813

MAURICE LEBLANC

translated by
ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

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ABOUT AUTHOR



Maurice Leblanc (1864-1941)

"The Mastermind Behind the Gentleman-Burglar"

Maurice Marie Émile Leblanc was a profound French novelist and short story writer whose creation of the charming, elusive master thief Arsène Lupin left an indelible mark on world detective fiction. Operating during the vibrant era of Belle Époque France, Leblanc redefined the boundaries of crime literature by introducing a protagonist who was not a defender of the law, but a brilliant outlaw with a strict moral code.

Early Life and Literary Ambitions:

Born on December 11, 1864, in Rouen, Normandy, Leblanc was the son of a wealthy Italian ship-owner. Growing up in a prosperous household, he was deeply influenced by the rich cultural atmosphere of 19th-century France. Although his father strongly pushed him to pursue a practical career in the local manufacturing industry, Leblanc's heart belonged entirely to literature.

In his twenties, he abandoned his studies and moved to Paris to immerse himself in the bohemian literary scene. His early works consisted of psychological novels and short stories heavily influenced by masters of French realism, such as Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant. While these early efforts earned him critical praise and respect from fellow intellectuals, they achieved very little commercial success, leaving Leblanc struggling financially for nearly two decades.

The Birth of Arsène Lupin:

Leblanc's destiny changed forever in 1905. Pierre Lafitte, the editor of the newly launched popular magazine *Je sais tout*, approached Leblanc with a specific request: to write a crime story modeled after the immense British success of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.

Instead of creating another brilliant detective, Leblanc turned the concept completely on its head. In July 1905, he published ***The Arrest of Arsène Lupin*** (*L'Arrestation d'Arsène Lupin*). The story introduced a charismatic, aristocratic thief who stole only from the corrupt, rich, and elite, using wit, disguise, and immaculate manners instead of violence. The character was an instant, overwhelming sensation. Readers demanded more, and what was meant to be a single short story quickly transformed into a lifelong literary phenomenon.

The Literary World of Lupin:

Leblanc's writing perfectly captured the spirit of his time. The *Arsène Lupin* universe combined the romance of the fading 19th century with the rapid technological advances of the early 20th century, featuring automobiles, wireless telegraphs, and modern steamships.

Leblanc famously blurred the lines between fictional universes by introducing Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective into his stories. Following legal threats from Doyle's lawyers, Leblanc cleverly rearranged the letters to create **"Sherlock Holmes"**, turning the British detective into a brilliant but frequently outsmarted rival to Lupin.

Over the course of nearly thirty years, Leblanc dedicated his career to expanding this universe, writing over twenty novels and numerous short story collections featuring the gentleman-burglar.

In recognition of his immense contributions to French literature and cultural export, Maurice Leblanc was awarded the prestigious *Légion d'honneur* by the French government.

Most Notable Works:

While Leblanc wrote several standalone science-fiction and mystery novels, his legacy rests primarily on the following masterpieces:

- ***The Extraordinary Adventures of Arsène Lupin, Gentleman-Burglar*** **(1907)**: The foundational collection of the first nine short stories that introduced Lupin's genius, disguises, and daring escapes to the world.
- ***Arsène Lupin versus Sherlock Holmes*** **(1908)**: A legendary battle of wits between the world's greatest detective and France's most elusive thief.
- ***The Hollow Needle*** **(1909)**: Widely considered Leblanc's finest novel, where Lupin uncovers a historic secret chamber used by the kings of France, hidden inside a famous rock formation in Normandy.
- ***813*** **(1910)**: A darker, epic, and complex masterpiece that sees Lupin entangled in international politics, secret treaties, and a mysterious murder plot.
- ***The Crystal Stopper*** **(1912)**: A high-stakes

political thriller where a vulnerable Lupin must use every ounce of his intellect to save his accomplices from the guillotine.

Later Years and Legacy:

As the years progressed, Leblanc grew somewhat resentful of his creation, feeling that Lupin had completely overshadowed his serious psychological fiction. Yet, he continued to write for his millions of devoted fans worldwide. In 1939, following the outbreak of World War II, Leblanc fled Paris and moved to the safety of Perpignan in southern France. He passed away there from pneumonia on November 6, 1941, at the age of 76.

Today, Maurice Leblanc is celebrated as a pioneer of the caper story and the anti-hero archetype. His creation, Arsène Lupin, remains an immortal pop-culture icon, continuously adapted into global television series, anime, movies, and video games, proving that the charm of the gentleman-burglar is truly timeless.

PREFACE

A Cryptic Cipher. A Triple Murder.

The Darkest Game Arsène Lupin Has Ever Played.

A wealthy diamond king is brutally murdered in a locked Paris hotel room, leaving behind a mysterious package, a sheet of paper with the number "813," and a corpse bearing the calling card of Arsène Lupin. But for the first time in his career, the gentleman-burglar is completely innocent. Framed by a ruthless, invisible mastermind who leaves a trail of blood across Europe, Lupin must step out of the shadows not just to steal, but to clear his own name before the police—and a sinister enemy—trap him forever.

What starts as a clever theft quickly escalates into a high-stakes political conspiracy involving secret international treaties, imperial crown jewels, and a deadly cipher that could alter the map of Europe. To solve the enigma of "813," Lupin must deploy every disguise, unlock every secret chamber, and push his brilliant mind to its absolute limits. But as the bodies pile up, he realizes his adversary is just as brilliant, twice as cruel, and always one step ahead.

