Arsene Lupin in Prison

Maurice Leblanc

Table of Contents

Arsene Lupin in Prison

Maurice Leblanc

EVERY tripper by the banks of the Seine must have noticed, between the ruins of Jumieges and those of Saint−Wandrille, the curious little feudal castle of the Malaquis, proudly seated on its rock in mid−stream. A bridge connects it with the road. The base of its turrets seems to make one with the granite that supports it, a huge block detached from a mountain−top and flung where it stands by some formidable convulsion of nature. All around, the calm water of the broad river ripples among the reeds, while wagtails perch timidly on the top of the moist pebbles.

The history of the Malaquis is as rough as its name, as harsh as its outlines, and consists of endless fights, sieges, assaults, sacks and massacres. Stories are told in the Caux country, late at night, with a shiver, of the crimes committed there. Mysterious legends are conjured up. There is talk of a famous underground passage that led to the Abbey of Jumieges and to the manor−house of Agnes Sorel, the favourite of Charles VII.

This erstwhile haunt of heroes and robbers is now occupied by Baron Nathan Cahorn, or Baron Satan as he used to be called on the Bourse, where he made his fortune a little too suddenly. The ruined owners of the Malaquis were compelled to sell the abode of their ancestors to him for a song. Here he installed his wonderful collections of pictures and furniture, of pottery and carvings. He lives here alone, with three old servants. No one ever enters the doors. No one has ever beheld, in the setting of those ancient halls, his three Rubens, his two Watteaus, his pulpit carved by Jean Goujon and all the other marvels snatched by force of money from before the eyes of the wealthiest frequenters of the public sale−rooms.

Baron Satan leads a life of fear. He is afraid not for himself, but for the treasures which he has accumulated with so tenacious a passion and with the perspicacity of a collector whom not the most cunning of dealers can boast of having ever taken in. He loves his curiosities with all the greed of a miser, with all the jealousy of a lover.

Daily, at sunset, the four iron−barred doors that command both ends of the bridge and the entrance to the principal court are locked and bolted. At the least touch, electric bells would ring through the surrounding silence. There is nothing to be feared on the side of the Seine, where the rock rises sheer from the water.

One Friday in September, the postman appeared as usual at the bridge−head. And, in accordance with his daily rule, the baron himself opened the heavy door.

He examined the man as closely as if he had not for years known that good jolly face and those crafty peasant eyes. And the man said, with a laugh:

"It's me all right, monsieur le baron. It's not another chap in my cap and blouse!"

"One never knows!" muttered Cahorn.

The postman handed him a bundle of newspapers. Then he added:

"And now, monsieur le baron, I have something special for you."

"Something special? What do you mean?"

"A letter... and a registered letter at that!"

Living cut off from everybody, with no friends nor any one that took an interest in him, the baron never received letters; and this suddenly struck him as an ill−omened event which gave him good cause for nervousness. Who was the mysterious correspondent that came to worry him in his retreat?

"I shall want your signature, monsieur le baron."

He signed the receipt, cursing as he did so. Then he took the letter, waited until the postman had disappeared round the turn of the road and, after taking a few steps to and fro, leaned against the parapet of the bridge and opened the envelope. It contained a sheet of ruled paper, headed, in writing:

"Prison de la Sante, Paris."

He looked at the signature:

"ARSENE LUPIN."

Utterly dumbfounded, he read:

MONSIEUR LE BARON, In the gallery that connects your two drawing−rooms there is a picture by Philippe de Champaigne, an excellent piece of work, which I admire greatly. I also like your Rubens pictures and the smaller of your two Watteaus. In the drawing−room on the right, I note the Louis XIII credence−table, the Beauvais tapestries, the Empire stand, signed by Jacob, and the Renascence chest. In the room on the left, the whole of the case of trinkets and miniatures.

This time, I will be satisfied with these objects, which, I think, can be easily turned into cash. I will therefore ask you to have them properly packed and to send them to my name, carriage paid, to the Gare de Batignolles, on or before this day week, failing which I will myself see to their removal on the night of Wednesday the 27th instant. In the latter case, as is only fair, I shall not be content with the above−mentioned objects.

Pray excuse the trouble which I am giving you, and believe me to be

Yours very truly,

ARSENE LUPIN

P.S. Be sure not to send me the larger of the two Watteaus. Although you paid thirty thousand francs for it at the sale−rooms, it is only a copy, the original having been burnt under the Directory, by Barras, in one of his orgies. See Garat's unpublished Memoirs.

