and the mystery of "The Yellow Room" will become more and more mysterious. That's why it interests me. The examining magistrate is right; nothing stranger than this crime has ever been known."

"Have you any idea of the way by which the murderer escaped?" I asked.

"None," replied Rouletabille—"none, for the present. But I have an idea as to the revolver; the murderer did not use it."

"Good Heavens! By whom, then, was it used?"

"Why—by Mademoiselle Stangerson."

"I don't understand,—or rather, I have never understood," I said.

Rouletabille shrugged his shoulders.

"Is there nothing in this article in the 'Matin' by which you were particularly struck?"

"Nothing,—I have found the whole of the story it tells equally strange."

"Well, but—the locked door—with the key on the inside?"

"That's the only perfectly natural thing in the whole article."

"Really!—And the bolt?"

"The bolt?"

"Yes, the bolt—also inside the room—a still further protection against entry? Mademoiselle Stangerson took quite extraordinary precautions! It is clear to me that she feared someone. That was why she took such precautions—even Daddy Jacques's revolver—without telling him of it. No doubt she didn't wish to alarm anybody, and least of all, her father. What she dreaded took place, and she defended herself. There was a struggle, and she used the revolver skilfully enough to wound the assassin in the hand—which explains the impression on the wall and on the door of the large, blood-stained hand of the man who was searching for a means of exit from the chamber. But she didn't fire soon enough to avoid the terrible blow on the right temple."

"Then the wound on the temple was not done with the revolver?"

"The paper doesn't say it was, and I don't think it was; because logically it appears to me that the revolver was used

by Mademoiselle Stangerson against the assassin. Now, what weapon did the murderer use? The blow on the temple seems to show that the murderer wished to stun Mademoiselle Stangerson, —after he had unsuccessfully tried to strangle her. He must have known that the attic was inhabited by Daddy Jacques, and that was one of the reasons, I think, why he must have used a quiet weapon,—a life-preserver, or a hammer."

"All that doesn't explain how the murderer got out of "The Yellow Room"," I observed.

"Evidently," replied Rouletabille, rising, "and that is what has to be explained. I am going to the Chateau du Glandier, and have come to see whether you will go with me."

"I?—"

"Yes, my boy. I want you. The 'Epoque' has definitely entrusted this case to me, and I must clear it up as quickly as possible."

"But in what way can I be of any use to you?"

"Monsieur Robert Darzac is at the Chateau du Glandier."

"That's true. His despair must be boundless."

"I must have a talk with him."

Rouletabille said it in a tone that surprised me.

"Is it because—you think there is something to be got out of him?" I asked.

"Yes."

That was all he would say. He retired to my sitting-room, begging me to dress quickly.

I knew Monsieur Robert Darzac from having been of great service to him in a civil action, while I was acting as secretary to Maitre Barbet Delatour. Monsieur Robert Darzac, who was at that time about forty years of age, was a professor of physics at the Sorbonne. He was intimately acquainted with the Stangersons, and, after an assiduous seven years' courtship of the daughter, had been on the point of marrying her. In spite of the fact that she has become, as the phrase goes, "a person of a certain age," she was still remarkably good-looking. While I was dressing I called out to Rouletabille, who was impatiently moving about my sitting-room:

"Have you any idea as to the murderer's station in life?"

"Yes," he replied; "I think if he isn't a man in society, he is, at least, a man belonging to the upper class. But that, again, is only an impression."

"What has led you to form it?"

"Well,—the greasy cap, the common handkerchief, and the marks of the rough boots on the floor," he replied.

"I understand," I said; "murderers don't leave traces behind them which tell the truth."

"We shall make something out of you yet, my dear Sainclair," concluded Rouletabille.

# CHAPTER III. "A Man Has Passed Like a Shadow Through the Blinds"

Half an hour later Rouletabille and I were on the platform of the Orleans station, awaiting the departure of the train which was to take us to Epinay-sur-Orge.

On the platform we found Monsieur de Marquet and his Registrar, who represented the Judicial Court of Corbeil. Monsieur Marquet had spent the night in Paris, attending the final rehearsal, at the Scala, of a little play of which he was the unknown author, signing himself simply "Castigat Ridendo."

Monsieur de Marquet was beginning to be a "noble old gentleman." Generally he was extremely polite and full of gay humour, and in all his life had had but one passion,—that of dramatic art. Throughout his magisterial career he was interested solely in cases capable of furnishing him with something in the nature of a drama. Though he might very well have aspired to the highest judicial positions, he had never really worked for anything but to win a success at the romantic Porte-Saint-Martin, or at the sombre Odeon.

Because of the mystery which shrouded it, the case of "The Yellow Room" was certain to fascinate so theatrical a mind. It interested him enormously, and he threw himself into it, less as a magistrate eager to know the truth, than as an amateur of

dramatic embroglios, tending wholly to mystery and intrigue, who dreads nothing so much as the explanatory final act.

So that, at the moment of meeting him, I heard Monsieur de Marquet say to the Registrar with a sigh:

"I hope, my dear Monsieur Maleine, this builder with his pickaxe will not destroy so fine a mystery."

"Have no fear," replied Monsieur Maleine, "his pickaxe may demolish the pavilion, perhaps, but it will leave our case intact. I have sounded the walls and examined the ceiling and floor and I know all about it. I am not to be deceived."

Having thus reassured his chief, Monsieur Maleine, with a discreet movement of the head, drew Monsieur de Marquet's attention to us. The face of that gentleman clouded, and, as he saw Rouletabille approaching, hat in hand, he sprang into one of the empty carriages saying, half aloud to his Registrar, as he did so, "Above all, no journalists!"

Monsieur Maleine replied in the same tone, "I understand!" and then tried to prevent Rouletabille from entering the same compartment with the examining magistrate.

"Excuse me, gentlemen,—this compartment is reserved."

"I am a journalist, Monsieur, engaged on the 'Epoque,'" said my young friend with a great show of gesture and politeness, "and I have a word or two to say to Monsieur de Marquet."

"Monsieur is very much engaged with the inquiry he has in hand."

"Ah! his inquiry, pray believe me, is absolutely a matter of

indifference to me. I am no scavenger of odds and ends," he went on, with infinite contempt in his lower lip, "I am a theatrical reporter; and this evening I shall have to give a little account of the play at the Scala."

"Get in, sir, please," said the Registrar.

Rouletabille was already in the compartment. I went in after him and seated myself by his side. The Registrar followed and closed the carriage door.

Monsieur de Marquet looked at him.

