

THE ARREST OF ARSENE LUPIN

Maurice Leblanc

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THE strangest of journeys! And yet it had begun so well! I, for my part, had never made a voyage that started under better auspices. The Province is a swift and comfortable transatlantic liner, commanded by the most genial of men. The company gathered on board was of a very select character. Acquaintances were formed and amusements organized. We had the delightful feeling of being separated from the rest of the world, reduced to our own devices, as though upon an unknown island, and obliged, therefore, to make friends with one another. And we grew more and more intimate. . . .

Have you ever reflected on the element of originality and surprise contained in this grouping of a number of people who, but a day earlier, had never seen one another, and who are now, for a few days, destined to live together in the closest contact, between the infinite sky and the boundless sea, defying the fury of the ocean, the alarming onslaught of the waves, the malice of the winds, and the distressing calmness of the slumbering waters ?

Life itself, in fact, with its storms and its greatneses, its monotony and its variety, becomes a sort of tragic epitome; and that, perhaps, is why we enjoy with a fevered haste and an intensified delight this short voyage of which we see the end.

But, of late years, a thing has happened that adds curiously to the excitement of the passage. The little floating island is no longer entirely separated from the world from which we believed ourselves cut adrift. One link remains, and is at intervals tied and at intervals untied in mid-ocean. The wireless telegraph! As who should say a summons from another world, whence we receive news in the most mysterious fashion! The imagination no longer has the resource of picturing wires along which the invisible message glides: the mystery is even more insoluble, more poetic; and we must have recourse to the winds to explain the new miracle.

And so, from the start, we felt that we were being followed, escorted, even preceded by that distant voice which, from time to time, whispered to one of us a few words from the continent which we had quitted. Two of my friends spoke to me. Ten others, twenty others sent to all of us, through space, their sad or cheery greetings. Now, on the stormy afternoon of the second day, when we were five hundred miles from the French coast, the wireless telegraph sent us a message of the following tenor:

"Arsene Lupin on board your ship, first class, fair hair, wound on right forearm, travelling alone under alias R "

At that exact moment, a violent thunderclap burst in the dark sky. The electric waves were interrupted. The rest of the message failed to reach us. We knew only the initial of the name under which Arsene Lupin was concealing his identity.

Had the news been any other, I have no doubt but that the secret would have been scrupulously kept by the telegraph-clerks and the captain and his officers. But there are certain events that appear to ove. The rest of the message failed to reach us. We knew only the initial of the name under which Arsene Lupin was concealing his identity.

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discretion. Before the day was past, though no one could have told how the rumor had got about, we all knew that the famous Arsene Lupin was hidden in our midst.

Arsene Lupin in our midst! The mysterious housebreaker whose exploits had been related in all the newspapers for months! The baffling individual with whom Ganimard, our greatest detective, had entered upon that duel to the death of which the details were being unfolded in so picturesque a fashion! Arsene Lupin, the fastidious gentleman who confines his operations to country-houses and fashionable drawing-rooms, and who one night, after breaking in at Baron Schormann's, had gone away empty-handed, leaving his visiting card:

Arsene Lupin
Gentleman Burglar

with these words added in pencil:

"Will return when your things are genuine."

Arsene Lupin, the man with a thousand disguises, by turns chauffeur, opera-singer, book-maker, gilded youth, young man, old man, Marseillese bagman, Russian doctor, Spanish bull-fighter!

Picture the situation: Arsene Lupin moving about within the comparatively restricted compass of a transatlantic liner, nay — more, within the small space reserved to the first-class passengers — where one might come across him at any moment, in the saloon, the drawing-room, the smoking-room! Why, Arsene Lupin might be that gentleman over there . . . or this one close by . . . or my neighbor at table . . . or the passenger sharing my stateroom . . .

"And just think, this is going to last for five days!" cried Miss Nellie Underdown, on the following day. "Why, it's awful! I do hope they'll, catch him!" And, turning to me, "Do say, Monsieur d'Andrezy, you're such friends with the captain, haven't you heard anything?"