I do not care either to have the Louis XVI chatelaine, the authenticity of which appears to me to be exceedingly doubtful.

This letter thoroughly upset Baron Cahorn. It would have alarmed him considerably had it been signed by any other hand. But signed by Arsene Lupin! ...

He was a regular reader of the newspapers, knew of everything that went on in the way of theft and crime and had heard all about the exploits of the infernal house−breaker. He was quite aware that Lupin had been arrested in

America by his enemy, Ganimard; that he was safely under lock and key; and that the preliminaries of his trial were now being conducted... with great difficulty, no doubt! But he also knew that one could always expect anything of Arsene Lupin. Besides, this precise knowledge of the castle, of the arrangement of the pictures and furniture, was a very formidable sign. Who had informed Lupin of things which nobody had ever seen?

The baron raised his eyes and gazed at the frowning outline of the Malaquis, its abrupt pedestal, the deep water that surrounds it. He shrugged his shoulders. No, there was no possible danger. No one in the world could penetrate to the inviolable sanctuary that contained his collections.

No one in the world, perhaps; but Arsene Lupin? Did doors, draw−bridges, walls so much as exist for Arsene Lupin? Of what use were the most ingeniously contrived obstacles, the most skilful precautions, once that Arsene Lupin had decided to attain a given object? ...

That same evening, he wrote to the public prosecutor at Rouen. He enclosed the threatening letter and demanded police protection.

The reply came without delay: the said Arsene Lupin was at that moment a prisoner at the Sante, where he was kept under strict observation and not allowed to write. The letter, therefore, could only be the work of a hoaxer. Everything went to prove this: logic, common sense and the actual facts. However, to make quite sure, the letter had been submitted to a handwriting expert, who declared that, notwithstanding certain points of resemblance, it was not in the prisoner's writing.

"Notwithstanding certain points of resemblance." The baron saw only these five bewildering words, which he regarded as the confession of a doubt which alone should have been enough to justify the intervention of the police. His fears increased. He read the letter over and over again. "I will myself see to their removal." And that fixed date, the night of Wednesday the 27th of September!

Of a naturally suspicious and silent disposition, he dared not unburden himself to his servants, whose devotion he did not consider proof against all tests. And yet, for the first time for many years, he felt a need to speak, to take advice. Abandoned by the police of his country, he had no hope of protecting himself by his own resources and thought of going to Paris to beg for the assistance of some retired detective or other.

Two days elapsed. On the third day, as he sat reading his newspapers, he gave a start of delight. The Reveil de Caudebec contained the following paragraph:

"We have had the pleasure of numbering among our visitors, for nearly three weeks, Chief−Inspector Ganimard, one of the veterans of the detective service. M. Ganimard, for whom his last feat, the arrest of Arsene Lupin, has won a European reputation, is enjoying a rest from his arduous labours and spending a short holiday fishing for bleak and gudgeon in the Seine."

Ganimard! The very man that Baron Cahorn wanted! Who could baffle Lupin's plans better than the cunning and patient Ganimard?

The baron lost no time. It is a four−mile walk from the castle to the little town of Caudebec. He did the distance with a quick and joyous step, stimulated by the hope of safety.

After many fruitless endeavours to discover the chief−inspector's address, he went to the office of the Reveil, which is on the quay. He found the writer of the paragraph, who, going to the window, said:

"Ganimard! Why, you're sure to meet him, rod in hand, on the quay. That's where I picked up with him and read his name, by accident, on his fishing−rod. Look, there he is, the little old man in the frock−coat and a straw hat,

under the trees."

"A frock−coat and a straw hat?"

"Yes. He's a queer specimen, close−tongued and a trifle testy."

Five minutes later, the baron accosted the famous Ganimard, introduced himself and made an attempt to enter into conversation. Failing in this, he broached the question quite frankly and laid his case before him.

The other listened, without moving a muscle or taking his eyes from the water. Then he turned his head to the Baron, eyed him from head to foot with a look of profound compassion and said:

"Sir, it is not usual for criminals to warn the people whom they mean to rob. Arsene Lupin, in particular, never indulges in that sort of bounce."

"Still... "

"Sir, if I had the smallest doubt, believe me, the pleasure of once more locking up that dear Lupin would outweigh every consideration. Unfortunately, the youth is already in prison."