"Ah, sir," Rouletabille began, "You must not be angry with Monsieur de Maleine. It is not with Monsieur de Marquet that I desire to have the honour of speaking, but with Monsieur 'Castigat Ridendo.' Permit me to congratulate you—personally, as well as the writer for the 'Epoque.'" And Rouletabille, having first introduced me, introduced himself.

Monsieur de Marquet, with a nervous gesture, caressed his beard into a point, and explained to Rouletabille, in a few words, that he was too modest an author to desire that the veil of his pseudonym should be publicly raised, and that he hoped the enthusiasm of the journalist for the dramatist's work would not lead him to tell the public that Monsieur "Castigat Ridendo" and the examining magistrate of Corbeil were one and the same person.

"The work of the dramatic author may interfere," he said, after a slight hesitation, "with that of the magistrate, especially in a province where one's labours are little more than routine."

"Oh, you may rely on my discretion!" cried Rouletabille.

The train was in motion.

"We have started!" said the examining magistrate, surprised at seeing us still in the carriage.

"Yes, Monsieur,—truth has started," said Rouletabile, smiling amiably,—"on its way to the Chateau du Glandier. A fine case, Monsieur de Marquet,—a fine case!"

"An obscure—incredible, unfathomable, inexplicable affair—and there is only one thing I fear, Monsieur Rouletabille,—that the journalists will be trying to explain it."

My friend felt this a rap on his knuckles.

"Yes," he said simply, "that is to be feared. They meddle in everything. As for my interest, monsieur, I only referred to it by mere chance,—the mere chance of finding myself in the same train with you, and in the same compartment of the same carriage."

"Where are you going, then?" asked Monsieur de Marquet.

"To the Chateau du Glandier," replied Rouletabille, without turning.

"You'll not get in, Monsieur Rouletabille!"

"Will you prevent me?" said my friend, already prepared to fight.

"Not I!—I like the press and journalists too well to be in any way disagreeable to them; but Monsieur Stangerson has given orders for his door to be closed against everybody, and it is well guarded. Not a journalist was able to pass through the gate of

the Glandier yesterday."

Monsieur de Marquet compressed his lips and seemed ready to relapse into obstinate silence. He only relaxed a little when Rouletabille no longer left him in ignorance of the fact that we were going to the Glandier for the purpose of shaking hands with an "old and intimate friend," Monsieur Robert Darzac—a man whom Rouletabille had perhaps seen once in his life.

"Poor Robert!" continued the young reporter, "this dreadful affair may be his death,—he is so deeply in love with Mademoiselle Stangerson."

"His sufferings are truly painful to witness," escaped like a regret from the lips of Monsieur de Marquet.

"But it is to be hoped that Mademoiselle Stangerson's life will be saved."

"Let us hope so. Her father told me yesterday that, if she does not recover, it will not be long before he joins her in the grave. What an incalculable loss to science his death would be!"

"The wound on her temple is serious, is it not?"

"Evidently; but, by a wonderful chance, it has not proved mortal. The blow was given with great force."

"Then it was not with the revolver she was wounded," said Rouletabille, glancing at me in triumph.

Monsieur de Marquet appeared greatly embarrassed.

"I didn't say anything—I don't want to say anything—I will not say anything," he said. And he turned towards his Registrar as if he no longer knew us.

But Rouletabille was not to be so easily shaken off. He moved nearer to the examining magistrate and, drawing a copy of the "Matin" from his pocket, he showed it to him and said:

"There is one thing, Monsieur, which I may enquire of you without committing an indiscretion. You have, of course, seen the account given in the 'Matin'? It is absurd, is it not?"

"Not in the slightest, Monsieur."

"What! "The Yellow Room" has but one barred window—the bars of which have not been moved—and only one door, which had to be broken open—and the assassin was not found!"

"That's so, monsieur,—that's so. That's how the matter stands."

Rouletabille said no more but plunged into thought. A quarter of an hour thus passed.

Coming back to himself again he said, addressing the magistrate:

"How did Mademoiselle Stangerson wear her hair on that evening?"

"I don't know," replied Monsieur de Marquet.

"That's a very important point," said Rouletabille. "Her hair was done up in bands, wasn't it? I feel sure that on that evening, the evening of the crime, she had her hair arranged in bands."

"Then you are mistaken, Monsieur Rouletabille," replied the magistrate; "Mademoiselle Stangerson that evening had her hair drawn up in a knot on the top of her head,—her usual way of arranging it—her forehead completely uncovered. I can assure

you, for we have carefully examined the wound. There was no blood on the hair, and the arrangement of it has not been disturbed since the crime was committed."

"You are sure! You are sure that, on the night of the crime, she had not her hair in bands?"

"Quite sure," the magistrate continued, smiling, "because I remember the Doctor saying to me, while he was examining the wound, 'It is a great pity Mademoiselle Stangerson was in the habit of drawing her hair back from her forehead. If she had worn it in bands, the blow she received on the temple would have been weakened.' It seems strange to me that you should attach so much importance to this point."

"Oh! if she had not her hair in bands, I give it up," said Rouletabille, with a despairing gesture.

"And was the wound on her temple a bad one?" he asked presently.

"Terrible."

"With what weapon was it made?"

"That is a secret of the investigation."

"Have you found the weapon—whatever it was?"

The magistrate did not answer.

"And the wound in the throat?"

Here the examining magistrate readily confirmed the decision of the doctor that, if the murderer had pressed her throat a few seconds longer, Mademoiselle Stangerson would have died of strangulation.

"The affair as reported in the 'Matin,'" said Rouletabille eagerly, "seems to me more and more inexplicable. Can you tell me, Monsieur, how many openings there are in the pavilion? I mean doors and windows."

"There are five," replied Monsieur de Marquet, after having coughed once or twice, but no longer resisting the desire he felt to talk of the whole of the incredible mystery of the affair he was investigating. "There are five, of which the door of the vestibule is the only entrance to the pavilion,—a door always automatically closed, which cannot be opened, either from the outer or inside, except with the two special keys which are never out of the possession of either Daddy Jacques or Monsieur Stangerson. Mademoiselle Stangerson had no need for one, since Daddy Jacques lodged in the pavilion and because, during the daytime, she never left her father. When they, all four, rushed into "The Yellow Room", after breaking open the door of the laboratory, the door in the vestibule remained closed as usual and, of the two keys for opening it, Daddy Jacques had one in his pocket, and Monsieur Stangerson the other. As to the windows of the pavilion, there are four; the one window of The Yellow Room and those of the laboratory looking out on to the country; the window in the vestibule looking into the park."

"It is by that window that he escaped from the pavilion!" cried Rouletabille.

"How do you know that?" demanded Monsieur de Marquet, fixing a strange look on my young friend.

"We'll see later how he got away from "The Yellow Room"," replied Rouletabille, "but he must have left the pavilion by the vestibule window."

