

## II. ARSÈNE LUPIN IN PRISON

There is no tourist worthy of the name who does not know the banks of the Seine, and has not noticed, in passing, the little feudal castle of the Malaquis, built upon a rock in the centre of the river. An arched bridge connects it with the shore. All around it, the calm waters of the great river play peacefully amongst the reeds, and the wagtails flutter over the moist crests of the stones.

The history of the Malaquis castle is stormy like its name, harsh like its outlines. It has passed through a long series of combats, sieges, assaults, rapines and massacres. A recital of the crimes that have been committed there would cause the stoutest heart to tremble. There are many mysterious legends connected with the castle, and they tell us of a famous subterranean tunnel that formerly led to the abbey of Jumieges and to the manor of Agnes Sorel, mistress of Charles VII.

In that ancient habitation of heroes and brigands, the Baron Nathan Cahorn now lived; or Baron Satan as he was formerly called on the Bourse, where he had acquired a fortune with incredible rapidity. The lords of Malaquis, absolutely ruined, had been obliged to sell the ancient castle at a great sacrifice. It contained an admirable collection of furniture, pictures, wood carvings, and faience. The Baron lived there alone, attended by three old servants. No one ever enters the place. No one had ever beheld the three Rubens that he possessed, his two Watteau, his Jean Goujon pulpit, and the many other treasures that he had acquired by a vast expenditure of money at public sales.

Baron Satan lived in constant fear, not for himself, but for the

treasures that he had accumulated with such an earnest devotion and with so much perspicacity that the shrewdest merchant could not say that the Baron had ever erred in his taste or judgment. He loved them—his bibelots. He loved them intensely, like a miser; jealously, like a lover. Every day, at sunset, the iron gates at either end of the bridge and at the entrance to the court of honor are closed and barred. At the least touch on these gates, electric bells will ring throughout the castle.

One Thursday in September, a letter-carrier presented himself at the gate at the head of the bridge, and, as usual, it was the Baron himself who partially opened the heavy portal. He scrutinized the man as minutely as if he were a stranger, although the honest face and twinkling eyes of the postman had been familiar to the Baron for many years. The man laughed, as he said:

“It is only I, Monsieur le Baron. It is not another man wearing my cap and blouse.”

“One can never tell,” muttered the Baron.

The man handed him a number of newspapers, and then said:

“And now, Monsieur le Baron, here is something new.”

“Something new?”

“Yes, a letter. A registered letter.”

Living as a recluse, without friends or business relations, the baron never received any letters, and the one now presented to him immediately aroused within him a feeling of suspicion and distrust. It was like an evil omen. Who was this mysterious correspondent that dared to disturb the tranquility of his retreat?

“You must sign for it, Monsieur le Baron.”

He signed; then took the letter, waited until the postman had disappeared beyond the bend in the road, and, after walking nervously to and fro for a few minutes, he leaned against the parapet of the bridge and opened the envelope. It contained a sheet of paper, bearing this heading: Prison de la

Santé, Paris. He looked at the signature: Arsène Lupin. Then he read:  
“Monsieur le Baron:

“There is, in the gallery in your castle, a picture of Philippe de Champaigne, of exquisite finish, which pleases me beyond measure. Your Rubens are also to my taste, as well as your smallest Watteau. In the salon to the right, I have noticed the Louis XIII cadence-table, the tapestries of Beauvais, the Empire gueridon signed ‘Jacob,’ and the Renaissance chest. In the salon to the left, all the cabinet full of jewels and miniatures.

“For the present, I will content myself with those articles that can be conveniently removed. I will therefore ask you to pack them carefully and ship them to me, charges prepaid, to the station at Batignolles, within eight days, otherwise I shall be obliged to remove them myself during the night of 27 September; but, under those circumstances, I shall not content myself with the articles above mentioned.

“Accept my apologies for any inconvenience I may cause you, and believe me to be your humble servant,

“Arsène Lupin.”

“P. S.—Please do not send the largest Watteau. Although you paid thirty thousand francs for it, it is only a copy, the original having been burned, under the Directoire by Barras, during a night of debauchery. Consult the memoirs of Garat.

“I do not care for the Louis XV chatelaine, as I doubt its authenticity.”

That letter completely upset the baron. Had it borne any other signature, he would have been greatly alarmed—but signed by Arsène Lupin!