I wished that I had, if only to please Nellie Underdown. She was one of those magnificent creatures that become the cynosure of all eyes wherever they may be. Their beauty is as dazzling as their fortune. A court of fervent enthusiasts follow in their train.

She had been brought up in Paris by her French mother, and was now on her way to Chicago to join her father, Underdown, the American millionaire. A friend, Lady Gerland, was chaperoning her on the voyage.

I had paid her some slight attentions from the first. But, almost immediately, in the rapid intimacy of ocean travel, her charms had gained upon me, and my emotions now exceeded those of a mere flirtation whenever her great dark eyes met mine. She, on her side, received my devotion with a certain favor. She condescended to laugh at my jokes and to be interested in my stories. A vague sympathy seemed to respond to the assiduity which I displayed.

One rival alone, perhaps, could have given me cause for anxiety: a rather good-looking fellow, well-dressed and reserved in manner, show silent humor seemed at times to attract her more than did my somewhat "butterfly" Parisian ways.

He happened to form one of the group of admirers surrounding Miss Underdown at the moment when she spoke to me. We were on deck, comfortably installed in our chairs. The storm of the day before had cleared the sky. It was a delightful afternoon.

"I have heard nothing very definite," I replied. "But why should we not be able to conduct our own inquiry just as well as old Ganimard, Lupin's personal enemy, might do?"

"I say, you're going very fast!"

"Why? Is the problem so complicated?"

"Most complicated."

"You only say that because you forget the clues which we possess towards its solution."

"Which clues?"

"First, Lupin is travelling under the name of Monsieur R——."

"That's rather vague."

"Secondly, he's travelling alone."

"If you consider that a sufficient detail!"

"Thirdly, he is fair."

"Well, then?"

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"Then we need only consult the list of first-class passengers and proceed by elimination."

I had the list in my pocket. I took it out and glanced through it:

"To begin with, I see that there are only thirteen persons whose names begin with an R."

"Only thirteen?"

"In the first class, yes. Of these thirteen R's, as you can ascertain for yourself, nine are accompanied by their wives, children, or servants. That leaves four solitary passengers: the Marquis de Raverdan . . ."

"Secretary of legation," interrupted Miss Underdown. "I know him."

"Major Rawson . . ."

"That's my uncle," said someone.

"Signor Rivolta . . ."

"Here!" cried one of us, an Italian, whose face disappeared from view behind a huge black beard.

Miss Underdown had a fit of laughing: "That gentleman is not exactly fair!"

"Then," I continued, "we are bound to conclude that the criminal is the last on the list."

"Who is that?"

"Monsieur Rozaine. Does any one know Monsieur Rozaine?"

No one answered. But Miss Underdown, turning to the silent young man whose assiduous presence by her side vexed me, said:

"Well, Monsieur Rozaine, have you nothing to say?"

All eyes were turned upon him. He was fairhaired!

I must admit I felt a little shock pass through me. And the constrained silence that weighed down upon us showed me that the other passengers present also experienced that sort of choking feeling. The thing was absurd, however, for, after all, there was nothing in his manner to warrant our suspecting him.

"Have I nothing to say?" he replied. "Well, you see, realizing what my name was and the color of my hair and the fact that I am travelling by myself, I have already made a similar inquiry and arrived at the same conclusion. My opinion, therefore, is that I ought to be arrested."

He wore a queer expression as he uttered these words. His thin, pale lips grew thinner and paler eyes were bloodshot.

There was no doubt but that he was jesting. And yet his appearance and attitude impressed us. Miss Underdown asked, innocently:

"But have you a wound?"

"That's true," he said. "The wound is missing."

With a nervous movement, he pulled up his cuff and uncovered his arm. But a sudden idea struck me. My eyes met Miss Underdown's: he had shown his left arm.

And, upon my word. I was on the point of remarking upon this, when an incident occurred to divert our attention. Lady Gerland, Miss Underdown's friend, came running up.