Experience the absolute masterpiece of Maurice Leblanc’s legendary series. Darker, faster, and more unpredictable than any previous adventure, *813* is a breathless psychological thriller that blends political intrigue with brilliant deduction, keeping you guessing until the final, shocking revelation.

I

THE TRAGEDY AT THE PALACE HOTEL

Mr. Kesselbach stopped short on the threshold of the sitting-room, took his secretary's arm and, in an anxious voice, whispered:

"Chapman, someone has been here again."

"Surely not, sir," protested the secretary. "You have just opened the hall-door yourself; and the key never left your pocket while we were lunching in the restaurant."

"Chapman, someone has been here again," Mr. Kesselbach repeated. He pointed to a traveling-bag on the mantelpiece. "Look, I can prove it. That bag was shut. It is now open."

Chapman protested.

"Are you quite sure that you shut it, sir? Besides, the bag contains nothing but odds and ends of no value, articles of dress. …"

"It contains nothing else, because I took my pocketbook out before we went down, by way of precaution. … But for that. … No, Chapman, I tell you, someone has been here while we were at lunch."

There was a telephone on the wall. He took down the receiver:

"Hallo! … I'm Mr. Kesselbach. … Suite 415 … That's right. … Mademoiselle, would you please put me on to the Prefecture of Police … the detective department. … I know the number … one second … Ah, here it is! Number 822.48. … I'll hold the line."

A moment later he continued:

"Are you 822.48? I should like a word with M. Lenormand, the chief of the detective-service. My name's Kesselbach. … Hullo! … Yes, the chief detective knows what it's about. He has given me leave to ring him up. … Oh, he's not there? … To whom am I speaking? … Detective-sergeant Gourel? … You were there yesterday, were you not, when I called on M. Lenormand? Well, the same thing that I told M. Lenormand yesterday has occurred again today. … Someone has entered the suite which I am occupying. And, if you come at once, you may be able to discover some clues. … In an hour or two? All right; thanks. … You have only to ask for suite 415. … Thank you again."

Rudolf Kesselbach, nicknamed alternatively the King of Diamonds and the Lord of the Cape, possessed a fortune estimated at nearly twenty millions sterling. For the past week, he had occupied suite 415, on the fourth floor of the Palace Hotel, consisting of three rooms, of which the two larger, on the right, the sitting-room and the principal bedroom, faced the avenue; while the other, on the left, in which Chapman, the secretary, slept, looked out on the Rue de Judée.

Adjoining this bedroom, a suite of five rooms had been reserved for Mrs. Kesselbach, who was to leave Monte

Carlo, where she was at present staying, and join her husband the moment she heard from him.

Rudolf Kesselbach walked up and down for a few minutes with a thoughtful air. He was a tall man, with a ruddy complexion, and still young; and his dreamy eyes, which showed pale blue through his gold-rimmed spectacles, gave him an expression of gentleness and shyness that contrasted curiously with the strength of the square forehead and the powerfully-developed jaws.

He went to the window: it was fastened. Besides, how could anyone have entered that way? The private balcony that ran round the flat broke off on the right and was separated on the left by a stone channel from the balconies in the Rue de Judée.

He went to his bedroom: it had no communication with the neighboring rooms. He went to his secretary's bedroom: the door that led into the five rooms reserved for Mrs. Kesselbach was locked and bolted.

"I can't understand it at all, Chapman. Time after time I have noticed things here … funny things, as you must admit. Yesterday, my walking-stick was moved. … The day before that, my papers had certainly been touched. … And yet how was it possible? …

"It is not possible, sir!" cried Chapman, whose honest, placid features displayed no anxiety. "You're imagining things, that's all. … You have no proof, nothing but impressions, to go upon. … Besides, look here: there is no way into this suite except through the entrance-lobby. Very well. You had a special key made on the day of our arrival:

and your own man, Edwards, has the only duplicate. Do you trust him?"

"Of course I do! … He's been with me for ten years! … But Edwards goes to lunch at the same time that we do; and that's a mistake. He must not go down, in future, until we come back."

Chapman gave a slight shrug of the shoulders. There was no doubt about it, the Lord of the Cape was becoming a trifle eccentric, with those incomprehensible fears of his. What risk can you run in an hotel, especially when you carry no valuables, no important sum of money on you or with you?

They heard the hall-door opening. It was Edwards. Mr. Kesselbach called him:

"Are you dressed, Edwards? Ah, that's right! … I am expecting no visitors today, Edwards … or, rather, one visitor only, M. Gourel. Meantime, remain in the lobby and keep an eye on the door. Mr. Chapman and I have some serious work to do."

The serious work lasted for a few minutes, during which Mr. Kesselbach went through his correspondence, read three or four letters and gave instructions how they were to be answered. But, suddenly, Chapman, waiting with pen poised, saw that Mr. Kesselbach was thinking of something quite different from his correspondence. He was holding between his fingers and attentively examining a pin, a black pin bent like a fishhook:

"Chapman," he said, "look what I've found on the table. This bent pin obviously means something. It's a proof, a material piece of evidence. You can't pretend now that no

one has been in the room. For, after all, this pin did not come here of itself."

"Certainly not," replied the secretary. "It came here through me."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, it's a pin which I used to fasten my tie to my collar. I took it out last night, while you were reading, and I twisted it mechanically."

Mr. Kesselbach rose from his chair, with a great air of vexation, took a few steps and stopped.