"Once more,—how do you know that?"

"How? Oh, the thing is simple enough! As soon as he found he could not escape by the door of the pavilion his only way out was by the window in the vestibule, unless he could pass through a grated window. The window of "The Yellow Room" is secured by iron bars, because it looks out upon the open country; the two windows of the laboratory have to be protected in like manner for the same reason. As the murderer got away, I conceive that he found a window that was not barred,—that of the vestibule, which opens on to the park,—that is to say, into the interior of the estate. There's not much magic in all that."

"Yes," said Monsieur de Marquet, "but what you have not guessed is that this single window in the vestibule, though it has no iron bars, has solid iron blinds. Now these iron blinds have remained fastened by their iron latch; and yet we have proof that the murderer made his escape from the pavilion by that window! Traces of blood on the inside wall and on the blinds as well as on the floor, and footmarks, of which I have taken the measurements, attest the fact that the murderer made his escape that way. But then, how did he do it, seeing that the blinds remained fastened on the inside? He passed through them like a shadow. But what is more bewildering than all is that it is impossible to form any idea as to how the murderer got out of

"The Yellow Room", or how he got across the laboratory to reach the vestibule! Ah, yes, Monsieur Rouletabille, it is altogether as you said, a fine case, the key to which will not be discovered for a long time, I hope."

"You hope, Monsieur?"

Monsieur de Marquet corrected himself.

"I do not hope so,—I think so."

"Could that window have been closed and refastened after the flight of the assassin?" asked Rouletabille.

"That is what occurred to me for a moment; but it would imply an accomplice or accomplices,—and I don't see—"

After a short silence he added:

"Ah—if Mademoiselle Stangerson were only well enough to-day to be questioned!"

Rouletabille following up his thought, asked:

"And the attic?—There must be some opening to that?"

"Yes; there is a window, or rather skylight, in it, which, as it looks out towards the country, Monsieur Stangerson has had barred, like the rest of the windows. These bars, as in the other windows, have remained intact, and the blinds, which naturally open inwards, have not been unfastened. For the rest, we have not discovered anything to lead us to suspect that the murderer had passed through the attic."

"It seems clear to you, then, Monsieur, that the murderer escaped—nobody knows how—by the window in the vestibule?"

"Everything goes to prove it."

"I think so, too," confessed Rouletabille gravely.

After a brief silence, he continued:

"If you have not found any traces of the murderer in the attic, such as the dirty footmarks similar to those on the floor of "The Yellow Room", you must come to the conclusion that it was not he who stole Daddy Jacques's revolver."

"There are no footmarks in the attic other than those of Daddy Jacques himself," said the magistrate with a significant turn of his head. Then, after an apparent decision, he added: "Daddy Jacques was with Monsieur Stangerson in the laboratory—and it was lucky for him he was."

"Then what part did his revolver play in the tragedy?—It seems very clear that this weapon did less harm to Mademoiselle Stangerson than it did to the murderer."

The magistrate made no reply to this question, which doubtless embarrassed him. "Monsieur Stangerson," he said, "tells us that the two bullets have been found in "The Yellow Room", one embedded in the wall stained with the impression of a red hand—a man's large hand—and the other in the ceiling."

"Oh! oh! in the ceiling!" muttered Rouletabille. "In the ceiling! That's very curious!—In the ceiling!"

He puffed awhile in silence at his pipe, enveloping himself in the smoke. When we reached Savigny-sur-Orge, I had to tap him on the shoulder to arouse him from his dream and come out on to the platform of the station.

There, the magistrate and his Registrar bowed to us, and

by rapidly getting into a cab that was awaiting them, made us understand that they had seen enough of us.

"How long will it take to walk to the Chateau du Glandier?" Rouletabille asked one of the railway porters.

"An hour and a half or an hour and three quarters—easy walking," the man replied.

Rouletabille looked up at the sky and, no doubt, finding its appearance satisfactory, took my arm and said:

"Come on!—I need a walk."

"Are things getting less entangled?" I asked.

"Not a bit of it!" he said, "more entangled than ever! It's true, I have an idea—"

"What's that?" I asked.

"I can't tell you what it is just at present—it's an idea involving the life or death of two persons at least."

"Do you think there were accomplices?"

"I don't think it—"

We fell into silence. Presently he went on:

"It was a bit of luck, our falling in with that examining magistrate and his Registrar, eh? What did I tell you about that revolver?" His head was bent down, he had his hands in his pockets, and he was whistling. After a while I heard him murmur:

"Poor woman!"

"Is it Mademoiselle Stangerson you are pitying?"

"Yes; she's a noble woman and worthy of being pitied!—a woman of a great, a very great character—I imagine—I

imagine."

"You know her then?"

"Not at all. I have never seen her."

"Why, then, do you say that she is a woman of great character?"

"Because she bravely faced the murderer; because she courageously defended herself—and, above all, because of the bullet in the ceiling."

I looked at Rouletabille and inwardly wondered whether he was not mocking me, or whether he had not suddenly gone out of his senses. But I saw that he had never been less inclined to laugh, and the brightness of his keenly intelligent eyes assured me that he retained all his reason. Then, too, I was used to his broken way of talking, which only left me puzzled as to his meaning, till, with a very few clear, rapidly uttered words, he would make the drift of his ideas clear to me, and I saw that what he had previously said, and which had appeared to me void of meaning, was so thoroughly logical that I could not understand how it was I had not understood him sooner.

# CHAPTER IV. "In the Bosom of Wild Nature"

The Chateau du Glandier is one of the oldest chateaux in the Ile de France, where so many building remains of the feudal period are still standing. Built originally in the heart of the forest, in the reign of Philip le Bel, it now could be seen a few hundred yards from the road leading from the village of Sainte-Genevieve to Monthery. A mass of inharmonious structures, it is dominated by a donjon. When the visitor has mounted the crumbling steps of this ancient donjon, he reaches a little plateau where, in the seventeenth century, Georges Philibert de Sequigny, Lord of the Glandier, Maisons-Neuves and other places, built the existing town in an abominably rococo style of architecture.

It was in this place, seemingly belonging entirely to the past, that Professor Stangerson and his daughter installed themselves to lay the foundations for the science of the future. Its solitude, in the depths of woods, was what, more than all, had pleased them. They would have none to witness their labours and intrude on their hopes, but the aged stones and grand old oaks. The Glandier—ancient Glandierum—was so called from the quantity of glands (acorns) which, in all times, had been gathered in that neighbourhood. This land, of present mournful interest, had fallen back, owing to the negligence or abandonment of its

owners, into the wild character of primitive nature. The buildings alone, which were hidden there, had preserved traces of their strange metamorphoses. Every age had left on them its imprint; a bit of architecture with which was bound up the remembrance of some terrible event, some bloody adventure. Such was the chateau in which science had taken refuge—a place seemingly designed to be the theatre of mysteries, terror, and death.