As an habitual reader of the newspapers, he was versed in the history of recent crimes, and was therefore well acquainted with the exploits of the mysterious burglar. Of course, he knew that Lupin had been arrested in America by his enemy Ganimard and was at present

incarcerated in the Prison de la Santé. But he knew also that any miracle might be expected from Arsène Lupin. Moreover, that exact knowledge of the castle, the location of the pictures and furniture, gave the affair an alarming aspect. How could he have acquired that information concerning things that no one had ever seen?

The baron raised his eyes and contemplated the stern outlines of the castle, its steep rocky pedestal, the depth of the surrounding water, and shrugged his shoulders. Certainly, there was no danger. No one in the world could force an entrance to the sanctuary that contained his priceless treasures.

No one, perhaps, but Arsène Lupin! For him, gates, walls and drawbridges did not exist. What use were the most formidable obstacles or the most careful precautions, if Arsène Lupin had decided to effect an entrance?

That evening, he wrote to the Procurer of the Republique at Rouen. He enclosed the threatening letter and solicited aid and protection.

The reply came at once to the effect that Arsène Lupin was in custody in the Prison de la Santé, under close surveillance, with no opportunity to write such a letter, which was, no doubt, the work of some imposter. But, as an act of precaution, the Procurer had submitted the letter to an expert in handwriting, who declared that, in spite of certain resemblances, the writing was not that of the prisoner.

But the words "in spite of certain resemblances" caught the attention of the baron; in them, he read the possibility of a doubt which appeared to him quite sufficient to warrant the intervention of the law. His fears increased. He read Lupin's letter over and over again. "I shall be obliged to remove them myself." And then there was the fixed date: the night of 27 September.

To confide in his servants was a proceeding repugnant to his nature; but now, for the first time in many years, he experienced the necessity of seeking counsel with some one. Abandoned by the legal

fully understand what that means: to be under the eyes of a woman that one loves? I cared for nothing in the world but that. And that is why I am here."

"Permit me to say: you have been here a long time."

"In the first place, I wished to forget. Do not laugh; it was a delightful adventure and it is still a tender memory. Besides, I have been suffering from neurasthenia. Life is so feverish these days that it is necessary to take the 'rest cure' occasionally, and I find this spot a sovereign remedy for my tired nerves."

"Arsène Lupin, you are not a bad fellow, after all."

"Thank you," said Lupin. "Ganimard, this is Friday. On Wednesday next, at four o'clock in the afternoon, I will smoke my cigar at your house in the rue Pergolese."

"Arsène Lupin, I will expect you."

They shook hands like two old friends who valued each other at their true worth; then the detective stepped to the door.

"Ganimard!"

"What is it?" asked Ganimard, as he turned back.

"You have forgotten your watch."

"My watch?"

"Yes, it strayed into my pocket."

He returned the watch, excusing himself.

"Pardon me.... a bad habit. Because they have taken mine is no reason why I should take yours. Besides, I have a chronometer here that satisfies me fairly well."

He took from the drawer a large gold watch and heavy chain.

"From whose pocket did that come?" asked Ganimard.

Arsène Lupin gave a hasty glance at the initials engraved on the watch.

"J.B....Who the devil can that be?...Ah! yes, I remember. Jules Bouvier, the judge who conducted my examination. A charming fellow!...."

“One hundred thousand balls?” said Ganimard.

“Yes, one hundred thousand francs. Very little, but then, you know, these are hard times....And I have some heavy bills to meet. If you only knew my budget.... living in the city comes very high.”

Ganimard arose. His ill humor had disappeared. He reflected for a moment, glancing over the whole affair in an effort to discover a weak point; then, in a tone and manner that betrayed his admiration of the prisoner, he said:

“Fortunately, we do not have a dozen such as you to deal with; if we did, we would have to close up shop.”

Arsène Lupin assumed a modest air, as he replied:

“Bah! a person must have some diversion to occupy his leisure hours, especially when he is in prison.”

“What!” exclaimed Ganimard, “your trial, your defense, the examination—isn’t that sufficient to occupy your mind?”

“No, because I have decided not to be present at my trial.”

“Oh! oh!”

Arsène Lupin repeated, positively:

“I shall not be present at my trial.”

“Really!”

“Ah! my dear monsieur, do you suppose I am going to rot upon the wet straw? You insult me. Arsène Lupin remains in prison just as long as it pleases him, and not one minute more.”

“Perhaps it would have been more prudent if you had avoided getting there,” said the detective, ironically.