"Suppose he escapes?"

"People don't escape from the Sante."

"But Lupin... "

"Lupin no more than another."

"Still... "

"Very well, if he does escape, so much the better; I'll nab him again. Meanwhile, you can sleep soundly and stop frightening my fish."

The conversation was ended. The baron returned home feeling more or less reassured by Ganimard's indifference. He saw to his bolts, kept a watch upon his servants and another forty−eight hours passed, during which he almost succeeded in persuading himself that, after all, his fears were groundless. There was no doubt about it: as Ganimard had said, criminals don't warn the people whom they mean to rob.

The date was drawing near. On the morning of Tuesday the twenty−sixth, nothing particular happened. But, at three o'clock in the afternoon, a boy rang and handed in this telegram:

"No goods Batignolles. Get everything ready for to−morrow night.

ARSENE."

Once again, Cahorn lost his head, so much so that he asked himself whether he would not do better to yield to Arsene Lupin's demands.

He hurried off to Caudebec. Ganimard was seated on a camp−stool, fishing, in the same spot as before. The baron handed him the telegram without a word.

"Well?" said the detective.

"Well what? It's fixed for to−morrow!"

"What is?"

"The burglary! The theft of my collections!"

Ganimard turned to him, and, folding his arms across his chest, cried, in a tone of impatience:

"Why, you don't really mean to say that you think I'm going to trouble myself about this stupid business?"

"What fee will you take to spend Wednesday night at the castle?"

"Not a penny. Don't bother me!"

"Name your own price. I'm a rich man, a very rich man."

The brutality of the offer took Ganimard aback. He replied, more calmly:

"I am here on leave and I have no right to...."

"No one shall know. I undertake to be silent, whatever happens!"

"Oh, nothing will happen!"

"Well, look here; is three thousand francs enough?"

The inspector took a pinch of snuff, reflected and said:

"Very well. But it's only fair to tell you that you are throwing your money away."

"I don't mind."

"In that case.... And besides, after all, one can never tell, with that devil of a Lupin! He must have a whole gang at his orders.... Are you sure of your servants?"

"Well, I...."

"Then we must not rely upon them. I'll wire to two of my own men; that will make us feel safer.... And, now, leave me; we must not be seen together. To−morrow evening, at nine o'clock."

On the morning of the next day, the date fixed by Arsene Lupin, Baron Cahorn took down his trophy of arms, polished up his pistols and made a thorough inspection of the Malaquis, without discovering anything suspicious.

At half−past eight in the evening, he dismissed his servants for the night. They slept in a wing facing the road, but set a little way back and right at the end of the castle. As soon as he was alone, he softly opened the four doors. In a little while, he heard footsteps approaching.

Ganimard introduced his assistants, two powerfully−built fellows, with bull necks and huge, strong hands, and asked for certain explanations. After ascertaining the disposition of the place, he carefully closed and barricaded

every issue by which the threatened rooms could be entered. He examined the walls, lifted up the tapestries and finally installed his detectives in the central gallery

"No nonsense, do you understand? You're not here to sleep. At the least sound, open the windows on the court and call me. Keep a look−out also on the water side. Thirty feet of steep cliff doesn't frighten scoundrels of that stamp."

He locked them in, took away the keys and said to the baron:

"And now to our post."

He had selected, as the best place in which to spend the night, a small room contrived in the thickness of the outer walls, between the two main doors. It had at one time been the watchman's lodge. A spy−hole opened upon the bridge, another upon the court. In one corner was what looked like the mouth of a well.

"You told me, did you not, monsieur l baron, that this well is the only entrance to the underground passage and that it has been stopped up since the memory of man?"

"Yes."

"Therefore, unless there should happen to be another outlet, unknown to any but Arsene Lupin, which seems pretty unlikely, we can be easy in our minds."

He placed three chairs in a row, settled himself comfortably at full length, lit his pipe and sighed:

"Upon my word, monsieur le baron, I must be very eager to build an additional storey to the little house in which I mean to end my days, to accept so elementary a job as this. I shall tell the story to our friend Lupin; he'll split his sides with laughter."

The baron did not laugh. With ears pricked up, he questioned the silence with ever−growing restlessness. From time to time, he leaned over the well and plunged an anxious eye into the yawning cavity.