Having explained so far, I cannot refrain from making one further reflection. If I have lingered a little over this description of the Glandier, it is not because I have reached the right moment for creating the necessary atmosphere for the unfolding of the tragedy before the eyes of the reader. Indeed, in all this matter, my first care will be to be as simple as is possible. I have no ambition to be an author. An author is always something of a romancer, and God knows, the mystery of The Yellow Room is quite full enough of real tragic horror to require no aid from literary effects. I am, and only desire to be, a faithful "reporter." My duty is to report the event; and I place the event in its frame —that is all. It is only natural that you should know where the things happened.

I return to Monsieur Stangerson. When he bought the estate, fifteen years before the tragedy with which we are engaged occurred, the Chateau du Glandier had for a long time been unoccupied. Another old chateau in the neighbourhood, built in the fourteenth century by Jean de Belmont, was also abandoned, so that that part of the country was very little inhabited. Some

small houses on the side of the road leading to Corbeil, an inn, called the "Auberge du Donjon," which offered passing hospitality to waggoners; these were about all to represent civilisation in this out-of-the-way part of the country, but a few leagues from the capital.

But this deserted condition of the place had been the determining reason for the choice made by Monsieur Stangerson and his daughter. Monsieur Stangerson was already celebrated. He had returned from America, where his works had made a great stir. The book which he had published at Philadelphia, on the "Dissociation of Matter by Electric Action," had aroused opposition throughout the whole scientific world. Monsieur Stangerson was a Frenchman, but of American origin. Important matters relating to a legacy had kept him for several years in the United States, where he had continued the work begun by him in France, whither he had returned in possession of a large fortune. This fortune was a great boon to him; for, though he might have made millions of dollars by exploiting two or three of his chemical discoveries relative to new processes of dyeing, it was always repugnant to him to use for his own private gain the wonderful gift of invention he had received from nature. He considered he owed it to mankind, and all that his genius brought into the world went, by this philosophical view of his duty, into the public lap.

If he did not try to conceal his satisfaction at coming into possession of this fortune, which enabled him to give himself

up to his passion for pure science, he had equally to rejoice, it seemed to him, for another cause. Mademoiselle Stangerson was, at the time when her father returned from America and bought the Glandier estate, twenty years of age. She was exceedingly pretty, having at once the Parisian grace of her mother, who had died in giving her birth, and all the splendour, all the riches of the young American blood of her parental grandfather, William Stangerson. A citizen of Philadelphia, William Stangerson had been obliged to become naturalised in obedience to family exigencies at the time of his marriage with a French lady, she who was to be the mother of the illustrious Stangerson. In that way the professor's French nationality is accounted for.

Twenty years of age, a charming blonde, with blue eyes, milk-white complexion, and radiant with divine health, Mathilde Stangerson was one of the most beautiful marriageable girls in either the old or the new world. It was her father's duty, in spite of the inevitable pain which a separation from her would cause him, to think of her marriage; and he was fully prepared for it. Nevertheless, he buried himself and his child at the Glandier at the moment when his friends were expecting him to bring her out into society. Some of them expressed their astonishment, and to their questions he answered: "It is my daughter's wish. I can refuse her nothing. She has chosen the Glandier."

Interrogated in her turn, the young girl replied calmly: "Where could we work better than in this solitude?" For Mademoiselle Stangerson had already begun to collaborate with her father in

his work. It could not at the time be imagined that her passion for science would lead her so far as to refuse all the suitors who presented themselves to her for over fifteen years. So secluded was the life led by the two, father and daughter, that they showed themselves only at a few official receptions and, at certain times in the year, in two or three friendly drawing-rooms, where the fame of the professor and the beauty of Mathilde made a sensation. The young girl's extreme reserve did not at first discourage suitors; but at the end of a few years, they tired of their quest.

One alone persisted with tender tenacity and deserved the name of "eternal fiance," a name he accepted with melancholy resignation; that was Monsieur Robert Darzac. Mademoiselle Stangerson was now no longer young, and it seemed that, having found no reason for marrying at five-and-thirty, she would never find one. But such an argument evidently found no acceptance with Monsieur Robert Darzac. He continued to pay his court—if the delicate and tender attention with which he ceaselessly surrounded this woman of five-and-thirty could be called courtship—in face of her declared intention never to marry.

Suddenly, some weeks before the events with which we are occupied, a report—to which nobody attached any importance, so incredible did it sound—was spread about Paris, that Mademoiselle Stangerson had at last consented to "crown" the inextinguishable flame of Monsieur Robert Darzac! It needed

that Monsieur Robert Darzac himself should not deny this matrimonial rumour to give it an appearance of truth, so unlikely did it seem to be well founded. One day, however, Monsieur Stangerson, as he was leaving the Academy of Science, announced that the marriage of his daughter and Monsieur Robert Darzac would be celebrated in the privacy of the Chateau du Glandier, as soon as he and his daughter had put the finishing touches to their report summing up their labours on the "Dissociation of Matter." The new household would install itself in the Glandier, and the son-in-law would lend his assistance in the work to which the father and daughter had dedicated their lives.

The scientific world had barely had time to recover from the effect of this news, when it learned of the attempted assassination of Mademoiselle under the extraordinary conditions which we have detailed and which our visit to the chateau was to enable us to ascertain with yet greater precision. I have not hesitated to furnish the reader with all these retrospective details, known to me through my business relations with Monsieur Robert Darzac. On crossing the threshold of "The Yellow Room" he was as well posted as I was.

# CHAPTER V. In Which Joseph Rouletabille Makes a Remark to Monsieur Robert Darzac Which Produces Its Little Effect

Rouletabille and I had been walking for several minutes, by the side of a long wall bounding the vast property of Monsieur Stangerson and had already come within sight of the entrance gate, when our attention was drawn to an individual who, half bent to the ground, seemed to be so completely absorbed in what he was doing as not to have seen us coming towards him. At one time he stooped so low as almost to touch the ground; at another he drew himself up and attentively examined the wall; then he looked into the palm of one of his hands, and walked away with rapid strides. Finally he set off running, still looking into the palm of his hand. Rouletabille had brought me to a standstill by a gesture.

"Hush! Frederic Larsan is at work! Don't let us disturb him!"

Rouletabille had a great admiration for the celebrated detective. I had 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 skilful unraveller of the most mysterious and complicated crimes. His

reputation was world-wide, and the police of London, and even of America, often called him in to their aid when their own national inspectors and detectives found themselves at the end of their wits and resources.

