The Escape of Arsene Lupin

Maurice Leblanc

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ARSENE LUPIN finished his mid−day meal, took a good cigar from his pocket, and complacently studied the gold−lettered inscription on its band. At that moment the door of his cell opened. He had just a second in which to throw the cigar into the drawer of the table and to move away. The warden came in to tell him that it was time to take his exercise.

"I was waiting for you, old chap!" cried Lupin, with his unfailing good−humor.

They went out together. Hardly had they turned the corner of the passage when two men entered the cell and began to make a minute examination. One of these was Inspector Dieuzy, the other Inspector Folenfant.

They wanted to have the matter settled once and for all. There was no doubt about it: Arsene Lupin was keeping up a correspondence with the outside world and communicating with his confidants. Only the day before the Grand Journal had published the following lines, addressed to its legal contributor:

"SIR, In an article published a few days ago you ventured to express yourself concerning me in utterly unwarrantable terms. I shall come and call you to account a day or two before my trial commences.

"Yours faithfully,

ARSENE LUPIN.

The handwriting was Arsene Lupin's. Therefore, he was sending letters. Therefore, he was receiving letters. Therefore, it was certain that he was preparing the escape which he had so arrogantly announced.

The position was becoming intolerable. By arrangement with the examining magistrate, M. Dudouis himself, the head of the detective service, went to the Sante to explain to the prison governor the measures which it was thought advisable to take, and on his arrival he sent two of his men to the prisoner's cell.

The men raised every one of the flag−stones, took the bed to pieces, did all that is usually done in such cases, and ended by discovering nothing. They were about to abandon their search when the warden came running in, and said:

"The drawer... look in the drawer of the table! I thought I saw him shut it when I came in just now."

They looked, and Dieuzy exclaimed:

"Gad, we've caught our customer this time!"

Folenfant stopped him.

"Don't do anything, my lad; let the chief take the inventory."

"Still, this Havana..."

"Leave it alone, and let us tell the chief."

Two minutes later M. Dudouis was exploring the contents of the drawer. He found, first, a collection of press−cuttings concerning Arsene Lupin; next, a tobacco−pouch, a pipe, and some foreign post−paper; and, lastly, two books.

He looked at the titles: Carlyle's Heroes and Hero−worship, in English, and a charming Elzevir, in the contemporary binding: a German translation of the Manual of Epictetus, published at Leyden in 1634. He glanced through them, and observed that every page was scored, underlined, and annotated. Were these conventional signs, or were they marks denoting the reader's devotiit alone, and let us tell the chief."

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"We'll go into this in detail," said M. Dudouis.

He investigated the tobacco−pouch, the pipe. Then, taking up the magnificent cigar in its gold band:

"By Jove!" he cried, "our friend does himself well! A Henry Clay!"

With the mechanical movement of a smoker he put it to his ear and crackled it. An exclamation escaped him. The cigar had given way under the pressure of his fingers! He examined it more attentively, and soon perceived something that showed white between the leaves of the tobacco. And carefully, with the aid of a pin, he drew out a scroll of very thin paper, no thicker than a tooth−pick. It was a note. He unrolled it, and read the following words, in a small, female hand:

"Maria has taken the other's place. Eight out of ten are prepared. On pressing outside foot, metal panel moves upward. H.P. will wait from 12 to 16 daily. But where? Reply at once. Have no fear: your friend is looking after you."

M. Dudouis reflected for a moment and said:

"That's clear enough.... Maria, the prison−van... the eight compartments.... Twelve to sixteen; that is, from twelve to four o'clock...."

"But who is H.P.? Who is to wait for him?"

"H.P. stands for horse−power, of course — a motor−car."

He rose and asked:

"Had the prisoner finished his lunch?"

"Yes."

"And, as he has not yet read this message, as the condition of the cigar shows, the chances are that he had only just received it."

"By what means?"

"How can I tell? In his food; inside a roll or a potato."

"That's impossible. He was only permitted to have his meals from the outside so that we might trap him and we have found nothing."

"We will look for Lupin's reply this evening. Meantime keep him out of his cell. I will take this to Monsieur Bouvier, the examining magistrate. If he agrees, we will have the letter photographed at once, and in an hour's time you can put these other things back in the drawer, together with an exactly similar cigar containing the original message. The prisoner must not be allowed to suspect anything."

