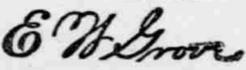


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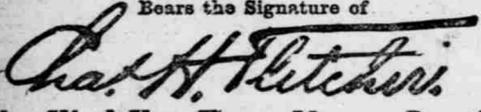
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THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK

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

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To be Continued.)

At these words I myself, who had seen and touched "the map of Australia," was unable to repress a shudder as I looked pityingly at Darzac, just as one might look at some poor man who is on the point of becoming the victim of some hideous judicial error.

"But, since you no longer have these suspicions, monsieur," exclaimed Darzac, his intonation singularly calm in spite of the fact that his voice was raised, "I should be glad to know, after all this exercise of your talent of reasoning, what could have driven them away?"

"In order to have them driven away, monsieur, one thing was essential—an absolute certitude! And I found it—a simple but conclusive proof which showed me in a manner complete and undeniable which of the two manifestations of Darzac was in reality Larsan. That proof, monsieur, was, happily, furnished me by yourself at the very moment when you closed the circle—the circle in which there had been found the 'body too many'—the time when, after having sworn that which was the truth, that you had drawn the bolt of your apartment as soon as you had entered your sleeping room, you had lied to us in concealing from us that you had entered that room at 6 o'clock instead of at 5 o'clock as Pere Bernier said and as we ourselves could have proved. You were then the only person except myself who knew that the Darzac who had entered at 5 o'clock and of whom we had spoken to you as yourself was in reality another man. But you said nothing. And you need not pretend that you did not attach any importance to that hour of 5 o'clock, since it explained everything to you—since it told you that another Darzac than yourself—the true Robert Darzac—had come into the square tower at that time. And after your false expressions of astonishment, how quiet you kept! Your very silence lied to us! And what interest could the true Darzac have in concealing that another Darzac, who might be Larsan, had come in before you had and was hiding in the square tower? Larsan was the only one who was interested in hiding from us that there was another manifestation of Darzac than the one he himself bore! Of the two manifestations of Darzac the false must have necessarily been that one which lied! Thus my suspicions were driven away by certainty. You are Larsan! And the man who was hidden behind the panel was Darzac!"

"You lie!" shouted the man (I could not even yet believe him to be Larsan), hurling himself upon Roulettable.

But none of us stirred a finger, and Roulettable, who had lost nothing of his calm demeanor, extended his arm toward the panel and said:

"He is behind the panel now!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Here is "the Body Too Many."

IT was an indescribable scene—a moment never to be forgotten. At the gesture of Roulettable the door of the panel swung open, pushed by an invisible hand, just as it had been on that terrible night which had witnessed the mystery of "the body too many."

And the form of a man appeared. Clamors of surprise, of joy, and of terror filled the square tower. The Lady in Black uttered a heartrending cry. "Robert, Robert, Robert!"

And it was a cry of joy! Two Darzacs before us so exactly similar that every one of us save the Lady in Black might have been deceived! But her heart told her the truth, even admitting that her reason, notwithstanding the triumphant conclusion of Roulettable, might have hesitated. Her arms outstretched, her eyes alight with love and joy, she rushed toward the second manifestation of Darzac—the one which had descended from the panel. Matilde's face was radiant with new life; her sorrowful eyes, which I had so often beheld fixed with somber gloom upon that other, were shining upon this one with a joy as glorious as it was tranquil and assured. It was he! It was he whom she had believed lost—whom she had sought in vain in the visage of the other and had not found there and, therefore, had accused herself, during the weary hours of day and night, of folly which was akin to madness.

As to the man who up to the last moment I had not believed to be guilty—as to that wretch who unveiled and tracked to earth, found himself suddenly face to face with the living proof of his crimes, he attempted yet again one of the daring coups which had so often saved him. Surrounded on every side, he yet endeavored to flee. Then we understood the audacious drama which in the last few moments he had played for our benefit.

When he could no longer have any doubt as to the issue of the discussion which he was holding with Roulettable he had had the incredible self control to permit nothing of his emotions to appear and had also been able to prolong the situation, permitting Roulettable to pursue at leisure the thread of the argument at the end of which he knew that he would find his doom, but during the progress of which he might discover perchance some means of escape. And he had effected his maneuvers so well that at the moment when we beheld the other Darzac advancing toward us we could not hinder the impostor from disappearing at one bound within the room which had served as the bed-chamber of Mme. Darzac and closing the door violently. Roulettable during the scene which

had pursued I thought only of guarding the door opening into the corridor, and he had not noticed that every movement of the false Darzac as soon as he realized that he was being convicted of his imposture had been in the direction of Mme. Darzac's room. The reporter had attached no importance to these movements, knowing, as he did, that this room did not offer any way by which Larsan might escape. But, however, when the scoundrel was behind the door which afforded his last refuge our confusion increased beyond all proportions. One might have thought that we had become suddenly bereft of our senses. We knocked on the door. We cried out. We thought of all his strokes of genius, of his marvelous escapes in the past.

"He will escape us! He will get away from us again!"

Arthur Raucé was the most enraged of us all. Mme. Edith, who was clinging to my arm, drove her finger nails into my hand in a paroxysm of nervous fear. None of us paid any heed to the Lady in Black and Robert Darzac, who in the midst of this tempest seemed to have forgotten everything—even the clamor and confusion around them. Neither one had spoken a word, but they were looking into each other's eyes as though they had discovered another world—the world which is love. But they had not discovered it; they had merely found it again, thanks to Roulettable.

The latter had opened the door of the corridor and summoned the three domestics to our assistance. They entered with their rifles. But it was axes that were needed. The door was solid and barricaded with heavy bolts. Pere Jacques went out and fetched a beam, which served us as a battering ram. Each of us exerted all his strength, and finally we saw the door beginning to give way. Our anxiety was at its height.

When the door had commenced to yield, Roulettable directed the servants to take up their guns, with the order, however, that the weapons were to be used only in case it should be impossible to capture Larsan living. Then Roulettable set his shoulder to the door with one last powerful effort, and as the boards, wrenched from their hinges, fell to the ground, he was the first to enter the room.

We followed him. And behind him, upon the threshold, we all halted, stupefied by the sight which met our eyes. Larsan was there, plainly to be seen by every one. And this time there was no difficulty in recognizing him. He had removed his false beard; he had put aside his "Darzac mask"; he had resumed once more the pale clean shaven face of that Frederic Larsan whom we had known at the Chateau of Glandier. And his presence seemed to fill the entire room. He was lying back comfortably in an easy chair in the center of the room and was looking at us with his great, calm eyes. His arm was stretched along the arm of the chair. His head was resting on the cushion at the back. One would have said that he was giving us an audience and was waiting for us to make known our business. It seemed to me that I could even discern an tropical smile on his lips.

Roulettable advanced toward him. "Larsan," he said in a voice which was not quite steady—"Larsan, do you give yourself up?"

But Larsan did not reply.

To be Continued.)

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