"You're laughing at me, Chapman, I feel you are … and you're quite right. … I won't deny it, I have been rather … odd, since my last journey to the Cape. It's because … well … you don't know the new factor in my life … a tremendous plan … a huge thing … I can only see it, as yet, in the haze of the future … but it's taking shape for all that … and it will be something colossal. … Ah, Chapman, you can't imagine. … Money I don't care a fig for: I have money, I have too much money. … But this, this means a great deal more; it means power, might, authority. If the reality comes up to my expectations, I shall be not only Lord of the Cape, but lord of other realms as well. … Rudolf Kesselbach, the son of the Augsburg ironmonger, will be on a par with many people who till now have looked down upon him. … He will even take precedence of them, Chapman; he will, take precedence of them, mark my words … and, if ever I …"

He interrupted himself, looked at Chapman as though he regretted having said too much and, nevertheless, carried away by his excitement, concluded:

“You now understand the reasons of my anxiety, Chapman. … Here, in this brain, is an idea that is worth a great deal … and this idea is suspected perhaps … and I am being spied upon. … I’m convinced of it. …”

A bell sounded.

“The telephone,” said Chapman.

“Could it,” muttered Kesselbach, “by any chance be … ?” He took down the instrument. “Hullo! … Who? The Colonel? Ah, good! Yes, it’s I. … Any news? … Good! … Then I shall expect you. … You will come with one of your men? Very well. … What? No, we shan’t be disturbed. … I will give the necessary orders. … It’s as serious as that, is it? … I tell you, my instructions will be positive … my secretary and my man shall keep the door; and no one shall be allowed in. … You know the way, don’t you? … Then don’t lose a minute.”

He hung up the receiver and said:

“Chapman, there are two gentlemen coming. Edwards will show them in. …”

“But M. Gourel … the detective-sergeant. … ?”

“He will come later … in an hour. … And, even then, there’s no harm in their meeting. So send Edwards down to the office at once, to tell them. I am at home to nobody … except two gentlemen, the Colonel and his friend, and M. Gourel. He must make them take down the names.”

Chapman did as he was asked. When he returned to the room, he found Mr. Kesselbach holding in his hand an envelope, or, rather, a little pocket-case, in black morocco leather, apparently empty. He seemed to hesitate, as though

he did not know what to do with it. Should he put it in his pocket or lay it down elsewhere? At last he went to the mantelpiece and threw the leather envelope into his traveling-bag:

"Let us finish the mail, Chapman. We have ten minutes left. Ah, a letter from Mrs. Kesselbach! Why didn't you tell me of it, Chapman? Didn't you recognize the handwriting?"

He made no attempt to conceal the emotion which he felt in touching and contemplating that paper which his wife had held in her fingers and to which she had added a look of her eyes, an atom of her scent, a suggestion of her secret thoughts. He inhaled its perfume and, unsealing it, read the letter slowly in an undertone, in fragments that reached Chapman's ears:

"Feeling a little tired. … Shall keep my room today. … I feel so bored. … When can I come to you? I am longing for your wire. …"

"You telegraphed this morning, Chapman? Then Mrs. Kesselbach will be here tomorrow, Wednesday."

He seemed quite gay, as though the weight of his business had been suddenly relieved and he freed from all anxiety. He rubbed his hands and heaved a deep breath, like a strong man certain of success, like a lucky man who possessed happiness and who was big enough to defend himself.

"There's someone ringing, Chapman, someone ringing at the hall door. Go and see who it is."

But Edwards entered and said:

"Two gentlemen asking for you, sir. They are the ones. …"

"I know. Are they there, in the lobby?"

"Yes, sir."

"Close the hall-door and don't open it again except to M. Gourel, the detective-sergeant. You go and bring the gentlemen in, Chapman, and tell them that I would like to speak to the Colonel first, to the Colonel alone."

Edwards and Chapman left the room, shutting the door after them. Rudolf Kesselbach went to the window and pressed his forehead against the glass.

Outside, just below his eyes, the carriages and motorcars rolled along in parallel furrows, marked by the double line of refuges. A bright spring sun made the brass-work and the varnish gleam again. The trees were putting forth their first green shoots; and the buds of the tall chestnuts were beginning to unfold their newborn leaves.

"What on earth is Chapman doing?" muttered Kesselbach. "The time he wastes in palavering! …"

He took a cigarette from the table, lit it and drew a few puffs. A faint exclamation escaped him. Close before him stood a man whom he did not know.

He started back:

"Who are you?"

The man—he was a well-dressed individual, rather smart-looking, with dark hair, a dark moustache and hard eyes—the man gave a grin:

"Who am I? Why, the Colonel!"

“No, no. … The one I call the Colonel, the one who writes to me under that … adopted … signature … is not you!”

“Yes, yes … the other was only … But, my dear sir, all this, you know, is not of the smallest importance. The essential thing is that I … am myself. And that, I assure you, I *am*!”

“But your name, sir? …”

“The Colonel … until further orders.”

Mr. Kesselbach was seized with a growing fear. Who was this man? What did he want with him?

He called out:

“Chapman!”

“What a funny idea, to call out! Isn’t my company enough for you?”

“Chapman!” Mr. Kesselbach cried again. “Chapman! Edwards!”

“Chapman! Edwards!” echoed the stranger, in his turn. “What are you doing? You’re wanted!”

“Sir, I ask you, I order you to let me pass.”

“But, my dear sir, who’s preventing you?”

He politely made way. Mr. Kesselbach walked to the door, opened it and gave a sudden jump backward. Behind the door stood another man, pistol in hand. Kesselbach stammered:

“Edwards … Chap …”

He did not finish. In a corner of the lobby he saw his secretary and his servant lying side by side on the floor, gagged and bound.