No one was astonished, then, that the head of the Surete had, at the outset of the mystery of "The Yellow Room", telegraphed his precious subordinate to London, where he had been sent on a big case of stolen securities, to return with all haste. Frederic who, at the Surete, was called the "great 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 us.

"Monsieur 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 Monsieur 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, Monsieur 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, Monsieur Rouletabille."

"Why not?"

"Because they were arrested half an hour ago."

"Arrested!" cried Rouletabille; "then they are the murderers!"

Frederic Larsan shrugged his shoulders.

"When you can't arrest the real murderer," he said with an air of supreme irony, "you can always indulge in the luxury of discovering accomplices."

"Did you have them arrested, Monsieur Fred?"

"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 Rouletabille eagerly.

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

The face of Rouletabille at the moment was really funny to look at. It showed such an irresistible desire to cross the threshold beyond which some prodigious mystery had occurred; it appealed with so much eloquence, not only of the mouth and eyes, but with all its features, that I could not refrain from bursting into laughter. Frederic Larsan, no more than myself, could retain his gravity. Meanwhile, standing on the other side of the gate, he calmly put the key in his pocket. I closely scrutinised him.

He might be about fifty years of age. He had a fine head, his hair turning grey; a colourless complexion, and a firm profile. His forehead was prominent, his chin and cheeks clean shaven. His upper lip, without moustache, was finely chiselled. His eyes were rather small and round, with a look in them that was at once searching and disquieting. He was of middle height and well built, with a general bearing elegant and gentlemanly. There was nothing about him of the vulgar policeman. In his way, he was an artist, and one felt that he had a high opinion of himself. The

sceptical tone of his conversation was that of a man who had been taught by experience. His strange profession had brought him into contact with so many crimes and villanies that it would have been remarkable if his nature had not been a little hardened.

Larsan turned his head at the sound of a vehicle which had come from the chateau and reached the gate behind him. We recognised 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 Monsieur 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 recognised me. While Larsan was unlocking the gate, Monsieur 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 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 learnt 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 brightness."

The words had no sooner 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 Monsieur Darzac, but he made no answer. My looks questioned Rouletabille, but his gaze was elsewhere.

# CHAPTER VI. In the Heart of the Oak Grove

We 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, Monsieur and Madame Bernier, the concierges, were confined. Monsieur 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 took his eyes off Monsieur Darzac. I followed his look and perceived that it was directed solely towards the gloved hands of the Sorbonne professor. When we were in a tiny sitting-room fitted with old furniture, Monsieur Darzac turned to Rouletabille and said sharply:

"What do you want?"

The reporter answered in an equally sharp tone:

"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 Mademoiselle 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 Monsieur 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 audacity, he said:

"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 cicatrix.

"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 Monsieur 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. What was in Rouletabille's mind? Was it possible that he thought Monsieur Robert Darzac to be the murderer? How could it be thought that this man, who was to have married Mademoiselle Stangerson in the course of a few days, had introduced himself into "The Yellow Room" to assassinate his fiancee? I could find no explanation as to how the murderer had been able to leave "The Yellow Room"; and so long as that mystery, which appeared to me so inexplicable, remained unexplained, I thought it was the duty of all of us to refrain from suspecting anybody. But, then, that seemingly senseless phrase —"The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness"—still rang in my ears. What did it mean? I was eager to rejoin Rouletabille and question him.

At that moment the young man came out of the chateau in the company of Monsieur Robert Darzac, and, 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 Inn."

"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 towards Rouletabille. He spoke quite seriously, and Monsieur Robert Darzac did not appear to be in the least degree surprised.

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

"Why have these people been arrested?"

"It is a little my fault," said Monsieur 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 costume wanting. The woman wore sabots, but the man had on laced boots. Now they assert that they went to bed at half-past nine. On arriving this morning, the examining magistrate brought with him from Paris a revolver of the same calibre 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 Monsieur 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."

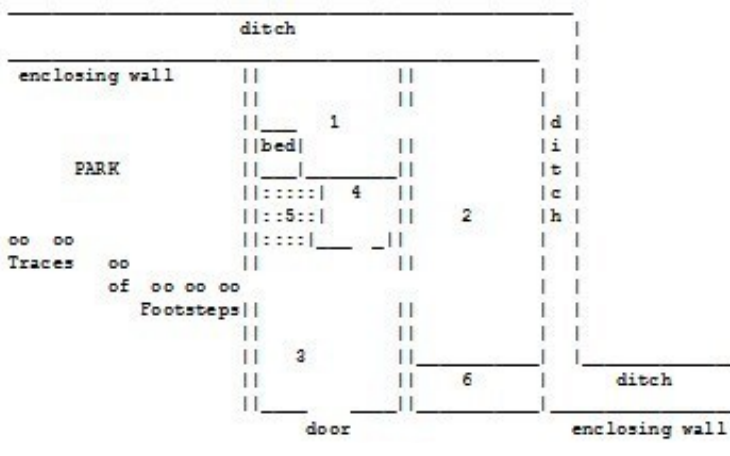
"Then, why were they abroad at midnight? Why don't they say?"

"They have certainly some reason for their silence. What that reason is, 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 Oak Grove, The oaks here were centuries old. Autumn had already shrivelled their tawny leaves, and their high branches, black and contorted, looked like horrid heads of hair, mingled with quaint reptiles such as the ancient sculptors have made on the head of Medusa. 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 the recent rains and the rotting of the fallen leaves; the trunks of the trees were black and the sky above us was now, as if in mourning, charged with great, heavy clouds.

And it was in this sombre and desolate retreat that we saw the white walls of the pavilion as we approached. A queer-looking building without a window visible on the side by which we neared it. A little door alone marked the entrance to it. It might have passed for a tomb, a vast mausoleum 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. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson must have found it an ideal seclusion for their work and their dreams.



Here is the ground plan of the pavilion. It had a ground-floor which was reached by a few steps, and above it was an attic, with which we need not concern ourselves. The plan of the ground-floor only, sketched roughly, is what I here submit to the reader.

1. "The Yellow Room", with its one window and its one door opening into the laboratory.

2. Laboratory, with its two large, barred windows and its doors, one serving for the vestibule, the other for "The Yellow Room".

3. Vestibule, with its unbarred window and door opening into the park.

4. Lavatory.

5. Stairs leading to the attic.

6. Large and the only chimney in the pavilion, serving for the experiments of the laboratory.

The plan was drawn by Rouletabille, and I assured myself that there was not a line in it that was wanting to help to the solution of the problem then set before the police. With the lines of this plan and the description of its parts before them, my readers will know as much as Rouletabille knew when he entered the pavilion for the first time. With him they may now ask: How did the murderer escape from "The Yellow Room"? Before mounting the three steps leading up to the door of the pavilion, Rouletabille stopped and asked Monsieur Darzac point blank:

"What was the motive for the crime?"