“Ah! monsieur jests? Monsieur must remember that he had the honor to effect my arrest. Know then, my worthy friend, that no one, not even you, could have placed a hand upon me if a much more important event had not occupied my attention at that critical moment.”

“You astonish me.”

“A woman was looking at me, Ganimard, and I loved her. Do you

official of his own district, and feeling unable to defend himself with his own resources, he was on the point of going to Paris to engage the services of a detective.

Two days passed; on the third day, he was filled with hope and joy as he read the following item in the ‘Réveil de Caudebec’, a newspaper published in a neighboring town:

“We have the pleasure of entertaining in our city, at the present time, the veteran detective Mon. Ganimard who acquired a world-wide reputation by his clever capture of Arsène Lupin. He has come here for rest and recreation, and, being an enthusiastic fisherman, he threatens to capture all the fish in our river.”

Ganimard! Ah, here is the assistance desired by Baron Cahorn! Who could baffle the schemes of Arsène Lupin better than Ganimard, the patient and astute detective? He was the man for the place.

The baron did not hesitate. The town of Caudebec was only six kilometers from the castle, a short distance to a man whose step was accelerated by the hope of safety.

After several fruitless attempts to ascertain the detective’s address, the baron visited the office of the ‘Réveil,’ situated on the quai. There he found the writer of the article who, approaching the window, exclaimed:

“Ganimard? Why, you are sure to see him somewhere on the quai with his fishing-pole. I met him there and chanced to read his name engraved on his rod. Ah, there he is now, under the trees.”

“That little man, wearing a straw hat?”

“Exactly. He is a gruff fellow, with little to say.”

Five minutes later, the baron approached the celebrated Ganimard, introduced himself, and sought to commence a conversation, but that was a failure. Then he broached the real object of his interview, and briefly stated his case. The other listened, motionless, with his attention riveted on his fishing-rod. When the baron had finished his

story, the fisherman turned, with an air of profound pity, and said:

“Monsieur, it is not customary for thieves to warn people they are about to rob. Arsène Lupin, especially, would not commit such a folly.”

“But—-”

“Monsieur, if I had the least doubt, believe me, the pleasure of again capturing Arsène Lupin would place me at your disposal. But, unfortunately, that young man is already under lock and key.”

“He may have escaped.”

“No one ever escaped from the Santé.”

“But, he—-”

“He, no more than any other.”

“Yet—-”

“Well, if he escapes, so much the better. I will catch him again. Meanwhile, you go home and sleep soundly. That will do for the present. You frighten the fish.”

The conversation was ended. The baron returned to the castle, reassured to some extent by Ganimard’s indifference. He examined the bolts, watched the servants, and, during the next forty-eight hours, he became almost persuaded that his fears were groundless. Certainly, as Ganimard had said, thieves do not warn people they are about to rob.

The fateful day was close at hand. It was now the twenty-sixth of September and nothing had happened. But at three o’clock the bell rang. A boy brought this telegram:

“No goods at Batignolles station. Prepare everything for tomorrow night. Arsène.”

This telegram threw the baron into such a state of excitement that he even considered the advisability of yielding to Lupin’s demands.

However, he hastened to Caudebec. Ganimard was fishing at the same place, seated on a campstool. Without a word, he handed him the telegram.

“Well, what of it?” said the detective.

a prison guard gave Ganimard an opportunity to recover himself. The man brought Arsène Lupin’s luncheon, furnished by a neighboring restaurant. After depositing the tray upon the table, the guard retired. Lupin broke his bread, ate a few morsels, and continued:

“But, rest easy, my dear Ganimard, you will not go to Malaquis. I can tell you something that will astonish you: the Cahorn affair is on the point of being settled.”

“Excuse me; I have just seen the Chief of the Sureté.”

“What of that? Does Mon. Dudouis know my business better than I do myself? You will learn that Ganimard—excuse me—that the pseudo-Ganimard still remains on very good terms with the baron. The latter has authorized him to negotiate a very delicate transaction with me, and, at the present moment, in consideration of a certain sum, it is probable that the baron has recovered possession of his pictures and other treasures. And on their return, he will withdraw his complaint. Thus, there is no longer any theft, and the law must abandon the case.”

Ganimard regarded the prisoner with a bewildered air.

“And how do you know all that?”

“I have just received the telegram I was expecting.”

“You have just received a telegram?”

