

# The Mystery of The Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

Roulettable Has Drawn a Circle Between the Two Bumps on His Forehead.

WE separated on the threshold of our room with a melancholy shake of the hands. Larsen's was an original brain, very intelligent, but without method. I did not go to bed. I awaited the coming of daylight and then went down to the front of the chateau and made a detour, examining every trace of footsteps coming toward it or going from it. These, however, were so mixed and confusing that I could make nothing of them. Here I may make a remark—I am not accustomed to attach an exaggerated importance to exterior signs left in the track of a crime.

"The method which traces the criminal by means of the tracks of his footprints is altogether primitive. So many footprints are identical. However, in the disturbed state of my mind I did go into the deserted court and did look at all the footprints I could find there, seeking for some indication as a basis for reasoning.

"If I could but find a right starting point! In despair I seated myself on a stone. For over an hour I busied myself with the common, ordinary work of a policeman. Like the least intelligent of detectives I went on blindly over the traces of footprints which told me just as much as they could.

"I came to the conclusion that I was a fool, lower in the scale of intelligence than even the police of the modern times." Novelists build mountains of stupor out of a footprint on the sand or an impression of a hand on the wall. That's the way innocent men are brought to prison. It might convince an examining magistrate or the head of a detective department, but it's not proof. You writers forget that what the senses furnish is not proof. If I am taking cognizance of what is offered me by my senses I do so to bring the results within the circle of my reason. That circle may be the most circumscribed, but, if it is, it has this advantage—it holds nothing but the truth. Yes, I swear that I have never used the evidence of the senses but as servants to my reason. I have never permitted them to become my master. They have not made me that monstrous thing—worse than a blind man—a man who sees falsely. And that is why I can triumph over your error and your merely animal intelligence, Frederic Larsen.

"Be of good courage, then, friend Roulettable. It is impossible that the incident of the inexplicable gallery should be outside the circle of your reason. You know that! Then have faith and take thought with yourself and forget not that you took hold of the right end when you drew that circle in your brain within which to unravel this mysterious play of circumstance.

"To it, once again! Go back to the gallery. Take you stand on your reason and rest there as Frederic Larsen rests on his cane. You will then soon prove that the great Fred is nothing but a fool—30th October, Noon.

"JOSEPH ROULETTABLE."

"I noted as I planned. With head on fire, I retraced my way to the gallery, and without having found anything more than I had seen on the previous night, the right hold I had taken of my reason drew me to something so important that I was obliged to cling to it to save myself from falling.

"Now for the strength and patience to find sensible traces to fit in with my thinking—and these must come within the circle I have drawn between the two bumps on my forehead.—30th October, Midnight.

"JOSEPH ROULETTABLE."

## CHAPTER XIX.

Roulettable Invites Me to Breakfast at the Donjon Inn.

IT was not until later that Roulettable sent me the notebook in which he had written at length the story of the inexplicable gallery. On the day I arrived at the Glandier and joined him in his room he recounted to me, with the greatest detail, all that I have related, telling me also how he had spent several hours in Paris, where he had learned nothing that could be of any help to him.

The event of the inexplicable gallery had occurred on the night between the 29th and 30th of October—that is to say, three days before my return to the chateau. It was on the 2d of November, then, that I went back to the Glandier, summoned there by my friend's telegram and taking the revolver with me.

I am now in Roulettable's room, and he has finished his recital.

While he had been telling me the story I noticed him continually rubbing the glass of the eyeglasses he had found on the side table. From the evident pleasure he was taking in handling them I felt they must be one of those sensible evidences destined to enter what he had called the circle of the right end of his reason.

"Very well," I said. "It seems to me that the point of departure of my reason would be this—there can be no doubt that the murderer you pursued was in the gallery?" I pursued.

"After thinking so long a start, you ought not to stop so soon," he exclaimed. "Come, make another effort."

"I'll try. Since he disappeared from the gallery without passing through any door or window, he must have escaped by some other opening."

Roulettable looked at me pityingly, smiled carelessly and remarked that I was reasoning like a postman—or like Frederic Larsen.

Roulettable had alternate fits of admiration and disdain for the great Fred. It all depended as to whether Larsen's discoveries tallied with Roulettable's reasoning or not. When they did he would exclaim, "He is really great! When they did not, he would grunt and mutter, "What an ass!" It was a petty side of the noble character of this strange youth.