The clock struck eleven; midnight; one o'clock.

Suddenly, he seized the arm of Ganimard, who woke with a start:

"Do you hear that?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"It's myself, snoring!"

"No, no, listen...."

"Oh yes, it's a motor−horn."

"Well?"

"Well, it's as unlikely that Lupin should come by motor−car as that he should use a battering−ram to demolish your castle. So I should go to sleep, if I were you, monsieur l baron... as I shall have the honour of doing once more. Good−night!"

This was the only alarm. Ganimard resumed his interrupted slumbers; and the baron heard nothing save his loud and regular snoring.

At break of day, they left their cell. A great calm peace, the peace of the morning by the cool waterside, reigned over the castle. Cahorn, beaming with joy, and Ganimard, placid as ever, climbed the staircase. Not a sound. Nothing suspicious.

"What did I tell you, monsieur l baron? I really ought not to have accepted... I feel ashamed of myself.... "

He took the keys and entered the gallery.

On two chairs, with bent bodies and hanging arms, sat the two detectives, fast asleep.

"What, in the name of all the... " growled the inspector.

At the same moment, the baron uttered a cry:

"The pictures!... The credence−table!"

He stammered and spluttered, with his hand out−stretched towards the dismantled walls, with their bare nails and slack cords. The Watteau and the two Rubens had disappeared! The tapestries had been removed, the glass cases emptied of their trinkets!

"And my Louis XVI sconces!... And the Regency chandelier!... And my twelfth−century Virgin!... "

He ran from place to place, maddened, in despair. Distraught with rage and grief, he quoted the purchase−prices, added up his losses, piled up figures, all promiscuously, in indistinct words and incomplete phrases. He stamped his feet, flung himself about and, in short, behaved like a ruined man who had nothing before him but suicide.

If anything could have consoled him, it would have been the sight of Ganimard's stupefaction. Contrary to the baron, the inspector did not move. He seemed petrified, and with a dazed eye, examined things. The windows? They were fastened. The locks of the doors? Untouched. There was not a crack in the ceiling, not a hole in the floor. Everything was in perfect order. The whole thing must have been carried out methodically, after an inexorable and logical plan.

"Arsene Lupin... Arsene Lupin," he muttered, giving way.

Suddenly, he leapt upon the two detectives, as though at last overcome with rage, and shook them and swore at them furiously. They did not wake up!

"The deuce!" he said. "Can they have been...?"

He bent over them and scrutinised them closely, one after the other: they were both asleep, but their sleep was not natural. He said to the baron:

"They have been drugged."

"But by whom?"

"By him, of course... or by his gang, acting under his instructions. It's a trick in his own manner. I recognize his touch."

"In that case, I am undone: the thing is hopeless."

"Hopeless."

"But this is abominable; it's monstrous."

"Lodge an information."

"It's myself, snoring!"

"No, no, listen...."

"Oh yes, it's a motor−horn."

"Well?"

"Well, it's as unlikely that Lupin should come by motor−car as that he should use a battering−ram to demolish your castle. So I should go to sleep, if I were you, monsieur l baron... as I shall have the honour of doing once more. Good−night!"

This was the only alarm. Ganimard resumed his interrupted slumbers; and the baron heard nothing save his loud and regular snoring.

At break of day, they left their cell. A great calm peace, the peace of the morning by the cool waterside, reigned over the castle. Cahorn, beaming with joy, and Ganimard, placid as ever, climbed the staircase. Not a sound. Nothing suspicious.

"What did I tell you, monsieur l baron? I really ought not to have accepted... I feel ashamed of myself.... "

He took the keys and entered the gallery.

On two chairs, with bent bodies and hanging arms, sat the two detectives, fast asleep.

"What, in the name of all the... " growled the inspector.

At the same moment, the baron uttered a cry:

"The pictures!... The credence−table!"

He stammered and spluttered, with his hand out−stretched towards the dismantled walls, with their bare nails and slack cords. The Watteau and the two Rubens had disappeared! The tapestries had been removed, the glass cases emptied of their trinkets!

"And my Louis XVI sconces!... And the Regency chandelier!... And my twelfth−century Virgin!... "

He ran from place to place, maddened, in despair. Distraught with rage and grief, he quoted the purchase−prices, added up his losses, piled up figures, all promiscuously, in indistinct words and incomplete phrases. He stamped his feet, flung himself about and, in short, behaved like a ruined man who had nothing before him but suicide.