Mr. Kesselbach, notwithstanding his nervous and excitable nature, was not devoid of physical courage; and the sense of a definite danger, instead of depressing him, restored all his elasticity and vigor. Pretending dismay and stupefaction, he moved slowly back to the chimneypiece and leant against the wall. His hand felt for the electric bell. He found it and pressed the button without removing his finger.

"Well?" asked the stranger.

Mr. Kesselbach made no reply and continued to press the button.

"Well? Do you expect they will come, that the whole hotel is in commotion, because you are pressing that bell? Why, my dear sir, look behind you and you will see that the wire is cut!"

Mr. Kesselbach turned round sharply, as though he wanted to make sure; but, instead, with a quick movement, he seized the traveling-bag, thrust his hand into it, grasped a revolver, aimed it at the man and pulled the trigger.

"Whew!" said the stranger. "So you load your weapons with air and silence?"

The cock clicked a second time and a third, but there was no report.

“Three shots more, Lord of the Cape! I shan’t be satisfied till you’ve lodged six bullets in my carcass. What! You give up? That’s a pity … you were making excellent practice!”

He took hold of a chair by the back, spun it round, sat down astraddle and, pointing to an armchair, said:

“Won’t you take a seat, my dear sir, and make yourself at home? A cigarette? Not for me, thanks: I prefer a cigar.”

There was a box on the table: he selected an Upmann, light in color and flawless in shape, lit it and, with a bow:

“Thank you! That’s a perfect cigar. And now let’s have a chat, shall we?”

Rudolf Kesselbach listened to him in amazement. Who could this strange person be? … Still, at the sight of his visitor sitting there so quiet and so chatty, he became gradually reassured and began to think that the situation might come to an end without any need to resort to violence or brute force.

He took out a pocketbook, opened it, displayed a respectable bundle of banknotes and asked:

“How much?”

The other looked at him with an air of bewilderment, as though he found a difficulty in understanding what Kesselbach meant. Then, after a moment, he called:

“Marco!”

The man with the revolver stepped forward.

“Marco, this gentleman is good enough to offer you a few bits of paper for your young woman. Take them, Marco.”

Still aiming his revolver with his right hand, Marco put out his left, took the notes and withdrew.

"Now that this question is settled according to your wishes," resumed the stranger, "let us come to the object of my visit. I will be brief and to the point. I want two things. In the first place, a little black morocco pocket-case, shaped like an envelope, which you generally carry on you. Secondly, a small ebony box, which was in that traveling-bag yesterday. Let us proceed in order. The morocco case?"

"Burnt."

The stranger knit his brows. He must have had a vision of the good old days when there were peremptory methods of making the contumacious speak:

"Very well. We shall see about that. And the ebony box?"

"Burnt."

"Ah," he growled, "you're getting at me, my good man!" He twisted the other's arm with a pitiless hand. "Yesterday, Rudolf Kesselbach, you walked into the Crédit Lyonnais, on the Boulevard des Italiens, hiding a parcel under your overcoat. You hired a safe … let us be exact: safe No. 16, in recess No. 9. After signing the book and paying your safe-rent, you went down to the basement; and, when you came up again, you no longer had your parcel with you. Is that correct?"

"Quite."

"Then the box and the pocket-case are at the Crédit Lyonnais?"

"No."

“Give me the key of your safe.”

“No.”

“Marco!”

Marco ran up.

“Look sharp, Marco! The quadruple knot!”

Before he had even time to stand on the defensive, Rudolf Kesselbach was tied up in a network of cords that cut into his flesh at the least attempt which he made to struggle. His arms were fixed behind his back, his body fastened to the chair and his legs tied together like the legs of a mummy.

“Search him, Marco.”

Marco searched him. Two minutes after, he handed his chief a little flat, nickel-plated key, bearing the numbers 16 and 9.

“Capital. No morocco pocket-case?”

“No, governor.”

“It is in the safe. Mr. Kesselbach, will you tell me the secret cipher that opens the lock?”

“No.”

“You refuse?”

“Yes.”

“Marco!”

“Yes, governor.”

“Place the barrel of your revolver against the gentleman’s temple.”

“It’s there.”

“Now put your finger to the trigger.”

“Ready.”

“Well, Kesselbach, old chap, do you intend to speak?”

“No.”

“I’ll give you ten seconds, and not one more. Marco!”

“Yes, governor.”

“In ten seconds, blow out the gentleman’s brains.”

“Right you are, governor.”

“Kesselbach, I’m counting. One, two, three, four, five, six …”

Rudolph Kesselbach made a sign.

“You want to speak?”

“Yes.”

“You’re just in time. Well, the cipher … the word for the lock?”

“Dolor.”

“Dolor … Dolor … Mrs. Kesselbach’s name is Dolores, I believe? You dear boy! … Marco, go and do as I told you. … No mistake, mind! I’ll repeat it: meet Jérôme at the omnibus office, give him the key, tell him the word: Dolor. Then, the two of you, go to the Crédit Lyonnais. Jérôme is to walk in alone, sign the name-book, go down to the basement and bring away everything in the safe. Do you quite understand?”

“Yes, governor. But if the safe shouldn’t open; if the word Dolor …”

“Silence, Marco. When you come out of the Crédit Lyonnais, you must leave Jérôme, go to your own place and telephone the result of the operation to me. Should the word Dolor by any chance fail to open the safe, we (my friend Rudolf Kesselbach and I) will have one … *last* … interview. Kesselbach, you’re quite sure you’re not mistaken?”