We had risen, and he led me into the park. When we reached the court and were making toward the gate, the sound of blinds thrown back against the wall made us turn our heads, and we saw at a window on the first floor of the chateau the ruddy and clean shaven face of a person I did not recognize.

"Hello!" muttered Roulettable. "Arthur Rance!" He lowered his head, quickened his pace, and I heard him ask himself between his teeth: "Was he in the chateau that night? What is he doing here?"

We had gone some distance from the chateau when I asked him who this Arthur Rance was and how he had come to know him. He referred to his story of that morning, and I remembered that Mr. Arthur W. Rance was the American from Philadelphia with whom he had had so many drinks at the Elysée reception.

"But was he not to have left France almost immediately?" I asked.

"No doubt that's why I am surprised to find him here still and not only in France, but above all, at the Glandier. He did not arrive this morning, and he did not get here last night. He must have not yet before dinner, then. Why didn't the concierges tell me?"

I reminded my friend, apropos of the concierges, that he had not yet told me who had led him to get them set at liberty.

"We were close to their lodge. M. and Mme. Bernier saw us coming. A frank smile lit up their happy faces. They seemed to harbor no ill feeling because of their detention. My young friend asked them at what hour Mr. Arthur Rance had arrived. They answered that they did not know he was at the chateau. He must have come during the evening of the previous night, but they had not had to open the gate for him, because, being a great walker and not wishing that a carriage should be sent to meet him, he was accustomed to get off at the little hamlet of Saint Michel, from which he came to the chateau by way of the forest. He reached the park by the grotto of Sainte Genevieve, over the little gate of which, giving on to the park, he climbed.

As the concierges spoke I saw Roulettable's face cloud over and exhibit disappointment—a disappointment, no doubt, with himself. Evidently he was a little vexed, after having worked so much on the spot, with so minute a study of the people and events at the Glandier, that he had to learn now that Arthur Rance was accustomed to visit the chateau.

"You say that M. Arthur Rance is accustomed to come to the chateau. When did he come here last?"

"We can't tell you exactly," replied Mme. Bernier. "We couldn't know while they were keeping us in prison. Besides, as the gentleman comes to the chateau without passing through our gate he goes away by the way he comes."

"Do you know when he came the first time?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur! Nine years ago."

"He was in France nine years ago, then," said Roulettable, "and since that time, as far as you know, how many times has he been at the Glandier?"

"Three times."

"When did he come the last time, as far as you know?"

"A week before the attempt in the yellow room."

Roulettable put himself particularly to the woman.

"In the grove of the parquetry," she replied.

"Thanks!" said Roulettable. "Be ready for me this evening."

He spoke the last words with a frown on his lips as if to command silence and discretion.

We left the park and took the way to the Donjon Inn.

"Do you often eat here?"

"Sometimes."

"But you also take your meals at the chateau?"

"Yes, Larsen and I are sometimes served in one of our rooms."

"Hasn't M. Stangerson ever invited you to his own table?"

"Never."

"Does your presence at the chateau displease him?"

"I don't know; but, in any case, he does not make us feel that we are in his way."

"Doesn't he question you?"

"Never. He is in the same state of mind as he was in at the door of the yellow room when his daughter was being murdered and when he broke open the door and did not find the murderer. He is persuaded since he could discover nothing that there's no reason why we should be able to discover more than he did. But he has made it his duty since Larsen expressed his theory not to oppose us."

Roulettable buried himself in thought again for some time. He aroused himself later to tell me of how he came to meet me.

"I took with me a piece of paper on which was written, I promise, whatever others may say, to keep in my service my two faithful servants, Bernier and his wife." I explained to him that by signing that document he would enable me to compel those two people to speak out, and I declared my own assurance of their innocence of any part in the crime. That was also his opinion. The examining magistrate after it was signed presented the document to the Berniers, who then did speak. They said what I was certain they would say as soon as they were sure they would not lose their place.