It was not without a certain curiosity that M. Dudouis, accompanied by Inspector Dieuzy, returned to the office of the Sante in the evening. In a corner, on the stove, were three plates.

"Has he had his dinner?"

"Yes," replied the governor.

"Dieuzy, cut those pieces of macaroni into very thin shreds and open that bit of bread.... Is there nothing there?"

"No, sir."

M. Dudouis examined the plates, the fork, the spoon, and, lastly, the knife — a regulation knife with a rounded blade. He twisted the handle to the left and then to the right. When turned to the right the handle gave way and became unscrewed. The knife was hollow, and served as a sheath for a slip of paper.

"Pooh!" he said, "that's not very artful for a man like Arsene. But let us waste no time. Do you go to the restaurant, Dieuzy, and make your inquiries.

Then he read:

"I leave it to you. Let H.P. follow every day at a distance. I shall go in front. I shall see you soon, my dear and adorable friend."

"At last!" cried M. Dudouis, rubbing his hands. "Things are going better, I think. With a little assistance from our side the escape will succeed... Just enough to enable us to bag the accomplices."

"And suppose Arsene Lupin slips through your fingers?" said the governor.

"We shall employ as many men as are necessary. If, however, he shows himself too clever... well, then, so much the worse for him! As for the rest of the gang, since the leader refuses to talk the others must be made to."

The fact was that Arsene Lupin did not talk much. For some months M. Jules Bouvier, the examining magistrate, had been exerting himself to no purpose. The interrogatories were reduced to uninteresting colloquies between the magistrate and Maitre Danval, one of the leaders of the bar, who, for that matter, knew as much and as little about the defendant as the man in the street.

From time to time, out of politeness, Arsene Lupin would let fall a remark:

"Quite so, sir; we are agreed. The robbery at the Credit Lyonnais, the robbery in the Rue de Babylone, the uttering of the forged notes, the affair of the insurance policies, the burglaries at the Chateaux d'Armesnil, de Gouret, d'Imblevain, des Groseillers, du Malaquis: that's all my work."

"Then perhaps you will explain..."

"There's no need of it. I confess to everything in the lump — everything, and ten times as much."

Tired out, the magistrate had suspended these wearisome interrogatories. He resumed them, after being shown the two intercepted missives. And regularly at twelve o'clock every day Arsene Lupin was taken from the Sante to the police−station in a van, with a number of other prisoners. They left again at three or four in the day.

One afternoon the return journey took place under exceptional conditions. As the other criminals from the Sante had not yet been examined, it was decided to take Arsene Lupin back first. He therefore stepped into the van alone.

These prison−vans, vulgarly known as paniers a salade, or salad−baskets, in France, and as "Black Marias" in England, are divided lengthwise by a central passage, giving admittance to ten compartments or boxes, five on each side. Each of these boxes is so arranged that its occupant has to adopt a sitting posture, and the five prisoners are consequently seated one beside the other, and are separated by parallel partitions. A municipal guard sits at the end and watches the central passage.

Arsene was placed in the third box on the right, and the heavy vehicle started. He perceived that they had left the Quai de l'Horloge, and were passing before the Palais de Justice. When they reached the middle of the Pont Saint−Michel he pressed his outer foot — that is to say, his right foot, as he had always done — against the sheet−iron panel that closed his cell. Suddenly something was thrown out of gear, and the panel opened outward imperceptibly. He saw that he was just between the two wheels.

He waited, with a watchful eye. The van went along the Boulevard Saint−Michel at a foot's pace. At the Carrefour Saint−Germain it pulled up. A dray−horse had fallen. The traffic was stopped, and soon there was a block of cabs and omnibuses.

Arsene Lupin put out his head. Another prison−van was standing beside the one in which he was sitting. He raised the panel farther, put his foot on one of the spokes of the hind wheel, and jumped to the ground.

A cab−driver saw him, choked with laughing, and then tried to call out. But his voice was lost in the din of the traffic, which had started afresh. Besides, Arsene Lupin was already some distance away.

He had taken a few steps at a run; but, crossing to the left−hand pavement, he turned back, cast a glance

around him, and seemed to be taking his breath, like a man who is not quite sure which direction he means to follow. Then, making up his mind, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and, with the careless air of a person taking a stroll, continued to walk along the boulevard.

The weather was mild: it was a bright, warm autumn day. The cafes were full of people. He sat down outside one of them.

