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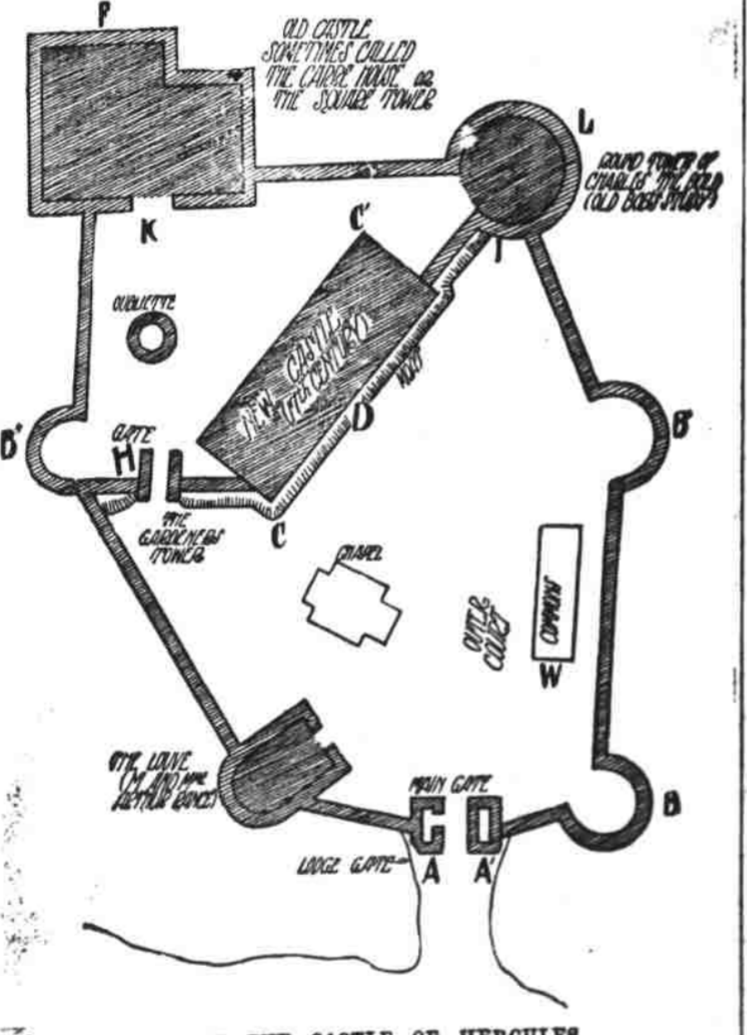
By GASTON LEROUX, Author of "The Mystery of the Yellow Room"

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CHAPTER I—Robert Darzac and Mlle. Stangerson celebrate their wedding quietly in a Paris church on April 6, 1895. Among the few present is Roulettable, the reporter-detective, who has his doubts about the alleged death of Larsan, the government secret service official who is said to have been lost in the wreck of La Dordogne.

CHAPTER V. The Castle of Horrors.

WHEN he alights at the Garavan station, whatever the season, the traveler might almost fancy himself in the garden of Hesperides, whose golden apples excited the desire of the conqueror of the Neuman lion. When, after alighting from the train, we came to the bank of the sea our eyes were struck by a dazzling silhouette of a castle standing upon the peninsula of Hercules, which the works accomplished on the frontier have, alas, nearly destroyed.



On the map by W, near the parapet between B and B', had been transformed into the stables and the kitchen. One could only penetrate into the second inclosure through the postern (indicated by H), which Mrs. Arthur Rance called "the tower of the gardener" and which was actually only a pavilion, formerly a dovecote, situated at C and which had entirely disappeared at the time of the erection of the new castle (shown at C C').

The Pointe de Garibaldi the bark had disappeared as if by enchantment. Darzac left me and hurried away to seek Mathilde. But he returned gloomy and griefed. The door of his wife's room was locked, and she would not see him. We remained together upon the rampart gazing at the night which had carried Larsan away. In order to change the direction of his thoughts I asked him a few questions regarding the Rance household. He told me that, after the trial at Versailles, Rance had returned to Philadelphia, and there one evening at a family dinner party he had found himself seated beside a charming young girl who had interested him at once by a display of interest in literature and art.

He had experienced only indifference in regard to her marriage to Robert Darzac, although the latter had been the best beloved of his pupils. In vain Mathilde, with the warmest tenderness had endeavored to rekindle the old feeling in the heart of her father. She knew well that he had changed toward her. The professor could work no longer. The great secret of the dissolution of matter which he had promised to reveal to mankind had returned to the unknown from which for a moment the scientist had drawn it, and men will go on, repeating for centuries to come the imbecile phrase, "From nothing, nothing."

It was the design of Larsan in showing himself to be a happy man who had not scarcely begun, he had completely succeeded. Mathilde had given Darzac at once to understand that she did not regard her father as his wife, since the man to whom she had pledged herself in her early girlhood was still living. I have said that Mathilde Stangerson had been brought up in a very religious manner, not by her father, who cared little for such things, but by her female relatives, especially her old aunt in Cincinnati. I might have passed over these religious beliefs of Mathilde in silence if they had not had so strong an influence on the resolution which she had taken in regard to her second husband when she discovered that her first husband was still alive. It had seemed to her that Larsan's death had been proved beyond the slightest doubt, and she had gone to her new husband as a widow with the approval of her confessor. And now she learned that in the sight of heaven she was not a widow, but a bigamist!

The unexpected exit of Roulettable sent a chill to my heart and seemed to spread a general sensation of alarm throughout the company. Mme. Darzac was very restless. And because Mathilde showed herself to be disturbed and nervous I fancied that Arthur Rance thought that it behooved him to display some little anxiety. Arthur Rance and his wife were not aware of the whole of the unfortunate story. It had seemed useless to inform them of the fact of Mathilde's secret marriage to Jean Roussel, afterward known as Larsan. That was something which concerned only the family. But they were fully aware of the way in which the secret service agent had pursued Mme. Darzac. The times of Larsan were explained in the eyes of Arthur Rance by a mad passion for Mathilde, the indications of an insane and hopeless love. As to Mme. Edith, her thoughts, which I read without her suspecting it, ran about in this way: "But what on earth is there about this woman which could inspire such an insane passion, lasting for years and years, in the heart of any man? Here is a woman for whom a detective officer becomes a murderer, a drunkard and for whom an innocent man permits himself to be pronounced guilty of a felony. What is there about her more than there is about myself, who owe my husband to the fact that she refused him before he ever saw me? What is the charm about her? And yet even now my husband forgets all about me while he is looking at her." That is what I read in Edith's eyes as she watched her husband gaze at Mathilde. Ah, those black eyes of gentle Mme. Edith!

CHAPTER VI. Fortifying Against a Weird Fate.

PROFESSOR STANGERSON since he had learned the cruel truth had not for one moment been able to free himself from the thought of it. In truth, the first victim of the affair at the Glandier and the most unfortunate was this good old man. He had lost everything—his faith in science, his love of work and his belief in his daughter. His faith in her had been his religion, joy and pride. And while he was thinking of her almost with reverence he discovered that the reason that his daughter refused to marry was because she was already the wife of Balmeyer. The day in which Mathilde had decided to tell him the story of the past, which must clear up the present with a tragic light to the eyes of the guests of the Glandier—the day when, falling at his feet, she had told him the story of her youth, Professor Stangerson had valued the form of his beloved child from the ground and had pressed her to his heart; he had singled his tears with the sob of her whose faith had been so bitterly exploited and had sworn that she had never been his wife. But she had never been his wife. She had never been his wife. She had never been his wife.

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