“Yes.”

“That means that you rely upon the futility of the search. We shall see. Be off, Marco!”

“What about you, governor?”

“I shall stay. Oh, I’m not afraid! I’ve never been in less danger than at this moment. Your orders about the door were positive, Kesselbach, were they not?”

“Yes.”

“Dash it all, you seemed very eager to get that said! Can you have been trying to gain time? If so, I should be caught in a trap like a fool. …” He stopped to think, looked at his prisoner and concluded, “No … it’s not possible … we shall not be disturbed …”

He had not finished speaking, when the doorbell rang. He pressed his hand violently on Rudolf Kesselbach’s mouth:

“Oh, you old fox, you were expecting someone!”

The captive’s eyes gleamed with hope. He could be heard chuckling under the hand that stifled him.

The stranger shook with rage:

“Hold your tongue, or I’ll strangle you! Here, Marco, gag him! Quick! … That’s it!”

The bell rang again. He shouted, as though he himself were Kesselbach and as though Edwards were still there:

“Why don’t you open the door, Edwards?”

Then he went softly into the lobby and, pointing to the secretary and the manservant, whispered:

“Marco, help me shift these two into the bedroom … over there … so that they can’t be seen.”

He lifted the secretary. Marco carried the servant.

“Good! Now go back to the sitting-room.”

He followed him in and at once returned to the lobby and said, in a loud tone of astonishment:

“Why, your man’s not here, Mr. Kesselbach. … No, don’t move … finish your letter. … I’ll go myself.”

And he quietly opened the hall-door.

“Mr. Kesselbach?”

He found himself faced by a sort of jovial, bright-eyed giant, who stood swinging from one foot to the other and twisting the brim of his hat between his fingers. He answered:

“Yes, that’s right. Who shall I say … ?”

“Mr. Kesselbach telephoned. … He expects me. …”

“Oh, it’s you. … I’ll tell him. … Do you mind waiting a minute? … Mr. Kesselbach will speak to you.”

He had the audacity to leave the visitor standing on the threshold of the little entrance-hall, at a place from which he could see a portion of the sitting-room through the open door, and, slowly, without so much as turning round, he entered the room, went to his confederate by Mr. Kesselbach's side and whispered:

"We're done! It's Gourel, the detective. …"

The other drew his knife. He caught him by the arm:

"No nonsense! I have an idea. But, for God's sake, Marco, understand me and speak in your turn. Speak *as if you were Kesselbach*. … You hear, Marco! You *are* Kesselbach."

He expressed himself so coolly, so forcibly and with such authority that Marco understood, without further explanation, that he himself was to play the part of Kesselbach. Marco said, so as to be heard:

"You must apologize for me, my dear fellow. Tell M. Gourel I'm awfully sorry, but I'm over head and ears in work. … I will see him tomorrow morning, at nine … yes, at nine o'clock punctually."

"Good!" whispered the other. "Don't stir."

He went back to the lobby, found Gourel waiting, and said:

"Mr. Kesselbach begs you to excuse him. He is finishing an important piece of work. Could you possibly come back at nine o'clock tomorrow morning?"

There was a pause. Gourel seemed surprised, more or less bothered and undecided. The other man's hand

clutched the handle of a knife at the bottom of his pocket. At the first suspicious movement, he was prepared to strike.

At last, Gourel said:

"Very well. … At nine o'clock tomorrow. … But, all the same … However, I shall be here at nine tomorrow. …"

And, putting on his hat, he disappeared down the passage of the hotel.

Marco, in the sitting-room, burst out laughing:

"That was jolly clever of you, governor! Oh, how nicely you spoofed him!"

"Look alive, Marco, and follow him. If he leaves the hotel, let him be, meet Jérôme at the omnibus-office as arranged … and telephone."

Marco went away quickly.

Then the man took a water-bottle on the chimneypiece, poured himself out a tumblerful, which he swallowed at a draught, wetted his handkerchief, dabbed his forehead, which was covered with perspiration, and then sat down beside his prisoner and, with an affectation of politeness, said:

"But I must really have the honor, Mr. Kesselbach, of introducing myself to you."

And, taking a card from his pocket, he said: "Allow me. … Arsène Lupin, gentleman-burglar."

The name of the famous adventurer seemed to make the best of impressions upon Mr. Kesselbach. Lupin did not fail to observe the fact and exclaimed:

"Aha, my dear sir, you breathe again! Arsène Lupin is a delicate, squeamish burglar. He loathes bloodshed, he has never committed a more serious crime than that of annexing other people's property … a mere peccadillo, eh? And what you're saying to yourself is that he is not going to burden his conscience with a useless murder. Quite so. … But will your destruction be so useless as all that? Everything depends on the answer. And I assure you that I'm not larking at present. Come on, old chap!"

He drew up his chair beside the armchair, removed the prisoner's gag and, speaking very plainly:

"Mr. Kesselbach," he said, "on the day when you arrived in Paris you entered into relations with one Barbareux, the manager of a confidential inquiry agency; and, as you were acting without the knowledge of your secretary, Chapman, it was arranged that the said Barbareux, when communicating with you by letter or telephone, should call himself 'the Colonel.' I hasten to tell you that Barbareux is a perfectly honest man. But I have the good fortune to number one of his clerks among my own particular friends. That is how I discovered the motive of your application to Barbareux and how I came to interest myself in you and to make a search or two here, with the assistance of a set of false keys … in the course of which search or two, I may as well tell you, I did not find what I was looking for."