He called for a bock and a packet of cigarettes. He emptied his glass with little sips, calmly smoked a cigarette and lit a second. Lastly, he stood up and asked the waiter to fetch the manager.

The manager came, and Arsene said, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all around:

"I am very sorry, but I have come out without my purse. Possibly you know my name and will not mind trusting me for a day or two: I am Arsene Lupin."

The manager looked at him, thinking he was joking. But Arsene repeated:

"Lupin, a prisoner at the Sante, just escaped. I venture to hope that my name inspires you with every confidence."

And he walked away amid the general laughter before the other dreamed of raising a protest.

He slanted across the Rue Soufflot, and turned down the Rue Saint−Jacques. He proceeded along this street quietly, looking at the shop−windows, and smoking one cigarette after the other. On reaching the Boulevard de Port−Royal he took his bearings, asked the way, and walked straight towards the Rue de la Sante. Soon the frowning walls of the prison came into view. He skirted them, and, going up to the municipal guard who was standing sentry at the gate, raised his hat, and said:

"Is this the Sante Prison?"

"Yes."

"I want to go back to my cell, please. The van dropped me on the way, and I should not like to abuse..."

The guard grunted.

"Look here, my man, you just go your road, and look sharp about it!"

"I beg your pardon, but my road lies through this gate. And, if you keep Arsene Lupin out, it may cost you dear, my friend."

"Arsene Lupin! What's all this?"

"I am sorry I haven't a card on me," said Arsene, pretending to feel in his pockets.

The guard, utterly nonplussed, eyed him from head to foot. Then, without a word and as though in spite of himself, he rang a bell. The iron door opened.

A few minutes later the governor hurried into the office, gesticulating and pretending to be in a violent rage. Arsene smiled.

"Come, sir, don't play a game with me! What! You take the precaution to bring me back alone in the van, you prepare a nice little block in the traffic, and you think that I am going to take to my heels and rejoin my friends! And what about the twenty detectives escorting us on foot, on bicycles, and in cabs? They'd have made short work of me: I should never have got off alive! Perhaps that was what they were reckoning on?"

Shrugging his shoulders, he added: "I beg you sir, don't let them trouble about me. When I decide to escape I shall want nobody's assistance."

Two days later the Echo de France, which was undoubtedly becoming the official gazette of the exploits of Arsene Lupin — he was said to be one of the principal shareholders — published the fullest details of his attempted escape. The exact text of the letters exchanged between the prisoner and his mysterious woman friend, the means employed for this correspondence, the part played by the police, the drive along the Boulevard Saint−Michel the incident at the Cafe Soufflot — everything was told in print. It was known that the inquiries of Inspector Dieuzy among the waiters of the restaurant had led to no result. And, in addition, the public were made aware of this bewildering fact, which showed the infinite variety of the resources which the man had at his disposal: the prison−van in which he had been carried was "faked" from end to end, and had been substituted by his accomplices for one of the six regular vans that compose the prison service.

No one entertained any further doubt as to Arsene Lupin's coming escape. He himself proclaimed it in categorical terms, as was shown by his reply to M. Bouvier on the day after the incident. The magistrate having bantered him on the check which he had encountered, he looked at him and said, coldly:

"Listen to me, sir, and take my word for it: this attempted escape formed part of my plan of escape."

"I don't understand," grinned the magistrate.

"There is no need that you should."

And when, in the course of this private interrogatory, which appeared at full length in the columns of the Echo de France, the magistrate resumed his cross−examination, Lupin exclaimed, with a weary air:

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear! What is the use of going on? All these questions have no importance whatever."

"How do you mean, no importance?"

"Of course not, seeing that I shall not attend my trial."

"You will not attend?..."

"No, it's a fixed idea of mine, an irrevocable decision. Nothing will induce me to depart from it."

This assurance, combined with the inexplicable indiscretions committed day after day, ended by enervating and disconcerting the officers of the law. Secrets were revealed, known to Arsene Lupin alone, the divulging of which could, therefore, come from none but him. But with what object did he divulge them? And by what means?

They changed Arsene Lupin's cell, moved him to a lower floor. The magistrate, on his side, closed the examination, and delivered the materials for the indictment.

A two months' silence ensued. These two months Arsene Lupin passed stretched on his bed, with his face almost constantly turned to the wall. The change of cell seemed to have crushed his spirits. He refused to see his counsel. He exchanged hardly a word with his wardens.