"They confessed to poisoning M. Stangerson's estate, and it was while they were poisoning, on the night of

the crime, that they were found not guilty from the pavilion at the moment when the outrage was being committed. Some rabbits they caught in that way were sold by them to the landlord of the Donjon Inn, who served them to his customers or sent them to Paris. That was the truth, as I had guessed from the first. Do you remember what I said on entering the Donjon Inn? 'We shall have to eat red meat—now.' I had heard the words on the same morning when we arrived at the park gate. You heard them also, but you did not attach any importance to them. You recollect when we reached the park gate that we stopped to look at a man who was running by the side of the wall, looking every minute at his watch. That was Larsen. Well, behind us the landlord of the Donjon Inn, standing on his doorstep, said to some one inside, 'We shall have to eat red meat—now.'

"Why that 'now?' When you are, as I am, in search of some hidden secret, you can't afford to have anything escape you. You've got to know the meaning of everything. We had come into a rather out of the way part of the country which had been turned topsy turvy by a crime, and my reason led me to suspect every phrase that could bear upon the event of the day. 'Now,' I took to mean, 'since the outrage,' in the course of my inquiry, therefore, I sought to find a relation between that phrase and the tragedy. We went to the Donjon Inn for breakfast. I repeated the phrase and saw by the surprise and trouble on Daddy Mathieu's face that I had not exaggerated its importance so far as he was concerned.

"I had just learned that the concierges had been arrested. Daddy Mathieu spoke of them as of dear friends—people for whom one is sorry. That was a reckless conjunction of ideas, I said to myself. 'Now,' that the concierges are arrested, 'we shall have to eat red meat.' No more concierges, no more game! The hatred expressed by Daddy Mathieu for M. Stangerson's forest keeper—a hatred he pretended was shared by the concierges—led me easily to think of poisoning. Now, as all the evidence showed the concierges had not been in bed at the time of the tragedy, why were they abroad that night? As participants in the crime? I was not disposed to think so. I had already arrived at the conclusion by steps of which I will tell you later—that the assassin had had no accomplice and that the tragedy held a mystery between Mlle. Stangerson and the murderer, a mystery with which the concierges had nothing to do.

"With that theory in my mind, I searched for proof in their lodge, which, as you know, I entered. I found there under their bed some springs and brass wire. 'Ah,' I thought, 'these things explain why they were out in the park at night!' I was not surprised at the dogged silence they maintained before the examining magistrate, even under the accusation so grave as that of being accomplices in the crime. Poisoning would save them from the assize court, but it would lose them their places, and as they were perfectly sure of their innocence of the crime they hoped it would soon be established, and then their poisoning might go on as usual. They could always confess later. I, however, hastened their confession by means of the document M. Stangerson signed. They gave all the necessary proofs, were set at liberty and have now a lively gratitude for me. Why did I not get them released sooner? Because I was not sure that nothing more than poisoning was against them. I wanted to study the ground. As the days went by, my conviction became more and more certain. The days after the events of the inexplicable gallery I had need of help I could rely on, so I resolved to have them released at once."

We reached the Donjon Inn and entered it.

"This time we did not see the landlord, but were received with a pleasant smile by the charming hostess. 'How's Daddy Mathieu?' asked Roulettable.

"Not much better, not much better. He is still confined to his bed."

"His rheumatism still sticks to him, then?"

"Yes. Last night I was again obliged to give him morphine, the only drug that gives him any relief."

She spoke in a soft voice. Everything about her expressed gentleness. She was, indeed, a beautiful woman, somewhat with an air of indolence, with great eyes seemingly black and blue, amorous eyes. Was she happy with her crabbed, rheumatic husband? The scene at which we had once been present did not lend us to believe that she was. Yet there was something in her bearing that was not suggestive of despair. She disappeared into the kitchen to prepare our repast, leaving on the table a bottle of excellent cider. Roulettable filled our earthenware mugs, loaded his pipe and quietly explained to me his reason for asking me to come to the Glandier with revolvers.

"Yes," he said contemptively, looking at the clouds of smoke he was puffing out, "yes, my dear boy, I expect the assassin tonight."

A brief silence followed, which I took care not to interrupt, and then he went on:

"Last night just as I was going to bed M. Robert Darzac knocked at my room. When he came in he confided to me that he was compelled to go to Paris the next day—that is, this morning. The reason which made this journey necessary was at once preposterous and mysterious. It was not possible for him to explain his object to me. 'I go, and yet,' he added, 'I would give my life not to leave Mlle. Stangerson at this moment.' He did not try to hide that he believed her to be once more in danger. 'It will not greatly astonish me if something happens tomorrow night,' he avowed, 'and yet I must be absent. I cannot be back at the Glandier before the morning of the day after tomorrow.'