He lowered his voice and, with his eyes fixed on the eyes of his prisoner, watching his expression, searching his secret thoughts, he uttered these words:

“Mr. Kesselbach, your instructions to Barbareux were that he should find a man hidden somewhere in the slums of Paris who bears or used to bear the name of Pierre Leduc. The man answers to this brief description: height, five feet nine inches; hair and complexion, fair; wears a moustache. Special mark: the tip of the little finger of the left hand is missing, as the result of a cut. Also, he has an almost imperceptible scar on the right cheek. You seem to attach enormous importance to this man’s discovery, as though it might lead to some great advantage to yourself. Who is the man?”

“I don’t know.”

The answer was positive, absolute. Did he know or did he not know? It made little difference. The great thing was that he was determined not to speak.

“Very well,” said his adversary, “but you have fuller particulars about him than those with which you furnished Barbareux.”

“I have not.”

“You lie, Mr. Kesselbach. Twice, in Barbareux’s presence, you consulted papers contained in the morocco case.”

“I did.”

“And the case?”

“Burnt.”

Lupin quivered with rage. The thought of torture and of the facilities which it used to offer was evidently passing through his mind again.

“Burnt? But the box? … Come, own up … confess that the box is at the Crédit Lyonnais.”

“Yes.”

“And what’s inside it?”

“The finest two hundred diamonds in my private collection.”

This statement did not seem to displease the adventurer.

“Aha, the finest two hundred diamonds! But, I say, that’s a fortune! … Yes, that makes you smile. … It’s a trifle to you, no doubt. … And your secret is worth more than that. … To you, yes … but to me? …”

He took a cigar, lit a match, which he allowed to go out again mechanically, and sat for some time thinking, motionless.

The minutes passed.

He began to laugh:

“I dare say you’re hoping that the expedition will come to nothing and that they won’t open the safe? … Very likely, old chap! But, in that case, you’ll have to pay me for my trouble. I did not come here to see what sort of figure you cut in an armchair. … The diamonds, since diamonds there appear to be … or else the morocco case. … There’s your dilemma.” He looked at his watch. “Half an hour. … Hang it all! … Fate is moving very slowly. … But there’s nothing for you to grin at,

Mr. Kesselbach. I shall not go back empty-handed, make no mistake about that! … At last!"

It was the telephone-bell. Lupin snatched at the receiver and, changing the sound of his voice, imitated the rough accent of his prisoner:

"Yes, Rudolf Kesselbach … you're speaking to him. … Yes, please, mademoiselle, put me on. … Is that you, Marco? … Good. … Did it go off all right? … Excellent! … No hitch? … My best compliments! … Well, what did you pick up? … The ebony box? … Nothing else? … No papers? … Tut, tut! … And what's in the box? … Are they fine diamonds? … Capital, capital! … One minute, Marco, while I think. … You see, all this. … If I were to tell you my opinion. … Wait, don't go away … hold the line. …"

He turned round.

"Mr. Kesselbach, are you keen on your diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Would you buy them back of me?"

"Possibly."

"For how much? Five hundred thousand francs?"

"Five hundred thousand … yes."

"Only, here's the rub: how are we to make the exchange? A cheque? No, you'd swindle me … or else I'd swindle you. … Listen. On the day after tomorrow, go to the Crédit Lyonnais in the morning, draw out your five hundred banknotes of a thousand each and go for a walk in the Bois, on the Auteuil side. … I shall have the diamonds in a bag: that's handier. … The box shows too much. …"

Kesselbach gave a start:

"No, no … the box, too. … I want everything. …"

"Ah," cried Lupin, shouting with laughter, "you've fallen into the trap! … The diamonds you don't care about … they can be replaced. … But you cling to that box as you cling to your skin. … Very well, you shall have your box … on the word of Arsène … you shall have it tomorrow morning, by parcel post!"

He went back to the telephone:

"Marco, have you the box in front of you? … Is there anything particular about it? … Ebony inlaid with ivory. … Yes, I know the sort of thing. … Japanese, from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. … No mark? … Ah, a little round label, with a blue border and a number! … Yes, a shop-mark … no importance. And is the bottom of the box thick? … Not very thick. … Bother! No false bottom, then? … Look here, Marco: just examine the ivory inlay on the outside … or, rather, no, the lid." He reveled with delight. "The lid! That's it, Marco! Kesselbach blinked his eyes just now. … We're burning! … Ah, Kesselbach, old chap, didn't you see me squinting at you? You silly fellow!" And, to Marco, "Well, what do you see? … A looking-glass inside the lid? … Does it slide? … Is it on hinges? … No! … Well, then, break it. … Yes, yes, I tell you to break it. … That glass serves no purpose there … it's been added since!" He lost patience. "Mind your own business, idiot! … Do as I say! …"

He must have heard the noise which Marco made at the other end of the wire in breaking the glass, for he shouted, in triumph.

“Didn’t I tell you, Mr. Kesselbach, that we should find something? … Hullo! Have you done it? … Well? … A letter? Victory! All the diamonds in the Cape and old man Kesselbach’s secret into the bargain!”

He took down the second receiver, carefully put the two discs to his ears and continued:

“Read it to me, Marco, read it to me slowly. … The envelope first. … Good. … Now, repeat.” He himself repeated, “ ‘Copy of the letter contained in the black morocco case.’ And next? Tear the envelope, Marco. … Have I your permission, Mr. Kesselbach? It’s not very good form, but, however … Go on, Marco, Mr. Kesselbach gives you leave. … Done it? … Well, then, read it out.”