“This very moment, my dear friend. Out of politeness, I did not wish to read it in your presence. But if you will permit me—-”

“You are joking, Lupin.”

“My dear friend, if you will be so kind as to break that egg, you will learn for yourself that I am not joking.”

Mechanically, Ganimard obeyed, and cracked the egg-shell with the blade of a knife. He uttered a cry of surprise. The shell contained nothing but a small piece of blue paper. At the request of Arsène he unfolded it. It was a telegram, or rather a portion of a telegram from which the post-marks had been removed. It read as follows:

“Contract closed. Hundred thousand balls delivered. All well.”

that such person is the celebrated detective—then, what will happen?”

“The editor will announce in the ‘Réveil’ the presence in Caudebec of said detective.”

“Exactly; and one of two things will happen: either the fish—I mean Cahorn—will not bite, and nothing will happen; or, what is more likely, he will run and greedily swallow the bait. Thus, behold my Baron Cahorn imploring the assistance of one of my friends against me.”

“Original, indeed!”

“Of course, the pseudo-detective at first refuses to give any assistance. On top of that comes the telegram from Arsène Lupin. The frightened baron rushes once more to my friend and offers him a definite sum of money for his services. My friend accepts and summons two members of our band, who, during the night, whilst Cahorn is under the watchful eye of his protector, removes certain articles by way of the window and lowers them with ropes into a nice little launch chartered for the occasion. Simple, isn’t it?”

“Marvelous! Marvelous!” exclaimed Ganimard. “The boldness of the scheme and the ingenuity of all its details are beyond criticism. But who is the detective whose name and fame served as a magnet to attract the baron and draw him into your net?”

“There is only one name could do it—only one.”

“And that is?”

“Arsène Lupin’s personal enemy—the most illustrious Ganimard.”

“I?”

“Yourself, Ganimard. And, really, it is very funny. If you go there, and the baron decides to talk, you will find that it will be your duty to arrest yourself, just as you arrested me in America. Hein! the revenge is really amusing: I cause Ganimard to arrest Ganimard.”

Arsène Lupin laughed heartily. The detective, greatly vexed, bit his lips; to him the joke was quite devoid of humor. The arrival of

“What of it? But it is tomorrow.”

“What is tomorrow?”

“The robbery! The pillage of my collections!”

Ganimard laid down his fishing-rod, turned to the baron, and exclaimed, in a tone of impatience:

“Ah! Do you think I am going to bother myself about such a silly story as that!”

“How much do you ask to pass tomorrow night in the castle?”

“Not a sou. Now, leave me alone.”

“Name your own price. I am rich and can pay it.”

This offer disconcerted Ganimard, who replied, calmly:

“I am here on a vacation. I have no right to undertake such work.”

“No one will know. I promise to keep it secret.”

“Oh! nothing will happen.”

“Come! three thousand francs. Will that be enough?”

The detective, after a moment’s reflection, said:

“Very well. But I must warn you that you are throwing your money out of the window.”

“I do not care.”

“In that case... but, after all, what do we know about this devil Lupin! He may have quite a numerous band of robbers with him. Are you sure of your servants?”

“My faith—”

“Better not count on them. I will telegraph for two of my men to help me. And now, go! It is better for us not to be seen together. Tomorrow evening about nine o’clock.”

The following day—the date fixed by Arsène Lupin—Baron Cahorn arranged all his panoply of war, furbished his weapons, and, like a sentinel, paced to and fro in front of the castle. He saw nothing,

heard nothing. At half-past eight o'clock in the evening, he dismissed his servants. They occupied rooms in a wing of the building, in a retired spot, well removed from the main portion of the castle. Shortly thereafter, the baron heard the sound of approaching footsteps. It was Ganimard and his two assistants—great, powerful fellows with immense hands, and necks like bulls. After asking a few questions relating to the location of the various entrances and rooms, Ganimard carefully closed and barricaded all the doors and windows through which one could gain access to the threatened rooms. He inspected the walls, raised the tapestries, and finally installed his assistants in the central gallery which was located between the two salons.

“No nonsense! We are not here to sleep. At the slightest sound, open the windows of the court and call me. Pay attention also to the water-side. Ten metres of perpendicular rock is no obstacle to those devils.”

Ganimard locked his assistants in the gallery, carried away the keys, and said to the baron:

“And now, to our post.”