"I asked him to explain himself, and this is all he would tell me. His anticipation of coming danger had come to him solely from the coincidence that Mlle. Stangerson had been twice at the Glandier, and both times when he had been absent. Now a man so moved who should still go away must be acting under compulsion—must be obeying a will stronger than his own. That was how I reasoned, and I told him so.

He replied 'Perhaps.' I asked him if Mlle. Stangerson was compelling him. He protested that she was not. His determination to go to Paris had been taken without any conference with Mlle. Stangerson.

"To cut the story short, he repeated that his belief in the possibility of a fresh attack was founded entirely on the extraordinary coincidence. 'If anything happens to Mlle. Stangerson,' he said, 'it will be terrible for both of us—for her, because her life would be in danger; for me, because I could not tell of where I had been. I am perfectly aware of the suspicions cast on me. The examining magistrate and M. Larsen are both on the point of believing in my guilt. Larsen tracked me the last time I went to Paris, and I had all the trouble in the world to get rid of him.'

"Why do you not tell me the name of the murderer now if you know it?" I cried.

"M. Darzac appeared extremely troubled by my question and replied to me in a hesitating tone:

"I know the name of the murderer? Why, how could I know his name?"

"I at once replied, 'From Mlle. Stangerson.'

"He grew so pale that I thought he was about to faint, and I saw that I had hit the right nail on the head. Mademoiselle and he knew the name of the murderer! When he recovered himself, he said to me: 'I am going to leave you. Since you have been here I have appreciated your exceptional intelligence and your unequalled ingenuity. But I ask your service of you. Perhaps I am wrong to fear an attack during the coming night, but as I must act with foresight I count on you to frustrate any attempt that may be made.'

"Have you spoken of all this to M. Stangerson?"

"No. I do not wish him to ask me, as you just now did, for the name of the murderer. I tell you all this, M. Roulettable, because I have great, very great, confidence in you. I know that you do not suspect me."

"The poor man spoke in jerks. He was evidently suffering. I pitied him, the more because I felt sure that he would rather allow himself to be killed than tell me who the murderer was. As for Mlle. Stangerson, I felt that she would rather allow herself to be murdered than denounce the man of the yellow room and of the inexplicable gallery. The man must be dominating her or both by some insuperable power. They were dreading nothing so much as the chance of M. Stangerson knowing that his daughter was held by her assailant. I made M. Darzac understand that he had explained himself sufficiently and that he might refrain from telling me any more than he had already told me. I promised him to watch through the night. He insisted that I should establish an absolutely impassable barrier about Mlle. Stangerson's chamber, around the boudoir where the nurses were sleeping and around the drawing room where since the affair of the inexplicable gallery M. Stangerson had slept. In short, I was to put a cordon round the whole apartment.

"From his insistence I gathered that M. Darzac intended not only to make it impossible for the expected man to reach the chamber of Mlle. Stangerson, but to make that impossibility as visibly clear that, seeing himself exposed, he would at once go away. That was how I interpreted his final words when he parted, 'You may mention your own suspicions of the expected attack to M. Stangerson, to Daddy Jacques, to Frederic Larsen and to anybody in the chateau.'

"When he was gone I began to think that I should have to use even a greater cunning than his so that if the man should come that night he might not for a moment suspect that his coming had been expected. Certainly! I would allow him to get in far enough, so that, dead or alive, I might see his face clearly. He must be got rid of. Mlle. Stangerson must be freed from this continual impending danger."

The landlady reappeared at that moment, bringing in the traditional bacon omelet. Roulettable chafed her a little, and she took the chaff with the most charming good humor.

"She is much jollier when Daddy Mathieu is in bed with his rheumatism," Roulettable said to me.

When he had finished his omelet and we were again alone Roulettable continued the tale of his confidences.

"When I sent you my telegram this morning," he said, "I had only the word of M. Darzac that 'perhaps' the assassin would come tonight. I can now say that he will certainly come. I expect him."

"What has made you feel this certainty?"

"I have been sure since half past 10 o'clock this morning that he would come. I knew that before we saw Arthur Rance at the window in the court."