She was in a state of great agitation. Her fellow-passengers crowded round her; and it was only after many efforts that she succeeded in stammering out:

"My jewels! . . . My pearls! . . . They've all been stolen!"

No, they had not all been stolen, as we subsequently discovered; a much more curious thing had happened: the thief had made a selection!

From the diamond star, the pendant of uncut rubies, the broken necklaces and bracelets, he had removed not the largest but the finest, the most precious stones — those, in fact, which had the greatest value and at the same time occupied the smallest space. The settings were left lying on the table. I saw them, we all saw them, stripped of their gems like flowers from which the fair, bright-colored petals had been torn.

And to carry out this work, he had had, in broad daylight, while Lady Gerland was taking tea, to break in the door of the state-room in a frequented passage, to discover a little jewel-case purposely hidden at the bottom of a bandbox, to open it and make his choice!

We all uttered the same cry. There was but one opinion among the passengers when the theft became known: it was Arsene Lupin. And, indeed, the theft had been committed in his own complicated, mysterious, inscrutable . . . and yet logical manner, for we realized that, though it would have been difficult to conceal the cumbersome mass which the ornaments as a whole would have formed, he would have much less trouble with such small

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independent objects as single pearls, emeralds and sapphires.

At dinner this happened: the two seats to the right and left of Rozaine remained unoccupied. And, in the evening, we knew that he had been sent for by the captain.

His arrest, of which no one entertained a doubt, caused a genuine relief. We felt at last that we could breathe. We played charades in the saloon. We danced. Miss Underdown, in particular, displayed an obstreperous gayety which made it clear to me that, though Rozaine's attentions might have pleased her at first, she no longer gave them a thought. Her charm conquered me entirely. At midnight, under the still rays of the moon, I declared myself her devoted lover in emotional terms which she did not appear to resent.

But, the next day, to the general stupefaction, it became known that the charges brought against him were insufficient. Rozaine was free.

It seemed that he was the son of a wealthy Bordeaux merchant. He had produced papers which were in perfect order. Moreover, his arms showed not the slightest trace of a wound.

"Papers, indeed!" exclaimed Rozaine's enemies. "Birth-certificates! Tush! Why, Arsene Lupin can supply them by the dozen! As for the wound, it only shows that he never had a wound . . . or that he has removed its traces!"

Somebody suggested that, at the time when the theft was committed, Rozaine — this had been proved — was walking on deck. In reply to this it was urged that, with a man of Rozaine's stamp, it was not really necessary for the thief to be present at his own crime. And, lastly, apart from all other considerations, there was one point upon which the most sceptical had nothing to say: who but Rozaine was travelling alone, had fair hair, and was called by a name beginning with the letter R? Who but Rozaine answered to the description in the wireless telegram?

And when Rozaine, a few minutes before lunch, boldly made for our group, Lady Gerland and Miss Underdown rose and walked away.

It was a question of pure fright.

An hour later, a manuscript circular was passed from hand to hand among the staff of the vessel, the crew, and the passengers of all classes. M. Louis Rozaine had promised a reward of ten thousand francs to whosoever should unmask Arsene Lupin or discover the possessor of the stolen jewels.

"And if no one helps me against the ruffian," said Rozaine to the captain, "I'll settle his business myself."

The contest between Rozaine and Arsene Lupin, or rather, in the phrase that soon became current, between Arsene Lupin himself and Arsene Lupin, was not lacking in interest.

It lasted two days. Rozaine was observed wandering to right and left, mixing with the crew, questioning and ferreting on every hand. His shadow was seen prowling about at night.

The captain, on his side, displayed the most active energy. The Provence was searched from stem to stern, in every nook and corner. Every state-room was turned out, without exception, under the very proper pretext that the stolen objects must be hidden somewhere — anywhere rather than in the thief's own cabin.

"Surely they will end by finding something?" asked Miss Underdown. "Wizard though he may be, he can't make pearls and diamonds invisible."