"Speaking for myself, Monsieur, there can be no doubt

on the matter," said Mademoiselle Stangerson's fiance, greatly distressed. "The nails of the fingers, the deep scratches on the chest and throat of Mademoiselle Stangerson show that the wretch who attacked her attempted to commit a frightful crime. The medical experts who examined these traces 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 large to go into my gloves," he added with an indefinable smile.

"Could not that blood-stained hand," I interrupted, "have been the hand of Mademoiselle Stangerson who, in the moment 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 Monsieur Darzac.

"We are now sure," said I, "that it was Mademoiselle Stangerson who was armed with Daddy Jacques's 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 Monsieur Darzac, looking at Rouletabille. Rouletabille then said to me:

"You must know, my friend, that the inquiry is a little more advanced than Monsieur de Marquet has chosen to tell us. He not only knows that Mademoiselle Stangerson defended herself with the revolver, but he knows what the weapon was that was used

to attack her. Monsieur Darzac tells me it was a mutton-bone. Why is Monsieur de Marquet surrounding this mutton-bone with so much mystery? No doubt for the purpose of facilitating the inquiries of the agents of the Surete? He imagines, perhaps, that the owner of this instrument of crime, the most terrible invented, is going to be found amongst those who are well-known in the slums of Paris who use it. But who can ever say what passes through the brain of an examining magistrate?" Rouletabille added with contemptuous irony.

"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 Monsieur de Marquet thinks. He has had it sent to the municipal laboratory at Paris to be analysed. 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 Monsieur 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 Mademoiselle 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 employeed her revolver too late; the first shot deviated and lodged in the ceiling; it was the second only that took effect."

Having said this, Monsieur 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 recognised 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-coloured velveteen, worn at the sides; sabots were on his feet. He had rather a waspish-looking face, the expression of which lightened, however, as soon as he saw Monsieur Darzac.

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

"I ought not to allow anybody to enter, Monsieur 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 reports—"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Jacques, one question before anything else," said Rouletabille.

"What is it, young man? If I can answer it—"

"Did your 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 tiles.

"Ah! This is the window by which the murderer escaped!" said Rouletabille.

"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 Monsieur Stangerson nor me, 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 shutters.

"Were these closed at the time of the crime?"

"And fastened with the iron catch inside," said Daddy Jacques, "and I am quite sure that the murderer did not get out that way."

"Are there any blood stains?"

"Yes, on the stones outside; but blood of what?"

"Ah!" said Rouletabille, "there are footmarks visible on the path—the ground was very moist. I will look into that presently."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Daddy Jacques; "the murderer did not go that way."

"Which way did he go, then?"

"How do I know?"

Rouletabille looked at everything, smelled everything. He went down on his knees and rapidly examined every one of the paving tiles. Daddy Jacques went on:

"Ah!—you can't find anything, monsieur. Nothing has been found. And now it is all dirty; too many persons have tramped over it. They wouldn't let me wash it, but on the day of the crime I had washed the floor thoroughly, and if the murderer had crossed it with his hobnailed boots, I should not have failed to see where he had been; he has left marks enough in Mademoiselle's chamber."

Rouletabille rose.

"When was the last time you washed these tiles?" he asked, and he fixed on Daddy Jacques a most searching look.

"Why—as I told you—on the day of the crime, towards half-past five—while Mademoiselle and her father were taking a little walk before dinner, here in this room: they had dined in the

laboratory. The next day, the examining magistrate came and saw all the marks there were on the floor as plainly as if they had been made with ink on white paper. Well, neither in the laboratory nor in the vestibule, which were both as clean as a new pin, were there any traces of a man's footmarks. Since they have been found near this window outside, he must have made his way through the ceiling of "The Yellow Room" into the attic, then cut his way through the roof and dropped to the ground outside the vestibule window. But—there's no hole, neither in the ceiling of "The Yellow Room" nor in the roof of my attic—that's absolutely certain! So you see we know nothing—nothing! And nothing will ever be known! It's a mystery of the Devil's own making."

Rouletabille went down upon his knees again almost in front of a small lavatory at the back of the vestibule. In that position he remained for about a minute.

"Well?" I asked him when he got up.

"Oh! nothing very important,—a drop of blood," he replied, turning towards Daddy Jacques as he spoke. "While you were washing the laboratory and this vestibule, was the vestibule window open?" he asked.

"No, Monsieur, it was closed; but after I had done washing the floor, I lit some charcoal for Monsieur in the laboratory furnace, and, as I lit it with old newspapers, it smoked, so I opened both the windows in the laboratory and this one, to make a current of air; then I shut those in the laboratory and left this one open when I went out. When I returned to the pavilion, this window

had been closed and Monsieur and Mademoiselle were already at work in the laboratory."

"Monsieur or Mademoiselle Stangerson had, no doubt, shut it?"

"No doubt."

"You did not ask them?"

After a close scrutiny of the little lavatory and of the staircase leading up to the attic, Rouletabille—to whom we seemed no longer to exist—entered the laboratory. I followed him. It was, I confess, in a state of great excitement. Robert Darzac lost none of my friend's movements. As for me, my eyes were drawn at once to the door of "The Yellow Room". It was closed and, as I immediately saw, partially shattered and out of commission.

My friend, who went about his work methodically, silently studied the room in which we were. It was large and well-lighted. Two big windows—almost bays—were protected by strong iron bars and looked out upon a wide extent of country. Through an opening in the forest, they commanded a wonderful view through the length of the valley and across the plain to the large town which could be clearly seen in fair weather. To-day, however, a mist hung over the ground—and blood in that room!

The whole of one side of the laboratory was taken up with a large chimney, crucibles, ovens, and such implements as are needed for chemical experiments; tables, loaded with phials, papers, reports, an electrical machine,—an apparatus, as Monsieur Darzac informed me, employeed by Professor

Stangerson to demonstrate the Dissociation of Matter under the action of solar light—and other scientific implements.

Along the walls were cabinets, plain or glass-fronted, through which were visible microscopes, special photographic apparatus, and a large quantity of crystals.

Rouletabille, who was ferreting in the chimney, put his fingers into one of the crucibles. Suddenly he drew himself up, and held up a piece of half-consumed paper in his hand. He stepped up to where we were talking by one of the windows.

"Keep that for us, Monsieur Darzac," he said.