He had chosen for himself a small room located in the thick outer wall, between the two principal doors, and which, in former years, had been the watchman's quarters. A peep-hole opened upon the bridge; another on the court. In one corner, there was an opening to a tunnel.

“I believe you told me, Monsieur le Baron, that this tunnel is the only subterranean entrance to the castle and that it has been closed up for time immemorial?”

“Yes.”

“Then, unless there is some other entrance, known only to Arsène Lupin, we are quite safe.”

He placed three chairs together, stretched himself upon them, lighted his pipe and sighed:

“Really, Monsieur le Baron, I feel ashamed to accept your money

Malaquis castle. Are you willing?”

“Yes, proceed.”

“Well, let us suppose a castle carefully closed and barricaded like that of the Baron Cahorn. Am I to abandon my scheme and renounce the treasures that I covet, upon the pretext that the castle which holds them is inaccessible?”

“Evidently not.”

“Should I make an assault upon the castle at the head of a band of adventurers as they did in ancient times?”

“That would be foolish.”

“Can I gain admittance by stealth or cunning?”

“Impossible.”

“Then there is only one way open to me. I must have the owner of the castle invite me to it.”

“That is surely an original method.”

“And how easy! Let us suppose that one day the owner receives a letter warning him that a notorious burglar known as Arsène Lupin is plotting to rob him. What will he do?”

“Send a letter to the Procureur.”

“Who will laugh at him, \*because the said Arsène Lupin is actually in prison.\* Then, in his anxiety and fear, the simple man will ask the assistance of the first-comer, will he not?”

“Very likely.”

“And if he happens to read in a country newspaper that a celebrated detective is spending his vacation in a neighboring town—”

“He will seek that detective.”

“Of course. But, on the other hand, let us presume that, having foreseen that state of affairs, the said Arsène Lupin has requested one of his friends to visit Caudebec, make the acquaintance of the editor of the ‘Réveil,’ a newspaper to which the baron is a subscriber, and let said editor understand



“From A to Z.”

“The letter of warning? the telegram?”

“All mine. I ought to have the receipts somewhere.”

Arsène opened the drawer of a small table of plain white wood which, with the bed and stool, constituted all the furniture in his cell, and took therefrom two scraps of paper which he handed to Ganimard.

“Ah!” exclaimed the detective, in surprise, “I though you were closely guarded and searched, and I find that you read the newspapers and collect postal receipts.”

“Bah! these people are so stupid! They open the lining of my vest, they examine the soles of my shoes, they sound the walls of my cell, but they never imagine that Arsène Lupin would be foolish enough to choose such a simple hiding place.”

Ganimard laughed, as he said:

“What a droll fellow you are! Really, you bewilder me. But, come now, tell me about the Cahorn affair.”

“Oh! oh! not quite so fast! You would rob me of all my secrets; expose all my little tricks. That is a very serious matter.”

“Was I wrong to count on your complaisance?”

“No, Ganimard, and since you insist—-”

Arsène Lupin paced his cell two or three times, then, stopping before Ganimard, he asked:

“What do you think of my letter to the baron?”

“I think you were amusing yourself by playing to the gallery.”

“Ah! playing to the gallery! Come, Ganimard, I thought you knew me better. Do I, Arsène Lupin, ever waste my time on such puerilities? Would I have written that letter if I could have robbed the baron without writing to him? I want you to understand that the letter was indispensable; it was the motor that set the whole machine in motion. Now, let us discuss together a scheme for the robbery of the

for such a sinecure as this. I will tell the story to my friend Lupin. He will enjoy it immensely.”

The baron did not laugh. He was anxiously listening, but heard nothing save the beating of his own heart. From time to time, he leaned over the tunnel and cast a fearful eye into its depths. He heard the clock strike eleven, twelve, one.

Suddenly, he seized Ganimard’s arm. The latter leaped up, awakened from his sleep.

“Do you hear?” asked the baron, in a whisper.

“Yes.”

“What is it?”

“I was snoring, I suppose.”

“No, no, listen.”

“Ah! yes, it is the horn of an automobile.”

“Well?”

“Well! it is very improbable that Lupin would use an automobile like a battering-ram to demolish your castle. Come, Monsieur le Baron, return to your post. I am going to sleep. Good-night.”