"Of course they will," I replied, "or else they will have to search the linings of our hats and clothes and anything that we carry about with us." And, showing her my five-by-four Kodak, with which I never wearied of photographing her in all manner of attitudes, I added, "Why, even in a camera no larger than this there would be room to stow away all Lady Gerland's jewels. You pretend to take snapshots and the thing is done."

"Still, I have heard say that every burglar always leaves a clew of some kind behind him."

"There is one who never does: Arsene Lupin."

"Why?"

"Why? Because he thinks not only of the crime which he is committing, but of all the circumstances that might tell against him."

"You're more confident at first."

"Ah, but I had not seen him at work then!"

"And so you think . . ."

"I think that we are wasting our time."

As a matter of fact, the investigations produced no result whatever, or, at least, that which was produced did not correspond with the general effort: the captain lost his watch.

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He was furious, redoubled his zeal, and kept an even closer eye than before on Rozaine, with whom he had several interviews. The next day, with a delightful irony, the watch was found among the second officer's collars.

All this was very wonderful, and pointed clearly to the humorous handiwork of a burglar, if you like, but an artist besides. He worked at his profession for a living, but also for his amusement. He gave the impression of a dramatist who thoroughly enjoys his own plays and who stands in the wings laughing heartily at the comic dialogue and diverting situations which he himself has invented.

He was decidedly an artist in his way; and, when I observed Rozaine, so gloomy and stubborn, and reflected on the two-faced part which this curious individual was doubtless playing, I was unable to speak of him without a certain feeling of admiration....

Well, on the night but one before our arrival in America, the officer of the watch heard groans on the darkest portion of the deck. He drew nearer, went up, and saw a man stretched at full length, with his head wrapped in a thick, gray muffler, and his hands tied together with a thin cord.

They unfastened his bonds, lifted him, and gave him a restorative.

The man was Rozaine.

Yes, it was Rozaine, who had been attacked in the course of one of his expeditions, knocked down, and robbed. A visiting-card pinned to his clothes bore these words:

"Arsene Lupin accepts M. Rozaine's ten thousand francs, with thanks."

As a matter of fact the stolen pocket-book contained twenty thousand-franc notes.

Of course, the unfortunate man was accused of counterfeiting this attack upon his own person. But, apart from the fact that it would have been impossible for him to bind himself in this way, it was proved that the writing on the card differed absolutely from Rozaine's handwriting, whereas it was exactly like that of Arsene Lupin, as reproduced in an old newspaper which had been found on board.

So Rozaine was not Arsene Lupin! Rozaine was Rozaine, the son of a Bordeaux merchant! And Arsene Lupin's presence had been asserted once again and by means of what a formidable act!

Sheer terror ensued. The passengers no longer dared stay alone in their cabins nor wander unaccompanied to the remoter parts of the ship. Those who felt sure of one another kept prudently together. And even here an instinctive mistrust divided those who knew one another best. The danger no longer threatened from a solitary individual kept under observation and therefore less dangerous. Arsene Lupin now seemed to be . . . to be everybody. Our over-excited imaginations ascribed to him the possession of a miraculous and boundless power. We supposed him capable of assuming the most unexpected disguises, of being by turns the most respectable Major Rawson, or the most noble Marquis de Raverdan, or even — for we no longer stopped at the accusing initial — this or that person known to all, and travelling with wife, children and servants.

The wireless telegrams brought us no news; at least, the captain did not communicate them to us. And this silence was not calculated to reassure us.

It was small wonder, therefore, that the last day appeared interminable. The passengers lived in the anxious expectation of a tragedy. This time it would not be a theft, it would not be a mere assault; it would be crime — murder. No one was willing to admit that Arsene Lupin would rest content with those two insignificant acts of larceny. He was absolute master of the ship; he reduced the officers to impotence; he had but to wreak his will upon us. He could do as he pleased; he held our lives and property in his hands. These were delightful hours to me, I confess, for they won for me the confidence of Nellie Underdown. Naturally timid and impressed by all these events, she spontaneously sought at my side the protection which I was happy to offer her.