I bent over the piece of scorched paper which Monsieur Darzac took from the hand of Rouletabille, and read distinctly the only words that remained legible:

"Presbytery—lost nothing—charm, nor the gar—its brightness."

Twice since the morning these same meaningless words had struck me, and, for the second time, I saw that they produced on the Sorbonne professor the same paralysing effect. Monsieur Darzac's first anxiety showed itself when he turned his eyes in the direction of Daddy Jacques. But, occupied as he was at another window, he had seen nothing. Then tremblingly opening his pocket-book he put the piece of paper into it, sighing: "My God!"

During this time, Rouletabille had mounted into the opening of the fire-grate—that is to say, he had got upon the bricks of a furnace—and was attentively examining the chimney, which

grew narrower towards the top, the outlet from it being closed with sheets of iron, fastened into the brickwork, through which passed three small chimneys.

"Impossible to get out that way," he said, jumping back into the laboratory. "Besides, even if he had tried to do it, he would have brought all that ironwork down to the ground. No, no; it is not on that side we have to search."

Rouletabille next examined the furniture and opened the doors of the cabinet. Then he came to the windows, through which he declared no one could possibly have passed. At the second window he found Daddy Jacques in contemplation.

"Well, Daddy Jacques," he said, "what are you looking at?"

"That policeman who is always going round and round the lake. Another of those fellows who think they can see better than anybody else!"

"You don't know Frederic Larsan, Daddy Jacques, or you wouldn't speak of him in that way," said Rouletabille in a melancholy tone. "If there is anyone who will find the murderer, it will be he." And Rouletabille heaved a deep sigh.

"Before they find him, they will have to learn how they lost him," said Daddy Jacques, stolidly.

At length we reached the door of "The Yellow Room" itself.

"There is the door behind which some terrible scene took place," said Rouletabille, with a solemnity which, under any other circumstances, would have been comical.

# CHAPTER VII. In Which Rouletabille Sets Out on an Expedition Under the Bed

Rouletabille having pushed open the door of "The Yellow Room" paused on the threshold saying, with an emotion which I only later understood, "Ah, the perfume of the lady in black!"

The chamber was dark. Daddy Jacques was about to open the blinds when Rouletabille stopped him.

"Did not the tragedy take place in complete darkness?" he asked.

"No, young man, I don't think so. Mademoiselle always had a nightlight on her table, and I lit it every evening before she went to bed. I was a sort of chambermaid, you must understand, when the evening came. The real chambermaid did not come here much before the morning. Mademoiselle worked late—far into the night."

"Where did the table with the night-light stand,—far from the bed?"

"Some way from the bed."

"Can you light the burner now?"

"The lamp is broken and the oil that was in it was spilled when the table was upset. All the rest of the things in the room remain just as they were. I have only to open the blinds for you to see."

"Wait."

Rouletabille went back into the laboratory, closed the shutters of the two windows and the door of the vestibule.

When we were in complete darkness, he lit a wax vesta, and asked Daddy Jacques to move to the middle of the chamber with it to the place where the night-light was burning that night.

Daddy Jacques who was in his stockings—he usually left his sabots in the vestibule—entered "The Yellow Room" with his bit of a vesta. We vaguely distinguished objects overthrown on the floor, a bed in one corner, and, in front of us, to the left, the gleam of a looking-glass hanging on the wall, near to the bed.

"That will do!—you may now open the blinds," said Rouletabille.

"Don't come any further," Daddy Jacques begged, "you may make marks with your boots, and nothing must be deranged; it's an idea of the magistrate's—though he has nothing more to do here."

And he pushed open the shutter. The pale daylight entered from without, throwing a sinister light on the saffron-coloured walls. The floor—for though the laboratory and the vestibule were tiled, "The Yellow Room" had a flooring of wood—was covered with a single yellow mat which was large enough to cover nearly the whole room, under the bed and under the dressing-table—the only piece of furniture that remained upright. The centre round table, the night-table and two chairs had been overturned. These did not prevent a large stain of blood being

visible on the mat, made, as Daddy Jacques informed us, by the blood which had flowed from the wound on Mademoiselle Stangerson's forehead. Besides these stains, drops of blood had fallen in all directions, in line with the visible traces of the footsteps—large and black—of the murderer. Everything led to the presumption that these drops of blood had fallen from the wound of the man who had, for a moment, placed his red hand on the wall. There were other traces of the same hand on the wall, but much less distinct.

"See!—see this blood on the wall!" I could not help exclaiming. "The man who pressed his hand so heavily upon it in the darkness must certainly have thought that he was pushing at a door! That's why he pressed on it so hard, leaving on the yellow paper the terrible evidence. I don't think there are many hands in the world of that sort. It is big and strong and the fingers are nearly all one as long as the other! The thumb is wanting and we have only the mark of the palm; but if we follow the trace of the hand," I continued, "we see that, after leaving its imprint on the wall, the touch sought the door, found it, and then felt for the lock—"

"No doubt," interrupted Rouletabille, chuckling,—"only there is no blood, either on the lock or on the bolt!"

"What does that prove?" I rejoined with a good sense of which I was proud; "he might have opened the lock with his left hand, which would have been quite natural, his right hand being wounded."

"He didn't open it at all!" Daddy Jacques again exclaimed. "We are not fools; and there were four of us when we burst open the door!"

"What a queer hand!—Look what a queer hand it is!" I said.

"It is a very natural hand," said Rouletabille, "of which the shape has been deformed by its having slipped on the wall. The man dried his hand on the wall. He must be a man about five feet eight in height."

"How do you come at that?"

"By the height of the marks on the wall."

My friend next occupied himself with the mark of the bullet in the wall. It was a round hole.

"This ball was fired straight, not from above, and consequently, not from below."

Rouletabille went back to the door and carefully examined the lock and the bolt, satisfying himself that the door had certainly been burst open from the outside, and, further, that the key had been found in the lock on the inside of the chamber. He finally satisfied himself that with the key in the lock, the door could not possibly be opened from without with another key. Having made sure of all these details, he let fall these words: "That's better!"—Then sitting down on the ground, he hastily took off his boots and, in his socks, went into the room.

The first thing he did was to examine minutely the overturned furniture. We watched him in silence.

"Young fellow, you are giving yourself a great deal of trouble,"

said Daddy Jacques ironically.

Rouletabille raised his head and said:

"You have spoken the simple truth, Daddy Jacques; your mistress did not have her hair in bands that evening. I was a donkey to have believed she did."

Then, with the suppleness of a serpent, he slipped under the bed. Presently we heard him ask:

"At what time, Monsieur Jacques, did Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson arrive at the laboratory?"

"At six o'clock."

