

# **The Mystery of the Yellow Room**

By

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# Chapter 1

## 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 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 2

### 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

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