That was the only alarm. Ganimard resumed his interrupted slumbers, and the baron heard nothing except the regular snoring of his companion. At break of day, they left the room. The castle was enveloped in a profound calm; it was a peaceful dawn on the bosom of a tranquil river. They mounted the stairs, Cahorn radiant with joy, Ganimard calm as usual. They heard no sound; they saw nothing to arouse suspicion.

“What did I tell you, Monsieur le Baron? Really, I should not have accepted your offer. I am ashamed.”

He unlocked the door and entered the gallery. Upon two chairs, with drooping heads and pendent arms, the detective’s two assistants were asleep.

“Tonnerre de nom d’un chien!” exclaimed Ganimard. At the same moment, the baron cried out:

“The pictures! The credence!”

He stammered, choked, with arms outstretched toward the empty places, toward the denuded walls where naught remained but the useless nails and cords. The Watteau, disappeared! The Rubens, carried away! The tapestries taken down! The cabinets, despoiled of their jewels!

“And my Louis XVI candelabra! And the Regent chandelier!... And my twelfth-century Virgin!”

He ran from one spot to another in wildest despair. He recalled the purchase price of each article, added up the figures, counted his losses, pell-mell, in confused words and unfinished phrases. He stamped with rage; he groaned with grief. He acted like a ruined man whose only hope is suicide.

If anything could have consoled him, it would have been the stupefaction displayed by Ganimard. The famous detective did not move. He appeared to be petrified; he examined the room in a listless manner. The windows?... closed. The locks on the doors?... intact. Not a break in the ceiling; not a hole in the floor. Everything was in perfect order. The theft had been carried out methodically, according to a logical and inexorable plan.

“Arsène Lupin....Arsène Lupin,” he muttered.

Suddenly, as if moved by anger, he rushed upon his two assistants and shook them violently. They did not awaken.

“The devil!” he cried. “Can it be possible?”

He leaned over them and, in turn, examined them closely. They were asleep; but their response was unnatural.

“They have been drugged,” he said to the baron.

“By whom?”

“By him, of course, or his men under his discretion. That work bears his stamp.”

hard stool. And no refreshments! Not even a glass of beer! Of course, you will excuse me, as I am here only temporarily.”

Ganimard smiled, and accepted the proffered seat. Then the prisoner continued:

“Mon Dieu, how pleased I am to see the face of an honest man. I am so tired of those devils of spies who come here ten times a day to ransack my pockets and my cell to satisfy themselves that I am not preparing to escape. The government is very solicitous on my account.”

“It is quite right.”

“Why so? I should be quite contented if they would allow me to live in my own quiet way.”

“On other people’s money.”

“Quite so. That would be so simple. But here, I am joking, and you are, no doubt, in a hurry. So let us come to business, Ganimard. To what do I owe the honor of this visit?”

“The Cahorn affair,” declared Ganimard, frankly.

“Ah! Wait, one moment. You see I have had so many affairs! First, let me fix in my mind the circumstances of this particular case....Ah! yes, now I have it. The Cahorn affair, Malaquis castle, Seine-Inférieure.... Two Rubens, a Watteau, and a few trifling articles.”

“Trifling!”

“Oh! ma foi, all that is of slight importance. But it suffices to know that the affair interests you. How can I serve you, Ganimard?”

“Must I explain to you what steps the authorities have taken in the matter?”

“Not at all. I have read the newspapers and I will frankly state that you have made very little progress.”

“And that is the reason I have come to see you.”

“I am entirely at your service.”

“In the first place, the Cahorn affair was managed by you?”

he must have fetters on his feet, manacles on his wrists, and gag in his mouth before I change my opinion.”

“Why so obstinate, Ganimard?”

“Because Arsène Lupin is the only man in France of sufficient calibre to invent and carry out a scheme of that magnitude.”

“Mere words, Ganimard.”

“But true ones. Look! What are they doing? Searching for subterranean passages, stones swinging on pivots, and other nonsense of that kind. But Lupin doesn’t employ such old-fashioned methods. He is a modern cracksman, right up to date.”

“And how would you proceed?”

“I should ask your permission to spend an hour with him.”

“In his cell?”

“Yes. During the return trip from America we became very friendly, and I venture to say that if he can give me any information without compromising himself he will not hesitate to save me from incurring useless trouble.”

It was shortly after noon when Ganimard entered the cell of Arsène Lupin. The latter, who was lying on his bed, raised his head and uttered a cry of apparent joy.

“Ah! This is a real surprise. My dear Ganimard, here!”

“Ganimard himself.”