In the fortnight immediately preceding his trial he seemed to revive. He complained of lack of air. He was sent into the yard for exercise very early in the morning with a man on either side of him.

Meanwhile public curiosity had not abated. The news of his escape was expected daily; it was almost hoped for, so greatly had he caught the fancy of the crowd with his pluck, his gayety, his variety, his inventive genius, and the mystery of his life. Arsene Lupin was bound to escape. It was inevitable. People were even astonished that he put it off so long. Every morning the prefect of police asked his secretary:

"Well, isn't he gone yet?"

"No, sir."

"Then it will be to−morrow."

And on the day before the trial a gentleman called at the office of the Grand Journal, asked to see the legal contributor, flung his card at his head, and made a rapid exit. The card bore the words:

"Arsene Lupin always keeps his promises."

It was in these conditions that the trial opened. The crowd was enormous. Everybody wanted to see the famous Arsene Lupin, and was enjoying in advance the way in which he was sure to baffle the presiding judge. The court was thronged with barristers, magistrates, reporters, artists, society men and women — with all, in fact, that go to make up a first−night audience in Paris.

It was raining; the light was bad outside; it was difficult to see Arsene Lupin when his wardens ushered him into the dock. However, his torpid attitude, the manner in which he let himself fall into his chair, his indifferent and passive lack of movement, did not tell in his favor. His counsel — one of Maitre Danval's "devils," the great man himself having regarded the part to which he was reduced as beneath him — spoke to him several times. He jerked his head and made no reply.

The clerk of the court read the indictment. Then the presiding judge said:

"Prisoner at the bar, stand up. Give your name, your age, and your occupation."

Receiving no answer, he repeated:

"Your name — what is your name?"

A thick and tired voice articulated the words:

"Desire Baudru."

There was a murmur in court. But the judge retorted:

"Desire Baudru? Is this a new incarnation? As it is about the eighth name to which you lay claim, and no doubt as imaginary as the rest, we will keep, if you don't mind, to that of Arsene Lupin, under which you are more favorably known."

The judge consulted his notes, and continued:

"For, notwithstanding all inquiries, it has been impossible to reconstruct your identity. You present the case, almost unparalleled in our modern society, of a man without a past. We do not know who you are, whence you

come, where your childhood was spent — in short, we know nothing about you. You sprang up suddenly, three years ago, from an uncertain source, to reveal yourself as Arsene Lupin — that is to say, as a curious compound of intelligence and perversity, of criminality and generosity. The data which we have concerning you before that time are of the nature of suppositions. It seems probable that the so−called Rostat, who, eight years ago, was acting as assistant to Dickson, the conjurer, was none other than Arsene Lupin. It seems probable that the Russian student who, six years ago, used to attend Dr. Altier's laboratory at St. Louis' Hospital, and who often astonished the master by the ingenious character of his hypotheses on bacteriology and by the boldness of his experiments in the diseases of the skin — it seems probable that he too was none other than Arsene Lupin. So was the professor of Japanese wrestling, who established himself in Paris long before jiu−jitsu had been heard of. So, we believe, was the racing cyclist who won the great prize at the Exhibition, took his ten thousand francs, and has never been seen since. So, perhaps, was the man who saved so many people from burning at the Charity Bazaar, helping them through the little dormer window... and robbing them of their belongings."

The judge paused for a moment, and concluded:

"Such was that period which seems to have been devoted entirely to a careful preparation for the struggle upon which you had embarked against society, a methodical apprenticeship in which you improved your force, your energy, and your skill to the highest pitch of perfection. Do you admit the accuracy of these facts?"

During this speech the defendant had shifted from foot to foot, with rounded back, and arms hanging slackly before him. As the light increased the spectators were able to distinguish his extreme emaciation, his sunken jaws, his curiously prominent cheek−bones, his earthen countenance, mottled with little red stains, and framed in a sparse and straggling beard. Prison had greatly aged and withered him. The clean−cut profile, the attractive, youthful features which had so often been reproduced in the papers, had passed away beyond all recognition.

He seemed not to have heard the question. It was twice repeated to him. At last he raised his eyes, appeared to think, and then, making a violent effort, muttered:

"Desire Baudru."

The judge laughed.

"I fail to follow exactly the system of defence which you have adopted, Arsene Lupin. If it be to play the irresponsible imbecile, you must please yourself. As far as I am concerned, I shall go straight to the point without troubling about your fancies.