If anything could have consoled him, it would have been the sight of Ganimard's stupefaction. Contrary to the baron, the inspector did not move. He seemed petrified, and with a dazed eye, examined things. The windows? They were fastened. The locks of the doors? Untouched. There was not a crack in the ceiling, not a hole in the floor. Everything was in perfect order. The whole thing must have been carried out methodically, after an inexorable and logical plan.

"Arsene Lupin... Arsene Lupin," he muttered, giving way.

Suddenly, he leapt upon the two detectives, as though at last overcome with rage, and shook them and swore at them furiously. They did not wake up!

"The deuce!" he said. "Can they have been...?"

He bent over them and scrutinised them closely, one after the other: they were both asleep, but their sleep was not natural. He said to the baron:

"They have been drugged."

"But by whom?"

"By him, of course... or by his gang, acting under his instructions. It's a trick in his own manner. I recognize his touch."

"In that case, I am undone: the thing is hopeless."

"Hopeless."

"But this is abominable; it's monstrous."

"Lodge an information."

"What's the good?"

"Well, you may as well try... the law has its resources...."

"The law! But you can see for yourself... Why, at this very moment, when you might be looking for a clue, discovering something, you're not even stirring!"

"Discover something, with Arsene Lupin! But, my dear sir, Arsene Lupin never leaves anything behind him! There's no chance with Arsene Lupin! I am beginning to wonder whether he got himself arrested by me of his own free will, in America!"

"Then I must give up the hope of recovering my pictures or anything! But he has stolen the pearls of my collection. I would give a fortune to get them back. If there's nothing to be done against him, let him name his price."

Ganimard looked at him steadily:

"That's a sound notion. Do you stick to it?"

"Yes, yes, yes! But why do you ask?"

"I have an idea."

"What idea?"

"We'll talk of it if nothing comes of the enquiry.... Only, not a word about me, to a soul, if you wish me to succeed."

And he added, between his teeth:

"Besides, I have nothing to be proud of."

The two men gradually recovered consciousness, with the stupefied look of men awakening from an hypnotic sleep. They opened astounded eyes, tried to make out what had happened. Ganimard questioned them. They remembered nothing.

"Still you must have seen somebody?"

"No, nobody."

"Try and think?"

"No, nobody."

"Did you have a drink?"

They reflected and one of them replied:

"Yes, I had some water."

"Out of that bottle there?"

"Yes."

"I had some too," said the other.

Ganimard smelt the water, tasted it. It had no particular scent or flavour.

"Come", he said, "we are wasting our time. Problems set by Arsene Lupin can't be solved in five minutes. But, by Jingo, I swear I'll catch him! He's won the second bout. The rubber game to me!"

That day, a charge of aggravated larceny was brought by Baron Cahorn against Arsene Lupin, a prisoner awaiting trial at the Sante.

The baron often regretted having laid his information when he saw the Malaquis made over to the gendarmes, the public prosecutor, the examining magistrate, the newspaper−reporters and all the inquisitive who worm themselves in wherever they have no business to be.

Already the case was filling the public mind. It had taken place under such peculiar conditions and the name of Arsene Lupin excited men's imaginations to such a pitch that the most fantastic stories crowded the columns of the press and found acceptance with the public.

But the original letter of Arsene Lupin, which was published in the Echo de France — and no one ever knew

who had supplied the text — the letter in which Baron Cahorn was insolently warned of what threatened him, caused the greatest excitement. Fabulous explanations were offered forthwith. The old legends were revived. The newspapers reminded their readers of the existence of the famous subterranean passages. And the public prosecutor, influenced by these statements, pursued his search in that direction.

The castle was ransacked from top to bottom. Every stone was examined; the wainscotings and chimneys, the frames of the mirrors and the rafters of the ceilings were carefully inspected. By the light of torches, the searchers investigated the immense cellars in which the lords of the Malaquis had been used to pile up their provisions and munitions of war. They sounded the very bowels of the rock. All to no purpose. They discovered not the slightest trace of a tunnel. No secret passage existed.

Very well, was the answer on every side; but pictures and furniture don't vanish like ghosts. They go out through doors and windows; and the people that take them also go in and out through doors and windows. Who are these people? How did they get in? And how did they get out?