“In my chosen retreat, I have felt a desire for many things, but my fondest wish was to receive you here.”

“Very kind of you, I am sure.”

“Not at all. You know I hold you in the highest regard.”

“I am proud of it.”

“I have always said: Ganimard is our best detective. He is almost,—you see how candid I am!—he is almost as clever as Sherlock Holmes. But I am sorry that I cannot offer you anything better than this

“In that case, I am lost—nothing can be done.”

“Nothing,” assented Ganimard.

“It is dreadful; it is monstrous.”

“Lodge a complaint.”

“What good will that do?”

“Oh; it is well to try it. The law has some resources.”

“The law! Bah! it is useless. You represent the law, and, at this moment, when you should be looking for a clue and trying to discover something, you do not even stir.”

“Discover something with Arsène Lupin! Why, my dear monsieur, Arsène Lupin never leaves any clue behind him. He leaves nothing to chance. Sometimes I think he put himself in my way and simply allowed me to arrest him in America.”

“Then, I must renounce my pictures! He has taken the gems of my collection. I would give a fortune to recover them. If there is no other way, let him name his own price.”

Ganimard regarded the baron attentively, as he said:

“Now, that is sensible. Will you stick to it?”

“Yes, yes. But why?”

“An idea that I have.”

“What is it?”

“We will discuss it later—if the official examination does not succeed. But, not one word about me, if you wish my assistance.”

He added, between his teeth:

“It is true I have nothing to boast of in this affair.”

The assistants were gradually regaining consciousness with the bewildered air of people who come out of an hypnotic sleep. They opened their eyes and looked about them in astonishment. Ganimard questioned them; they remembered nothing.

“But you must have seen some one?”

“No.”

“Can’t you remember?”

“No, no.”

“Did you drink anything?”

They considered a moment, and then one of them replied:

“Yes, I drank a little water.”

“Out of that carafe?”

“Yes.”

“So did I,” declared the other.

Ganimard smelled and tasted it. It had no particular taste and no odor.

“Come,” he said, “we are wasting our time here. One can’t decide an Arsène Lupin problem in five minutes. But, morbleu! I swear I will catch him again.”

The same day, a charge of burglary was duly performed by Baron Cahorn against Arsène Lupin, a prisoner in the Prison de la Santé.

The baron afterwards regretted making the charge against Lupin when he saw his castle delivered over to the gendarmes, the procureur, the judge d’instruction, the newspaper reporters and photographers, and a throng of idle curiosity-seekers.

The affair soon became a topic of general discussion, and the name of Arsène Lupin excited the public imagination to such an extent that the newspapers filled their columns with the most fantastic stories of his exploits which found ready credence amongst their readers.

But the letter of Arsène Lupin that was published in the ‘Echo de France’ (no one ever knew how the newspaper obtained it), that letter in which Baron Cahorn was impudently warned of the coming theft, caused considerable excitement. The most fabulous theories were advanced. Some recalled the existence of the famous subterranean

tunnels, and that was the line of research pursued by the officers of the law, who searched the house from top to bottom, questioned every stone, studied the wainscoting and the chimneys, the window-frames and the girders in the ceilings. By the light of torches, they examined the immense cellars where the lords of Malaquis were wont to store their munitions and provisions. They sounded the rocky foundation to its very centre. But it was all in vain. They discovered no trace of a subterranean tunnel. No secret passage existed.

But the eager public declared that the pictures and furniture could not vanish like so many ghosts. They are substantial, material things and require doors and windows for their exits and their entrances, and so do the people that remove them. Who were those people? How did they gain access to the castle? And how did they leave it?

The police officers of Rouen, convinced of their own impotence, solicited the assistance of the Parisian detective force. Mon. Dudouis, chief of the Sûreté, sent the best sleuths of the iron brigade. He himself spent forty-eight hours at the castle, but met with no success. Then he sent for Ganimard, whose past services had proved so useful when all else failed.

Ganimard listened, in silence, to the instructions of his superior; then, shaking his head, he said:

“In my opinion, it is useless to ransack the castle. The solution of the problem lies elsewhere.”

“Where, then?”

“With Arsène Lupin.”

“With Arsène Lupin! To support that theory, we must admit his intervention.”

“I do admit it. In fact, I consider it quite certain.”

“Come, Ganimard, that is absurd. Arsène Lupin is in prison.”

“I grant you that Arsène Lupin is in prison, closely guarded; but