And he enumerated in detail the robberies, swindles, and forgeries ascribed to Arsene Lupin. Occasionally he put a question to the prisoner. The latter gave a grunt or made no reply. Witness after witness entered the box. The evidence of several of them was insignificant; others delivered more important testimony; but all of them had one characteristic in common, which was that each contradicted the other. The trial was shrouded in a puzzling obscurity until Chief−Inspector Ganimard was called, when the general interest woke up.

Nevertheless, the old detective caused a certain disappointment from the first. He seemed not so much shy — he was too old a hand for that — as restless and ill at ease. He kept turning his eyes with visible embarrassment towards the prisoner. However, with his two hands resting on the ledge of the box, he described the incidents in which he had taken part, his pursuit of Lupin across Europe, his arrival in America. And the crowded court listened to him greedily, as it would have listened to the story of the most exciting adventures. But towards the close of his evidence, twice over, after alluding to his interviews with Arsene Lupin, he stopped with an absent and undecided air.

It was obvious that he was under the influence of some obsession. The judge said:

"If you are not feeling well, you can stand down and continue your evidence later."

"No, no, only..."

He stopped, took a long and penetrating look at the prisoner, and said:

"Might I be allowed to see the prisoner more closely? There is a mystery which I want to clear up."

He stepped across to the dock, gazed at the prisoner longer still, concentrating all his attention upon him, and returned to the witness−box. Then, in a solemn voice, he said:

"May it please the court, I swear that the man before me is not Arsene Lupin."

A great silence greeted these words. The judge, at first taken aback, exclaimed:

"What do you mean? What are you saying? You are mad!"

The inspector declared, deliberately:

"At first sight one might be deceived by a likeness which, I admit, exists; but it needs only a momentary examination. The nose, the mouth, the hair, the color of the skin: why, it's not Arsene Lupin at all. And look at the eyes: did he ever have those drunkard's eyes?"

"Come, come, explain yourself, witness. What do you mean?"

"I don't know. He must have substituted in his place and stead some poor wretch who would have been found guilty in his place and stead... unless this man is an accomplice."

This unexpected denouement caused the greatest sensation in court. Cries of laughter and astonishment rose from every side. The judge gave instructions for the attendance of the examining magistrate, the governor of the Sante, and the warders — and suspended the sitting.

After the adjournment M. Bouvier and the governor, on being confronted with the prisoner, declared that there was only a very slight resemblance in features between the man and Arsene Lupin.

"But, in that case," cried the judge, "who is this man? Where does he come from? How does he come to be in the dock?"

The two warders from the Sante were called. To the general astonishment, they recognized the prisoner, whom it had been their business to watch by turns. The judge drew a breath.

But one of the warders went on to say:

"Yes, yes, I think it's the man."

"What do you mean by saying you think?"

"Well, I hardly ever saw him. He was handed over to me at night, and for two months he was always lying on his bed with his face to the wall."

"But before those two months?"

"Oh, before that, he was not in Cell 24."

The governor of the prison explained:

"We changed his cell after his attempted escape."

"But you, as governor, must have seen him since the last two months."

"No, I had no occasion to see him... he kept quiet."

"And this man is not the prisoner who was given into your keeping?"

"No."

"Then who is he?"

"I don't know."

"We have, therefore, to do with a substitution of personalities effected two months ago. How do you explain it?"

"I can't explain it."

"Then..."

In despair the judge turned to the prisoner, and, in a coaxing voice, said:

"Prisoner, cannot you explain to me how and since when you come to be in the hands of the law?"

It seemed as though this benevolent tone disarmed the mistrust or stimulated the understanding of the man. He strove to reply. At last, skillfully and kindly questioned, he succeeded in putting together a few sentences which revealed that, two months before, he had been taken to the police−station and charged with vagrancy. He spent a night and a morning in the cells. Being found to possess a sum of seventy−five centimes, he was dismissed. But as he was crossing the yard two officers had caught him by the arm and taken him to the prison−van. Since that time he had been living in Cell 24.... He had been comfortable.... Had had plenty to eat.... Had slept pretty well.... So he had not protested....

All this seemed probable. Amid laughter and a great effervescence of spirits the judge adjourned the case to another sitting for further inquiries.