The public prosecutor of Rouen, persuaded of his own incompetence, asked for the assistance of the Paris police. M. Dudouis, the chief of the detective−service, sent the most efficient bloodhounds in his employ. He himself paid a forty−eight hours' visit to the Malaquis, but met with no greater success.

It was after his return that he sent for Chief−Inspector Ganimard, whose services he had so often had occasion to value.

Ganimard listened in silence to the instructions of his superior and then, tossing his head, said:

"I think we shall be on a false scent so long as we continue to search the castle. The solution lies elsewhere."

"With Arsene Lupin? If you think that, then you believe that he took part in the burglary."

"I do think so. I go further, I consider it certain."

"Come, Ganimard, this is absurd. Arsene Lupin is in prison."

"Arsene Lupin is in prison, I agree. He is being watched, I grant you. But, if he had his legs in irons, his hands bound and his mouth gagged, I should still be of the same opinion."

"But why this persistency?"

"Because no one else is capable of contriving a plan on so large a scale and of contriving it in such a way that it succeeds... as this has succeeded."

"Words, Ganimard!"

"They are true words, for all that. Only, it's no use looking for underground passages, for stones that turn on a pivot and stuff and nonsense of that kind. Our friend does not employ such antiquated measures. He is a man of to−day, or rather of to−morrow."

"And what do you conclude?"

"I conclude by asking you straight to let me spend an hour with Lupin."

"In his cell?"

"Yes. We were on excellent terms during the crossing from America and I venture to think that he is not without friendly feeling for the man who arrested him. If he can tell me what I want to know, without compromising himself, he will be quite willing to spare me an unnecessary journey."

It was just after mid−day when Ganimard was shown into Arsene Lupin's cell. Lupin, who was lying on his bed, raised his head and uttered an exclamation of delight:

"Well, this is a surprise! Dear old Ganimard here!"

"Himself."

"I have hoped for many things in this retreat of my own choosing, but for none more eagerly than the pleasure of welcoming you here."

"You are too good."

"Not at all, not at all. I have the liveliest regard for you."

"I am proud to hear it."

"I have said it a thousand times: Ganimard is our greatest detective. He's almost — see how frank I am — almost as clever as Holmlock Shears. But, really, I'm awfully sorry to have nothing better than this stool to offer you. And not a drink of any kind! Not so much as a glass of beer! Do forgive me: I am only just passing through town, you see!"

Ganimard smiled and sat down on the stool; and the prisoner, glad of the opportunity of speaking, continued:

"By Jove, what a treat to see a decent man's face! I am sick of the looks of all these spies who go through my cell and my pockets ten times a day to make sure that I am not planning an escape. Gad, how fond the government must be of me!"

"They show their judgment."

"No, no! I should be so happy if they would let me lead my own quiet life."

"On other people's money."

"Just so. It would be so simple. But I'm letting my tongue run on, I'm talking nonsense and I daresay you're in a hurry. Come, Ganimard, tell me to what I owe the honour of this visit."

"The Cahorn case," said Ganimard, abruptly.

"Stop! Wait a bit... You see, I have so many on hand! First, let me search my brain for the Cahorn pigeonhole.... Ah, I have it! Cahorn case, Chateau du Malaquis, Seine−Inferieure.... Two Rubens, a Watteau and a few minor trifles."

"Trifles!"

"Oh, yes, all this is of small importance. I have bigger things on hand. However, you're interested in the case and that's enough for me.... Go ahead, Ganimard."

"I need not tell you, need I, how far we have got with the investigation?"

"No, not at all. I have seen the morning papers. And I will even take the liberty of saying that you are not making much progress."

"That's just why I have come to throw myself upon your kindness."

"I am entirely at your service."

"First of all, the thing was done by you, was it not?"

"From start to finish."

"The registered letter? The telegram?"

"Were sent by yours truly. In fact, I ought to have the receipts somewhere."

Arsene opened the drawer of a little deal table which, with the bed and the stool, composed all the furniture of his cell, took out two scraps of paper and handed them to Ganimard.

"Hullo!" cried the latter. "Why, I thought you were being kept under constant observation and searched on the slightest pretext. And it appears that you read the papers and collect post−office receipts.... "

"Bah! Those men are such fools. They rip up the lining of my waistcoat, explore the soles of my boots, listen at the walls of my cell; but not one of them would believe that Arsene Lupin could be such a fool as to choose so obvious a hiding−place. That's just what I reckoned on."