He listened and, with a chuckle:

“The deuce! That’s not quite as clear as a pikestaff! Listen. I’ll repeat: a plain sheet of paper folded in four, the folds apparently quite fresh. … Good. … At the top of the page, on the right, these words: ‘Five feet nine, left little finger cut.’ And so on. … Yes, that’s the description of Master Pierre Leduc. In Kesselbach’s handwriting, I suppose? … Good. … And, in the middle of the page, this word in printed capitals: ‘APOON.’ Marco, my lad, leave the paper as it is and don’t touch the box or the diamonds. I shall have done with our friend here in ten minutes and I shall be with you in twenty. … Oh, by the way, did you send back the motor for me? Capital! So long!”

He replaced the instrument, went into the lobby and into the bedroom, made sure that the secretary and the manservant had not unloosed their bonds and, on the other

hand, that they were in no danger of being choked by their gags. Then he returned to his chief prisoner.

He wore a determined and relentless look:

"We've finished joking, Kesselbach. If you don't speak, it will be the worse for you. Have you made up your mind?"

"What about?"

"No nonsense, please. Tell me what you know."

"I know nothing."

"You lie. What does this word 'APOON' mean?"

"If I knew, I should not have written it down."

"Very well; but whom or what does it refer to? Where did you copy it? Where did you get it from?"

Mr. Kesselbach made no reply. Lupin, now speaking in nervous, jerky tones, resumed:

"Listen, Kesselbach, I have a proposal to make to you. Rich man, big man though you may be, there is not so much difference between us. The son of the Augsburg ironmonger and Arsène Lupin, prince of burglars, can come to an understanding without shame on either side. I do my thieving indoors; you do yours on the Stock Exchange. It's all much of a muchness. So here we are, Kesselbach. Let's be partners in this business. I have need of you, because I don't know what it's about. You have need of me, because you will never be able to manage it alone. Barbareux is an ass. I am Lupin. Is it a bargain?"

No answer. Lupin persisted, in a voice shaking with intensity:

"Answer, Kesselbach, is it a bargain? If so, I'll find your Pierre Leduc for you in forty-eight hours. For he's the man you're after, eh? Isn't that the business? Come along, answer! Who is the fellow? Why are you looking for him? What do you know about him?"

He calmed himself suddenly, laid his hand on Kesselbach's shoulder and, harshly:

"One word only. Yes or no?"

"No!"

He drew a magnificent gold watch from Kesselbach's fob and placed it on the prisoner's knees. He unbuttoned Kesselbach's waistcoat, opened his shirt, uncovered his chest and, taking a steel dagger, with a gold-crusted handle, that lay on the table beside him, he put the point of it against the place where the pulsations of the heart made the bare flesh throb:

"For the last time?"

"No!"

"Mr. Kesselbach, it is eight minutes to three. If you don't answer within eight minutes from now, you are a dead man!"

The next morning, Sergeant Gourel walked into the Palace Hotel punctually at the appointed hour. Without stopping, scorning to take the lift, he went up the stairs. On the fourth floor he turned to the right, followed the passage and rang at the door of 415.

Hearing no sound, he rang again. After half-a-dozen fruitless attempts, he went to the floor office. He found a headwaiter there:

"Mr. Kesselbach did not sleep here last night. We have not seen him since yesterday afternoon."

"But his servant? His secretary?"

"We have not seen them either."

"Then they also did not sleep in the hotel?"

"I suppose not."

"You suppose not? But you ought to be certain."

"Why? Mr. Kesselbach is not staying in the hotel; he is at home here, in his private flat. He is not waited on by us, but by his own man; and we know nothing of what happens inside."

"That's true. … That's true. …"

Gourel seemed greatly perplexed. He had come with positive orders, a precise mission, within the limits of which his mind was able to exert itself. Outside those limits he did not quite know how to act:

"If the chief were here," he muttered, "if the chief were here. …"

He showed his card and stated his quality. Then he said, on the off-chance:

"So you have not seen them come in?"

"No."

"But you saw them go out?"

"No, I can't say I did."

"In that case, how do you know that they went out?"

"From a gentleman who called yesterday afternoon."

"A gentleman with a dark mustache?"

"Yes. I met him as he was going away, about three o'clock. He said: 'The people in 415 have gone out. Mr. Kesselbach will stay at Versailles tonight, at the Reservoirs; you can send his letters on to him there.' "

"But who was this gentleman? By what right did he speak?"

"I don't know."

Gourel felt uneasy. It all struck him as rather queer.

"Have you the key?"

"No. Mr. Kesselbach had special keys made."

"Let's go and look."

Gourel rang again furiously. Nothing happened. He was about to go when, suddenly, he bent down and clapped his ear to the keyhole:

"Listen. … I seem to hear … Why, yes … it's quite distinct. … I hear moans. …"

He gave the door a tremendous blow with his fist.

"But, sir, you have not the right …"

"Oh, hang the right!"

He struck the door with renewed force, but to so little purpose that he abandoned the attempt forthwith:

“Quick, quick, a locksmith!”

One of the waiters started off at a run. Gourel, blustering and undecided, walked to and fro. The servants from the other floors collected in groups. People from the office, from the manager’s department arrived. Gourel cried:

“But why shouldn’t we go in though the adjoining rooms? Do they communicate with this suite?”

“Yes; but the communicating doors are always bolted on both sides.”