The inquiries forthwith revealed the existence of an entry in the gaol−book to the effect that, eight weeks previously, a man of the name of Desire Baudru had spent the night at the police−station. He was released the next day, and left the station at two o'clock in the afternoon. Well, at two o'clock on that day, Arsene Lupin, after undergoing his final examination, had left the police−station in the prison−van for the Sante.

Had the warders made a mistake? Had they themselves, in an inattentive moment, deceived by the superficial likeness, substituted this man for their prisoner? This seemed hardly possible in view of the length of their

service.

Had the substitution been planned in advance? Apart from the fact that the disposition localities made this almost unrealizable, it would have been necessary, in that case, that Baudru should be an accomplice, and cause himself to be arrested with the precise object of taking Arsene Lupin's place. But, then, by what miracle could a plan of this sort have succeeded, based, as it was, entirely on a series of improbable chances, of fortuitous meetings and fabulous mistakes?

Desire Baudru was subjected to the anthropometrical test: there was not a single record corresponding with his description. Besides, traces of him were easily discovered. He was known at Courbevoie, at Asnieres, at Levallois. He lived by begging, and slept in one of those rag−pickers' huts of which there are so many near the Barriere des Ternes. He had disappeared from sight for about a year.

Had he been suborned by Arsene Lupin? There were no grounds for thinking so. And even if this were so, it threw no light upon the prisoner's escape. The marvel remained as extraordinary as before. Of a score of suppositions put forward in explanation, not one was satisfactory. Of the escape alone there was no doubt: an incomprehensible, sensational escape, in which the public as well as the authorities felt the effect of a long preparation, a combination of wonderfully dove−tailed actions. And the upshot of it all was to justify Arsene Lupin's boastful prophecy:

"I shall not be present at my trial."

After a month of careful investigations the puzzle continued to present the same inscrutable character. Still, it was impossible to keep that poor wretch of a Baudru indefinitely locked up. To try him would have been absurd — what charge was there against him? The magistrate signed the order for his release. But the head of the detective service resolved to keep an active supervision upon his movements.

The idea was suggested by Ganimard. In his opinion, there was complicity and no accident in the matter. Baudru was an instrument that Arsene Lupin had employed with his amazing skill. With Baudru at large, they might hope, through him, to come upon Arsene Lupin, or, at least, upon one of his gang.

Inspectors Folenfant and Dieuzy were told off as assistants to Ganimard, and one foggy morning in January the prison gates were thrown open to Desire Baudru.

At first he seemed rather embarrassed, and walked like a man who has no very precise idea as to how to employ his time. He went down the Rue de la Sante and the Rue Saint−Jacques. Stopping outside an old−clothes shop, he took off his jacket and waistcoat, sold his waistcoat for a few sous, put on his jacket again, and went on.

He crossed the Seine. At the Chatelet an omnibus passed him. He tried to get into it. It was full. The ticket−collector advised him to take a number. He entered the waiting−room.

Ganimard beckoned to his two men, and, keeping his eyes on the office, said, quickly:

"Stop a cab... no, two cabs, that's better. I'll take one of you with me. We'll follow him."

The men did as they were told. Baudru, however, did not appear. Ganimard went into the waiting−room: there was no one there.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered. "I forgot the other door."

The office, as a matter of fact, is connected with the other office in the Rue Saint−Martin. Ganimard rushed through the communicating passage. He was just in time to catch sight of Baudru on the top of the omnibus from Batignolles to the Jardin des Plantes, which was turning the corner of the Rue de Rivoli. He ran after the omnibus and caught it up. But he had lost his two assistants, and was continuing the pursuit alone.

In his rage he felt like taking Baudru by the collar without further form or ceremony. Was it not by premeditation and thanks to an ingenious trick that the so−called idiot had separated him from his two auxiliaries? He looked at Baudru. The man was dozing where he sat, and his head shook from right to left. His mouth was half open, his face wore an incredible expression of stupidity. No, this was not an adversary capable of taking old Ganimard in; chance had favored him, that was all.

At the Carrefour des Galeries−Lafayette, Baudru changed from the omnibus to the La Muette tram−car. Ganimard followed his example. They went along the Boulevard Haussmann and the Avenue Victor−Hugo. Baudru alighted at the stopping−place at La Muette, and, with a lounging step, entered the Bois de Boulogne.

He passed from one alley to another, retraced his steps, and went on again. What was he looking for? Had he an object in view?