Ganimard exclaimed, in amusement:

"What a funny chap you are! You're beyond me. Come, tell me the story."

"Oh, I say! Not so fast! Initiate you into all my secrets... reveal my little tricks to you? That's a serious matter."

"Was I wrong in thinking that I could rely on you to oblige me?"

"No, Ganimard, and, as you insist upon it.... "

Arsene Lupin took two or three strides across his cell. Then, stopping:

"What do you think of my letter to the baron?" he asked.

"I think you wanted to have some fun, to tickle the gallery a bit."

"Ah, there you go! Tickle the gallery, indeed! Upon my word, Ganimard, I gave you credit for more sense! Do you really imagine that I, Arsene Lupin, waste my time with such childish pranks as that? Is it likely that I should have written the letter, if I could have rifled the baron without it? Do try and understand that the letter was the indispensable starting−point, the main−spring that set the whole machine in motion. Look here, let us proceed in order and, if you like, prepare the Malaquis burglary together."

"Very well."

"Now follow me. I have to do with an impregnable and closely−guarded castle.... Am I to throw up the game and forego the treasures which I covet, because the castle that contains them happens to be inaccessible?"

"Clearly not."

"Am I to try to carry it by assault as in the old days, at the head of a band of adventurers?"

"That would be childish."

"Am I to enter it by stealth?"

"Impossible."

"There remains only one way, which is to get myself invited by the owner of the foresaid castle."

"It's an original idea."

"And so easy! Suppose that, one day, the said owner receives a letter warning him of a plot hatched against him by one Arsene Lupin, a notorious housebreaker. What is he sure to do?"

"Send the letter to the public prosecutor."

"Who will laugh at him, because the said Lupin is actually under lock and key. The natural consequence is the utter bewilderment of the worthy man, who is ready and anxious to ask for the assistance of the first−comer. Am I right?"

"Quite so."

"And, if he happens to read in the local rag that a famous detective is staying in the neighbourhood...?"

"He will go and apply to that detective."

"Exactly. But, on the other hand, let us assume that, foreseeing this inevitable step, Arsene Lupin has asked one of his ablest friends to take up his quarters at Caudebec, to pick up acquaintance with a contributor to the Reveil, a paper, mark you, to which the baron subscribes, and to drop a hint that he is so−and−so, the famous detective. What will happen next?"

"The contributor will send a paragraph to the Reveil stating that the detective is staying at Caudebec."

"Exactly; and one of two things follows; either the fish — I mean Cahorn — does not rise to the bait, in which case nothing happens. Or else — and this is the more likely presumption — he nibbles, in which case you have our dear Cahorn imploring the assistance of one of my own friends against me!"

"This is becoming more and more original."

"Of course, the sham detective begins by refusing. Thereupon, a telegram from Arsene Lupin. Dismay of the baron, who renews his entreaties with my friend and offers him so much to watch over his safety. The friend aforesaid accepts and brings with him two chaps of our gang, who, during the night, while Cahorn is kept in sight by his protector, remove a certain number of things through the window and lower them with ropes into a barge freighted for the purpose. It's as simple as... Lupin."

"And it's just wonderful," cried Ganimard, "and I have no words in which to praise the boldness of the idea and the ingenuity of the details. But I can hardly imagine a detective so illustrious that his name should have attracted and impressed the baron to that extent."

"There is one and one only."

"Who?"

"The most illustrious of them all, the arch−enemy of Arsene Lupin, in short, Inspector Ganimard."

"What, myself?"

"Yourself, Ganimard. And that's the delightful part of it: if you go down and persuade the baron to talk, he will end by discovering that it is your duty to arrest yourself, just as you arrested me in America. A humorous revenge, what? I shall have Ganimard arrested by Ganimard!"

Arsene Lupin laughed loud and long, while the inspector bit his lips with vexation. The joke did not appear to him worthy of so much merriment.

The entrance of a warder gave him time to recover. The man brought the meal which Arsene Lupin, by special favour, was allowed to have sent in from the neighbouring restaurant. After placing the tray on the table, he went away. Arsene sat down, broke his bread, ate a mouthful or two and continued:

"But be easy, my dear Ganimard, you won't have to go. I have something to tell you that will strike you dumb. The Cahorn case is about to be withdrawn."

"What!"

"About to be withdrawn, I said."