"Ah!" I said. "But, again, what made you so sure? And why since half past 10 this morning?"

"Because at half past 10 I had proof that Mlle. Stangerson was making as many efforts to permit of the murderer's entrance as M. Robert Darzac had taken precautions against it."

"Is that possible?" I cried. "Haven't you told me that Mlle. Stangerson loves M. Robert Darzac?"

"I told you so because it is the truth."

"Then do you see nothing strange?"

"Everything in this business is strange, my friend; but take my word for it, the strangeness you now feel is nothing to the strangeness that's to come."

"It must be admitted, then," I said, "that Mlle. Stangerson and her murderer are in communication—at any rate in writing?"

"Admit it, my friend; admit it! You don't risk anything! I told you about the letter left on her table on the night of the inexplicable gallery affair—the letter that disappeared into the pocket of Mlle. Stangerson. Why should it not have been a summons to a meeting? Might he not, as soon as he was sure of Darzac's absence, appoint the meeting for the coming night?"

And my friend laughed silently. There are moments when I ask myself if he is not laughing at me.

The door of the inn opened. Roulettable was on his feet so suddenly

that one might have thought he had received an electric shock.

"Mr. Arthur Rance!" he cried.

Mr. Arthur Rance stood before us calmly bowing.

## CHAPTER XX.

An Act of Mlle. Stangerson.

"YOU remember me, monsieur?" asked Roulettable. The American extended his hand, and Roulettable, relaxing his frown, shook it and introduced Mr. Arthur Rance to me. He invited him to share our meal.

"No, thanks. I breakfasted with M. Stangerson."

Arthur Rance spoke French perfectly, almost without an accent.

"I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing you again, monsieur. I thought you were to have left France the day after the reception at the Elysée."

Roulettable and I, outwardly indifferent, listened most intently for every word the American would say.

The man's purplish red face, his heavy eyelids, the nervous twitchings, all spoke of his addiction to drink. How came it that so sorry a specimen of a man should be so intimate with M. Stangerson?

Some days later I learned from Frederic Larsen—who, like ourselves, was surprised and mystified by Rance's appearance and reception at the chateau—that Mr. Rance had been an inmate for about fifteen years only—that it is to say, since the professor and his daughter left Philadelphia. During the time the Stangersons lived in America they were very intimate with Arthur Rance, who was one of the most distinguished philologists of the new world. Owing to new experiments he had made enormous strides beyond the science of Gall and Lavater. The friendliness with which he was received at the Glandier may be explained by the fact that he had rendered Mlle. Stangerson a great service by stopping, at the peril of his own life, the runaway horses of her carriage. The immediate result of that could, however, have been no more than a mere friendly association with the Stangersons, certainly not a love affair.

Frederic Larsen did not tell me where he had picked up this information, but he appeared to be quite sure of what he said.

The American must have been at least forty-five years old. He spoke in a perfectly natural tone in reply to Roulettable's question.

"It put off my return to America when I heard of the attack on Mlle. Stangerson. I wanted to be certain the lady had not been killed, and I shall not go away until she is perfectly recovered."

Like Larsen, Rance thought that Robert Darzac had something to do with the matter. He did not mention him by name, but there was no room to doubt whom he meant. He told us he was aware of the efforts young Roulettable was making to unravel the tangled skein of the yellow room mystery. He explained that M. Stangerson had related to him all that had taken place in the inexplicable gallery. He several times expressed his regret at M. Darzac's absence from the chateau on all these occasions and thought that M. Darzac had done cleverly in allying himself with M. Joseph Roulettable, who could not fall sooner or later to discover the murderer. He spoke the last sentence with unconcealed irony. Then he rose, bowed to us and left the inn.

Roulettable watched him through the window.

"An odd fish, that," he said.

"Do you think he'll pass the night at the Glandier?" I asked.

To my amazement the young reporter answered that it was a matter of entire indifference to him whether he did or not.

As to how we spent our time during the afternoon, all I need say is that Roulettable led me to the grotto of Sainte Genevieve and all the time talked of every subject but the one with which we were most interested. Toward evening I was surprised to find Roulettable making none of the preparations I had expected him to make. I spoke to him about it when night had come on and we were once more in his room. He replied that all his arrangements had already been made, and this time the murderer would not get away from him.