After an hour of these manoeuvres he seemed tired and worn out. Catching sight of a bench, he sat down upon

it. The spot was not far from Auteuil, on the brink of a little lake hidden among the trees, and was absolutely deserted. Half an hour elapsed. At last, losing patience, Ganimard resolved to enter into conversation.

He therefore went up and took a seat by Baudru's side. He lit a cigarette, drew a pattern in the sand with the end of his walking−stick, and said:

"A cold day."

Silence. And suddenly in this silence a peal of laughter rang out — a peal of glad and happy laughter, the laughter of a child seized with a fit of laughter, and utterly unable to keep from laughing, laughing, laughing. Ganimard felt his hair literally and positively stand on end on his head. That laugh, that infernal laugh, which he knew so well!...

With an abrupt movement he caught the man by the lapels of his jacket, and gave him a violent and penetrating look — looked at him even more closely than he had done at the criminal court; and, in truth, it was no longer the man he had seen. It was the man, but, at the same time, it was the other, the real man.

Aided by the wish which is father to the thought, he rediscovered the glowing light in the eyes, he filled in the sunken features, he saw the real flesh under the wizened skin, the real mouth through the grimace which deformed it. And it was the other's eyes, it was the other's mouth, it was — it was, above all — his keen, lively, mocking, witty expression, so bright and so young!

"Arsene Lupin! Arsene Lupin!" he stammered.

And in a sudden access of rage he caught him by the throat and tried to throw him down. Notwithstanding his fifty years, he was still a man of uncommon vigor, whereas his adversary seemed quite out of condition. And what a master−stroke it would be if he succeeded in bringing him back!

The struggle was short. Arsene Lupin hardly made a movement in defence and Ganimard let go as promptly as he had attacked. His right arm hung numbed and lifeless by his side.

"If they taught you jiu−jitsu at the Quai des Orfevres," said Lupin, "you would know that they call this movement uli−shi−ghi in Japanese." And he added, coldly: "Another second and I should have broken your arm, and you would have had no more than you deserve. What! You, an old friend, whom I esteem, before whom I reveal my incognito of my own accord, would you abuse my confidence? It's very wrong of you!... Hullo, what's the matter now?"

Ganimard was silent. This escape, for which he held himself responsible — was it not he who, by his sensational evidence, had diverted the ends of justice? — this escape seemed to him to mark the disgrace of his career. A tear trickled slowly down his cheek towards his gray mustache.

"Why, goodness me, Ganimard, don't take on like that! If you hadn't spoken I should have arranged for some one else to speak. Come, come, how could I have allowed them to find a verdict against Desire Baudru?"

"So it was you that were there?" muttered Ganimard. "And it is you that are here?"

"Yes, I, I, no one but me."

"Is it possible?"

"Oh, one needn't be a wizard for that. It is enough, as that worthy judge said, to prepare one's self for a dozen years or so in order to be ready for every eventuality."

"But your face? Your eyes?"

"You can understand that when I worked for eighteen months at St. Louis' with Dr. Altier it was not for love of art. I felt that the man who would one day have the honor of calling himself Arsene Lupin ought to be exempt from the ordinary laws of personal appearance and identity. You can modify your appearance as you please. A hypodermic injection of paraffin puffs up your skin to just the extent desired. Pyrogallic acid turns you into a Cherokee Indian. Celandine juice adorns you with blotches and pimples of the most pleasing kind. A certain chemical process affects the growth of your hair and beard, another the sound of your voice. Add to that, two months of dieting in Cell 24, incessant practice, at opening my mouth with this particular grimace and carrying my head at this angle and my back at this stoop. Lastly, five drops of atrophine in the eyes to make them haggard and dilated, and the trick is done!"

"I can't see how the warders..."

"The change was slow and progressive. They could never have noticed its daily evolution."

"But Desire Baudru...?"

"Baudru is a real person. He is a poor, harmless beggar whom I met last year, and whose features are really

not quite unlike my own. Foreseeing an always possible arrest, I placed him in safe−keeping, and applied myself from the first to picking out the points of dissimilarity between us, so as to diminish these in myself as far as I could. My friends made him pass a night at the police−station in such a way that he left it at about the same time as I did and the coincidence could be easily established. For, observe, it was necessary that his passage should be traceable, else the lawyers would have wanted to know who I was; whereas, by offering them that excellent Baudru I made it inevitable — do you follow me? — inevitable that they should jump at him, in spite of the insurmountable difficulties of a substitution — prefer to believe in that substitution rather than admit their ignorance."