The voice of Rouletabille continued:

"Yes,—he's been under here,—that's certain; in fact, there was no where else where he could have hidden himself. Here, too, are the marks of his hobnails. When you entered—all four of you—did you look under the bed?"

"At once,—we drew it right out of its place—"

"And between the mattresses?"

"There was only one on the bed, and on that Mademoiselle was placed; and Monsieur Stangerson and the concierge immediately carried it into the laboratory. Under the mattress there was nothing but the metal netting, which could not conceal anything or anybody. Remember, monsieur, that there were four of us and we couldn't fail to see everything—the chamber is so small and scantily furnished, and all was locked behind in the pavilion."

I ventured on a hypothesis:

"Perhaps he got away with the mattress—in the mattress!—

Anything is possible, in the face of such a mystery! In their distress of mind Monsieur Stangerson and the concierge may not have noticed they were bearing a double weight; especially if the concierge were an accomplice! I throw out this hypothesis for what it is worth, but it explains many things,—and particularly the fact that neither the laboratory nor the vestibule bear any traces of the footmarks found in the room. If, in carrying Mademoiselle on the mattress from the laboratory of the chateau, they rested for a moment, there might have been an opportunity for the man in it to escape.

"And then?" asked Rouletabille, deliberately laughing under the bed.

I felt rather vexed and replied:

"I don't know,—but anything appears possible"—

"The examining magistrate had the same idea, monsieur," said Daddy Jacques, "and he carefully examined the mattress. He was obliged to laugh at the idea, monsieur, as your friend is doing now,—for whoever heard of a mattress having a double bottom?"

I was myself obliged to laugh, on seeing that what I had said was absurd; but in an affair like this one hardly knows where an absurdity begins or ends.

My friend alone seemed able to talk intelligently. He called out from under the bed.

"The mat here has been moved out of place,—who did it?"

"We did, monsieur," explained Daddy Jacques. "When we could not find the assassin, we asked ourselves whether there was

not some hole in the floor—"

"There is not," replied Rouletabille. "Is there a cellar?"

"No, there's no cellar. But that has not stopped our searching, and has not prevented the examining magistrate and his Registrar from studying the floor plank by plank, as if there had been a cellar under it."

The reporter then reappeared. His eyes were sparkling and his nostrils quivered. He remained on his hands and knees. He could not be better likened than to an admirable sporting dog on the scent of some unusual game. And, indeed, he was scenting the steps of a man,—the man whom he has sworn to report to his master, the manager of the "Epoque." It must not be forgotten that Rouletabille was first and last a journalist.

Thus, on his hands and knees, he made his way to the four corners of the room, so to speak, sniffing and going round everything—everything that we could see, which was not much, and everything that we could not see, which must have been infinite.

The toilette table was a simple table standing on four legs; there was nothing about it by which it could possibly be changed into a temporary hiding-place. There was not a closet or cupboard. Mademoiselle Stangerson kept her wardrobe at the chateau.

Rouletabille literally passed his nose and hands along the walls, constructed of solid brickwork. When he had finished with the walls, and passed his agile fingers over every portion of the

yellow paper covering them, he reached to the ceiling, which he was able to touch by mounting on a chair placed on the toilette table, and by moving this ingeniously constructed stage from place to place he examined every foot of it. When he had finished his scrutiny of the ceiling, where he carefully examined the hole made by the second bullet, he approached the window, and, once more, examined the iron bars and blinds, all of which were solid and intact. At last, he gave a grunt of satisfaction and declared "Now I am at ease!"

"Well,—do you believe that the poor dear young lady was shut up when she was being murdered—when she cried out for help?" wailed Daddy Jacques.

"Yes," said the young reporter, drying his forehead, ""The Yellow Room" was as tightly shut as an iron safe."

"That," I said, "is why this mystery is the most surprising I know. Edgar Allan Poe, in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' invented nothing like it. The place of that crime was sufficiently closed to prevent the escape of a man; but there was that window through which the monkey, the perpetrator of the murder, could slip away! But here, there can be no question of an opening of any sort. The door was fastened, and through the window blinds, secure as they were, not even a fly could enter or get out."

"True, true," assented Rouletabille as he kept on drying his forehead, which seemed to be perspiring less from his recent bodily exertion than from his mental agitation. "Indeed, it's a great, a beautiful, and a very curious mystery."

"The Bete du bon Dieu," muttered Daddy Jacques, "the Bete du bon Dieu herself, if she had committed the crime, could not have escaped. Listen! Do you hear it? Hush!"

Daddy Jacques made us a sign to keep quiet and, stretching his arm towards the wall nearest the forest, listened to something which we could not hear.

"It's answering," he said at length. "I must kill it. It is too wicked, but it's the Bete du bon Dieu, and, every night, it goes to pray on the tomb of Sainte-Genevieve and nobody dares to touch her, for fear that Mother Angenoux should cast an evil spell on them."

"How big is the Bete du bon Dieu?"

"Nearly as big as a small retriever,—a monster, I tell you. Ah! —I have asked myself more than once whether it was not her that took our poor Mademoiselle by the throat with her claws. But the Bete du bon Dieu does not wear hobnailed boots, nor fire revolvers, nor has she a hand like that!" exclaimed Daddy Jacques, again pointing out to us the red mark on the wall. "Besides, we should have seen her as well as we would have seen a man—"

"Evidently," I said. "Before we had seen this Yellow Room, I had also asked myself whether the cat of Mother Angenoux—"

"You also!" cried Rouletabille.

"Didn't you?" I asked.

"Not for a moment. After reading the article in the 'Matin,' I knew that a cat had nothing to do with the matter. But I swear

now that a frightful tragedy has been enacted here. You say nothing about the Basque cap, or the handkerchief, found here, Daddy Jacques?"

"Of course, the magistrate has taken them," the old man answered, hesitatingly.

"I haven't seen either the handkerchief or the cap, yet I can tell you how they are made," the reporter said to him gravely.

"Oh, you are very clever," said Daddy Jacques, coughing and embarrassed.

"The handkerchief is a large one, blue with red stripes and the cap is an old Basque cap, like the one you are wearing now."

"You are a wizard!" said Daddy Jacques, trying to laugh and not quite succeeding. "How do you know that the handkerchief is blue with red stripes?"

"Because, if it had not been blue with red stripes, it would not have been found at all."

Without giving any further attention to Daddy Jacques, my friend took a piece of paper from his pocket, and taking out a pair of scissors, bent over the footprints. Placing the paper over one of them he began to cut. In a short time he had made a perfect pattern which he handed to me, begging me not to lose it.

He then returned to the window and, pointing to the figure of Frederic Larsan, who had not quitted the side of the lake, asked Daddy Jacques whether the detective had, like himself, been working in "The Yellow Room"?

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.