In my heart, I blessed Arsene Lupin. Was it not he who had brought us together? Was it not to him that I owed the right to abandon myself to my fondest dreams? Dreams of love and dreams more practical: why not confess it? The d'Andrezys are of good Poitevin stock, but the gilt of their blazon is a little worn; and it did not seem to me unworthy of a man of family to think of restoring the lost lustre of his name.

Nor, I was convinced, did these dreams offend Nellie. Her smiling eyes gave me leave to indulge them. Her soft voice bade me hope.

And we remained side by side until the last moment, with our elbows resting on the bulwark rail, while the outline of the American coast grew more and more distinct.

The search had been abandoned. All seemed expectation. From the first-class saloon to the steerage, with its swarm of emigrants, every one was waiting for the supreme moment when the insoluble riddle would be

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explained. Who was Arsene Lupin? Under what name, under what disguise was the famous Arsene Lupin lurking?

The supreme moment came. If I live to be a hundred, never shall I forget its smallest detail.

"How pale you look, Nellie!" I said, as she leaned, almost fainting, on my arm.

"And you, too. Oh, how you have changed!" she replied.

"Think what an exciting minute this is and how happy I am to pass it at your side. I wonder, Nellie, if your memory will sometimes linger . . ."

All breathless and fevered, she was not listening. The gang-plank was lowered. But before we were allowed to cross it, men came on board: custom-house officers, men in uniform, postmen.

Nellie murmured:

"I shouldn't be surprised even if we heard that Arsene Lupin had escaped during the crossing!"

"He may have preferred death to dishonor, and plunged into the Atlantic rather than submit to arrest!"

"Don't jest about it," said she, in a tone of vexation.

Suddenly I gave a start and, in answer to her question, I replied:

"Do you see that little old man standing by the gang-plank?"

"The one in a green frock-coat with an umbrella?"

"That's Ganimard."

"Ganimard?"

"Yes, the famous detective who swore that he would arrest Arsene Lupin with his own hand. Ah, now I understand why we received no news from this side of the ocean. Ganimard was here, and he does not care to have any one interfering in his little affairs."

"So Arsene Lupin is sure of being caught?"

"Who can tell? Ganimard has never seen him, I believe, except made-up and disguised. Unless he knows the name under which he is travelling . . ."

"Ah," she said, with a woman's cruel curiosity, "I should love to see the arrest!"

"Have patience," I replied. "No doubt Arsene Lupin has already observe** his enemy's presence. He will prefer to leave among the last when the old man's eyes are tire."

The passengers began to cross the gang-plank. Leaning on his umbrella with an indifferent air, Ganimard seemed t pay no attention to the throng that crowded past between the two hand-rails. I noticed the ship's officers, standing behind him, whispered in his ear from time to time.

The Marquis de Raverdan, Major Rawson, Rivolta, the Italian, went past, and others and many more. Then I saw Rozaine approaching.

Poor Rozaine! He did not seem to have recovered from his misadventures!

"It may be he, all the same," said Nellie. "What do you think?"

"I think it would be very interesting to have Ganimard and Rozaine in one photograph. Would you take the camera? My hands are so full."

I gave it to her, but too late for her to use it. Rozaine crossed. The officer bent over to Ganimard's ear; Ganimard gave a shrug of the shoulders; and Rozaine passed on.

But then who, in Heaven's name, was Arsene Lupin?

"Yes," she said, aloud, "who is it!"

There were only a score of people left. Nellie looked at them, one after the other, with the bewildered dread that he was not one of the twenty.

I said to her:

"We cannot wait any longer."

She moved on. I followed her. But we had not taken ten steps when Ganimard barred our passage.

"What does this mean?" I exclaimed.

"One moment, sir. What's your hurry?"

"I am escorting this young lady."

"One moment," he repeated, in a more mysterious voice.

He stared hard at me, and then, looking me straight in the eyes, said:

"Arsene Lupin, I believe."

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I gave a laugh.