"Yes, yes, that's true," muttered Ganimard.

"And then," cried Arsene Lupin, "I held a formidable trump in my hand, a card which I had prepared from the start: the universal expectation of my escape! And there you see the clumsy mistake into which you and all of you fell in this exciting game which the law and I were playing, with my liberty for the stakes: you again thought that I was bragging, that I was intoxicated with my successes, like the veriest greenhorn! Fancy me, Arsene Lupin, guilty of such weakness! And, just as in the Cahorn case, you failed to say to yourselves: 'As soon as Arsene Lupin proclaims from the house−tops that he means to escape he must have some reason that obliges him to proclaim it.' But, hang it all, don't you see that, in order to escape... without escaping, it was essential that people should believe beforehand in my escape, that it should be an article of faith, an absolute conviction, a truth clear as daylight? And that is what it became, in accordance with my will. Arsene Lupin intended to escape, Arsene Lupin did not intend to be present at his trial. And when you stood up and said, 'That man is not Arsene Lupin,' it would have been beyond human nature for all those present not at once to believe that I was not Arsene Lupin. Had only one person expressed a doubt, had only one person uttered this simple reservation, 'But suppose it is Arsene Lupin?'... that very moment I should have been lost. They had only to bend over and look at me, not with the idea that I was not Arsene Lupin, as you and the rest did, but with the idea that I might be Arsene Lupin, and, in spite of all my precautions, I should have been recognized. But I was quite easy in my mind. It was logically and psychologically impossible for anybody to have that simple little idea."

He suddenly seized Ganimard's hand.

"Look here, Ganimard, confess that, a week after our interview at the Sante prison, you stayed in for me, at four o'clock, as I asked you to?"

"And your prison−van?" said Ganimard, evading the question.

"Bluff, mere bluff. My friends had faked up that old discarded van and substituted it for the other, and they wanted to try the experiment. But I knew that it was impracticable without the co−operation of exceptional circumstances. Only I thought it useful to complete this attempted escape and to give it the proper publicity. A first escape, boldly planned, gave to the second the full value of an escape realized in advance."

"So the cigar..."

"Was scooped out by myself; and the knife, too."

"And the notes?"

"Written by me."

"And the mysterious correspondent?"

"She and I were one. I can write any hand I please."

Ganimard thought for a moment, and said:

"How was it that, when they took Baudru's measurements in the anthropometrical room, these were not found to coincide with the record of Arsene Lupin?"

"Arsene Lupin's record does not exist."

"Nonsense!"

"Or, at least, it is not correct. This is a question to which I have devoted a good deal of study. The Bertillon system allows for, first, a visual description — and you have seen that this is not infallible — and, next, a description by measurements: measurements of the head, the fingers, the ears, and so on. There is nothing to be done against that."

"So?..."

"So I had to pay. Before my return from America one of the clerks of the staff accepted a definite bribe to enter one false measurement at the start. This is enough to throw the whole system out of gear, and to cause a

record to stray into a compartment diametrically opposite to the compartment in which it ought to go. The Baudru record could not, therefore, possibly agree with the Arsene Lupin record."

There was another silence, and then Ganimard asked:

"And what are you going to do now?"

"Now!" exclaimed Lupin. "I am going to take a rest, feed myself up and gradually become myself again. It's all very well to be Baudru or another, to change your personality as you would your boots, and to select your appearance, your voice, your expression, your handwriting. But there comes a time when you cease to know yourself amid all these changes, and that is very sad. I feel at present as the man must have felt who lost his shadow. I am going to look for myself... and to find myself."

He walked up and down. The daylight was waning. He stopped in front of Ganimard.

"We've said all that we had to say to each other, I suppose?"

"No," replied the inspector. "I should like to know if you intend to publish the truth about your escape... and the mistake I made..."

"Oh, no one will ever know that it was Arsene Lupin that was released. I have too great an interest to serve in heaping up the most mysterious darkness around me, and I should not dream of depriving my flight of its almost miraculous character. So have no fear, my dear friend; and good−bye. I am dining out to−night, and have only just time to dress."

"I thought you were so anxious for a rest."

"Alas, there are social engagements from which it is impossible to escape. My rest must begin to−morrow."

"And where are you dining, may I ask?"

"At the British Embassy."