"Nonsense! I have just left the chief."

"And then? Does Monsieur Dudouis know more than I do about my concerns? You must learn that Ganimard — excuse me — that the sham Ganimard remained on very good terms with Baron Cahorn. The baron — and this is his main reason for keeping the thing quiet — charged him with the very delicate mission of negotiating a deal with me; and the chances are that, by this time, on payment of a certain sum, the baron is once more in possession

of his pet knick−knacks. In return for which he will withdraw the charge. Wherefore there is no question of theft. Wherefore the public prosecutor will have to abandon...."

Ganimard gazed at the prisoner with an air of stupefaction:

"But how do you know all this?"

"I have just received the telegram I was expecting."

"You have just received a telegram?"

"This very moment, my friend. I was too polite to read it in your presence. But, if you will allow me...."

"You're poking fun at me, Lupin."

"Have the kindness, my friend, to cut off the top of that egg, gently. You will see for yourself that I am not poking fun at you."

Ganimard obeyed mechanically and broke the egg with the blade of a knife. A cry of surprise escaped him. The shell was empty but for a sheet of blue paper. At Arsene's request, he unfolded it. It was a telegram, or rather a portion of a telegram from which the postal indications had been removed. He read:

"Arrangement settled. Hundred thousand spondulics delivered. All well."

"Hundred thousand spondulics?" he uttered.

"Yes, a hundred thousand francs. It's not much, but these are hard times.... And my general expenses are so heavy! If you knew the amount of my budget... it's like the budget of a big town!"

Ganimard rose to go. His ill−humour had left him. He thought for a few moments and cast a mental glance over the whole business, trying to discover a weak point. Then, in a voice that frankly revealed his admiration as an expert, he said:

"It's a good thing that there are not dozens like you, or there would be nothing for us but to shut up shop."

Arsene Lupin assumed a modest simper and replied:

"Oh, I had to do something to amuse myself, to occupy my spare time... especially as the scoop could only succeed while I was in prison."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Ganimard. "Your trial, your defence, your examination: isn't that enough for you to amuse yourself with?"

"No, because I have decided not to attend my trial."

"Oh, I say!"

Arsene Lupin repeated deliberately:

"I shall not attend my trial."

"Really!"

"Why, my dear fellow, you surely don't think I mean to rot in gaol? The mere suggestion is an insult. Let me tell you that Arsene Lupin remains in prison as long as he thinks fit and not a moment longer."

"It might have been more prudent to begin by not entering it," said the inspector, ironically.

"Ah, so you're chaffing me, sirrah? Do you remember that you had the honour to effect my arrest? Well, learn from me, my respectable friend, that no one, neither you nor another, could have laid a hand upon me, if a much more important interest had not occupied my attention at that critical moment."

"You surprise me."

"A woman had cast her eyes upon me, Ganimard, and I loved her. Do you realise all that the fact implies when a woman whom one loves casts her eyes upon one? I cared about little else, I assure you. And that is why I'm here."

"You've been here a long time, allow me to observe."

"I was anxious to forget. Don't laugh, it was a charming adventure and I still have a tender recollection of it.... And then I have had a slight nervous break−down. We lead such a feverish existence nowadays! It's a good thing to take a rest−cure from time to time. And there's no place for it like this. They carry out the cure in all its strictness at the Sante."

"Arsene Lupin," said Ganimard, "you're pulling my leg."

"Ganimard," replied Lupin, "this is Friday. On Wednesday next, I'll come and smoke a cigar with you, in the Rue Pergolese, at four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Arsene Lupin, I shall expect you."

They shook hands like two friends who have a proper sense of each other's value and the old detective turned towards the door.

"Ganimard!"

Ganimard looked round:

"What is it?"

"Ganimard, you've forgotten your watch."

"My watch?"

"Yes, I've just found it in my pocket."

He returned it, with apologies:

"Forgive me ... it's a bad habit.... They've taken mine, but that's no reason why I should rob you of yours. Especially as I have a chronometer here which keeps perfect time and satisfies all my requirements."

He took out of the drawer a large, thick, comfortable−looking gold watch, hanging to a heavy chain.

"And out of whose pocket does this come?" asked Ganimard.

Arsene Lupin carelessly inspected the initials:

"J.B.... What on earth does that stand for?... Oh, yes, I remember: Jules Bouvier, my examining magistrate, a charming fellow...."