"Bernard d'Andrezy, simply."

"Bernard d'Andrezy died in Macedonia, three years ago."

"If Bernard d'Andrezy were dead I could not be here. And it's not so. Here are my papers."

"They are his papers. And I shall be pleased to tell you how you became possessed of them."

"But you are mad! Arsene Lupin took his passage under a name beginning with R."

"Yes, another of your tricks — a false scent upon which you put the people on the other side, OH, you have no lack of brains, my lad! But, this time, your luck has turned. Come, Lupin, show that you're a good loser."

I hesitated for a second. He struck me smart blow on the right forearm. I gave a cry of pain. He had hit the unhealed wound mentioned in the telegram.

There was nothing in it but to submit. I turned to Miss Underdown. She was listening with a white face, staggering where she stood.

Her glance met mine, and then fell upon the Kodak which I had handed her. She made a sudden movement, and I received the impression, the certainty, that she had understood. Yes, it was there — between the narrow boards covered with black morocco, inside the little camera which I had taken the precaution to place in her hands before Ganimard arrested me — it was there that Rozaine's twenty thousand francs' and Lady Gerland's pearls and diamonds lay concealed.

Now I swear that, at this solemn moment, with Ganimard and two of his minions around me, everything was indifferent to me — my arrest, the hostility of my fellow-men, everything save only this: the resolve which Nellie Underdown would take in regard to the object I had given into her charge.

Whether they had this material and decisive piece of evidence against me, what cared I? The only question that obsessed my mind was, would Nelly furnish it or not?

Would she betray me? Would she ruin me? Would she act as an irreconcilable foe, or as a woman who remembers, and whose contempt is softened by a touch of indulgence — a shade of sympathy?

She passed before me. I bowed very low, without a word. Mingling with the other passengers, she moved towards the gang-board, carrying my Kodak in her hand.

"Of course," I thought, "she will not dare to, in public. She will hand it over presently — in an hour."

But, on reaching the middle of the plank, with a pretended movement of awkwardness, she dropped the Kodak in the water, between the landing-stage and the ship's side.

Then I watched her walk away.

Her charming profile was lost in the crowd, came into view again, and disappeared. It was over — over for good and all.

For a moment I stood rooted to the deck, sad and, at the same time, pervaded with a sweet and tender emotion. Then, to Ganimard's great astonishment, I sighed:

"Pity, after all, that I'm a rogue!"

It was in these words that Arsene Lupin, one winter's evening, told me the story of his arrest Chance and a series of incidents which I will some day describe had established between us bonds of . . . shall I say friendship? Yes, I venture to think that Arsene Lupin honors me with a certain friendship; and it is owing to this friendship that he occasionally drops in upon me unexpectedly, bringing into the silence of my study his youthful gayety, the radiance of his eager life, his high spirits — the spirits of a man for whom fate has little but smiles and favors in store.

His likeness? How can I trace it? I have seen Arsene Lupin a score of times, and each time a different being has stood before me . . . or rather the same being under twenty distorted images reflected by as many mirrors, each image having its special eyes, its particular facial outline, its own gestures, profile and character.

"I myself," he once said to me, "have forgotten what I am really like. I no longer recognize myself in a glass."

A paradoxical whim of the imagination, no doubt; and yet true enough as regards those who come into contact with him, and who are unaware of his infinite resources, his patience, his unparalleled skill in make-up, and his prodigious faculty for changing even the proportions of his features one to the other.

"Why," he asked, "should I have a definite fixed appearance? Why not avoid the dangers attendant upon a personality that is always the same? My actions constitute my identity sufficiently."

And he added, with a touch of pride:

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"It is all the better if people are never able to say with certainty: 'There goes Arsene Lupin.' The great thing is that they should say without fear of being mistaken: 'That action was performed by Arsene Lupin.'"

It is some of those actions of his, some of those exploits, that I will endeavor to narrate, thanks to the confidences with which he has had the kindness to favor me on certain winter evenings in the silence of my study....