I expressed some doubt on this, reminding him of his disappearance in the gallery, and suggested that the same phenomenon might occur again. He answered that he hoped it would. He desired nothing more. I did not insist, knowing by experience how useless that would have been. He told me that, with the help of the concierges, the chateau had since early dawn been watched in such a way that nobody could approach it without his knowing it and that he had no concern for those who might have left it and remained without.

It was then 6 o'clock by his watch. Rising, he made a sign to me to follow him, and, without in the least trying to conceal his movements or the sound of his footsteps, he led me through the gallery and came to the landing place, which we crossed. We then continued our way in the gallery of the left wing, passing Professor Stangerson's apartment.

At the far end of the gallery, before coming to the donjon, is the room occupied by Arthur Rance. We knew that, because we had seen him at the window looking on to the court. The door of the room opens on to the end of the gallery, exactly facing the east window, at the extremity of the 'right' gallery, where Roulettable had placed Daddy Jacques, and commands an uninterrupted view of the gallery from end to end of the chateau.

"That 'off turning' gallery," said Roulettable, "I reserve for myself. When I tell you you'll come and take your place here."

And he made me enter a little dark, triangular closet built in a bend of the wall to the left of the door of Arthur Rance's room. From this recess I could see all that occurred in the gallery as well as if I had been standing in front of Arthur Rance's door, and I could watch that door too. The door of the closet, which was to be my place of observation, was fitted with

panels of transparent glass, in the gallery, where all the lamps had been lit, it was quite light. In the closet, however, it was quite dark. It was a splendid place from which to observe and remain unobserved.

We returned along the gallery. On reaching the door of Mlle. Stangerson's apartment it opened from a push given by the steward who was waiting at the dinner table. (M. Stangerson had for the last three days dined with his daughter in the drawing room on the first floor.) As the door remained open, we distinctly saw Mlle. Stangerson, taking advantage of the steward's absence and while her father was stooping to pick up something he had let fall, pour the contents of a vial into M. Stangerson's glass.

## CHAPTER XXI.

On the Watch.

THE act, which staggered me, did not appear to affect Roulettable much. We returned to the room, and, without even referring to what we had seen, he gave me his final instructions for the night. First we were to go to dinner. After dinner I was to take my stand in the dark closet and wait there as long as it was necessary—to look out for what might happen.

"If you see anything before I do," he explained, "you must let me know. If the man gets into the 'right' gallery by any other way than the 'off turning' gallery you will see him before I shall, because you have a view along the whole length of the 'right' gallery, while I can only command a view of the 'off turning' gallery. All you need do to let me know is to undo the cord holding the curtain of the 'right' gallery window nearest to the dark closet. The curtain will fall of itself and immediately leave a square of shadow where previously there had been a square of light. To do this you need but stretch your hand out of the closet. I shall understand your signal perfectly."

"And then?"

"Then you will see me coming round the corner of the 'off turning' gallery."

"What am I to do then?"

"You will immediately come toward me, behind the man, but I shall already be upon him and shall have seen his face."

I attempted a feeble smile.

"Why do you smile? Well, you may smile while you have the chance, but I swear you'll have no time for that a few hours from now."

"And if the man escapes?"

"So much the better," said Roulettable coolly. "I don't want to capture him. He may take himself off any way he can. I will let him go after I have seen his face. That's all I want. I shall know afterward what to do, so that as far as Mlle. Stangerson is concerned he shall be dead to her even though he continues to live. If I took him alive Mlle. Stangerson and Robert Darzac would perhaps never forgive me. And I wish to retain their good will and respect."

"Seeing, as I have just now seen, Mlle. Stangerson pour a narcotic into her father's glass, so that he might not be awake to interrupt the conversation she is going to have with her assailant, you can imagine she would not be grateful to me if I brought the man of the yellow room and the inexplicable gallery bound and gagged to her father. I realize now that if I am to save the unhappy lady I must silence the man and not capture him. To kill a human being is no small thing. Besides, that's not my business unless the man himself makes it my business. On the other hand, to render him forever silent without the lady's assent and confidence is to act on one's own initiative and assume a knowledge of everything with nothing for a basis. Fortunately, my friend, I have guessed—no, I have reasoned it all out. All that I ask of the man who is coming tonight is to bring me his face so that I may enter—

"Into the circle?"

"Exactly!