“Then I shall telephone to the detective-office,” said Gourel, to whose mind obviously there existed no salvation without his chief.

“And to the commissary of police,” observed someone.

“Yes, if you like,” he replied, in the tone of a gentleman who took little or no interest in that formality.

When he returned from the telephone, the locksmith had nearly finished trying the keys. The last worked the lock. Gourel walked briskly in.

He at once hastened in the direction from which the moans came and hit against the bodies of Chapman the secretary, and Edwards the manservant. One of them, Chapman, had succeeded, by dint of patience, in loosening his gag a little and was uttering short, stifled moans. The other seemed asleep.

They were released. But Gourel was anxious:

“Where’s Mr. Kesselbach?”

He went into the sitting-room. Mr. Kesselbach was sitting strapped to the back of the armchair, near the table. His head hung on his chest.

"He has fainted," said Gourel, going up to him. "He must have exerted himself beyond his strength."

Swiftly he cut the cords that fastened the shoulders. The body fell forward in an inert mass. Gourel caught it in his arms and started back with a cry of horror:

"Why, he's dead! Feel … his hands are ice-cold! And look at his eyes!"

Someone ventured the opinion:

"An apoplectic stroke, no doubt … or else heart-failure."

"True, there's no sign of a wound … it's a natural death."

They laid the body on the sofa and unfastened the clothes. But red stains at once appeared on the white shirt; and, when they pushed it back, they saw that, near the heart, the chest bore a little scratch through which had trickled a thin stream of blood.

And on the shirt was pinned a card. Gourel bent forward. It was Arsène Lupin's card, bloodstained like the rest.

Then Gourel drew himself up, authoritatively and sharply:

"Murdered! … Arsène Lupin! … Leave the flat. … Leave the flat, all of you! … No one must stay here or in the bedroom. … Let the two men be removed and seen to elsewhere! … Leave the flat … and don't touch a thing …

"*The chief is on his way! …*"

II

THE BLUE-EDGED LABEL

"Arsène Lupin!"

Gourel repeated these two fateful words with an absolutely petrified air. They rang within him like a knell. Arsène Lupin! The great, the formidable Arsène Lupin. The burglar-king, the mighty adventurer! Was it possible?

"No, no," he muttered, "it's not possible, *because he's dead*!"

Only that was just it … was he really dead?

Arsène Lupin!

Standing beside the corpse, he remained dull and stunned, turning the card over and over with a certain dread, as though he had been challenged by a ghost. Arsène Lupin! What ought he to do? Act? Take the field with his resources? No, no … better not act. … He was bound to make mistakes if he entered the lists with an adversary of that stamp. Besides, the chief was on his way!

The chief was on his way! All Gourel's intellectual philosophy was summed up in that short sentence. An able, persevering officer, full of courage and experience and endowed with Herculean strength, he was one of those who go ahead only when obeying directions and who do good

work only when ordered. And this lack of initiative had become still more marked since M. Lenormand had taken the place of M. Dudouis in the detective-service. M. Lenormand was a chief indeed! With him, one was sure of being on the right track. So sure, even, that Gourel stopped the moment that the chief's incentive was no longer behind him.

But the chief was on his way! Gourel took out his watch and calculated the exact time when he would arrive. If only the commissary of police did not get there first, if only the examining-magistrate, who was no doubt already appointed, or the divisional surgeon, did not come to make inopportune discoveries before the chief had time to fix the essential points of the case in his mind!

"Well, Gourel, what are you dreaming about?"

"The chief!"

M. Lenormand was still a young man, if you took stock only of the expression of his face and his eyes gleaming through his spectacles; but he was almost an old man when you saw his bent back, his skin dry and yellow as wax, his grizzled hair and beard, his whole decrepit, hesitating, unhealthy appearance. He had spent his life laboriously in the colonies as government commissary, in the most dangerous posts. He had there acquired a series of fevers; an indomitable energy, notwithstanding his physical weariness; the habit of living alone, of talking little and acting in silence; a certain misanthropy; and, suddenly, at the age of fifty-five, in consequence of the famous case of the three Spaniards at Biskra, a great and well-earned notoriety.

The injustice was then repaired; and he was straightway transferred to Bordeaux, was next appointed deputy in Paris, and lastly, on the death of M. Dudouis, chief of the detective-service. And in each of these posts he displayed such a curious faculty of inventiveness in his proceedings, such resourcefulness, so many new and original qualities; and above all, he achieved such correct results in the conduct of the last four or five cases with which public opinion had been stirred, that his name was quoted in the same breath with those of the most celebrated detectives.

Gourel, for his part, had no hesitation. Himself a favourite of the chief, who liked him for his frankness and his passive obedience, he set the chief above them all. The chief to him was an idol, an infallible god.

M. Lenormand seemed more tired than usual that day. He sat down wearily, parted the tails of his frock-coat—an old frock-coat, famous for its antiquated cut and its olive-green hue—untied his neckerchief—an equally famous maroon-coloured neckerchief, rested his two hands on his stick, and said:

"Speak!"

Gourel told all that he had seen, and all that he had learnt, and told it briefly, according to the habit which the chief had taught him.

But, when he produced Lupin's card, M. Lenormand gave a start:

"Lupin!"

"Yes, Lupin. The brute's bobbed up again."

"That's all right, that's all right," said M. Lenormand, after a moment's thought.

"That's all right, of course," said Gourel, who loved to add a word of his own to the rare speeches of a superior whose only fault in his eyes was an undue reticence. "That's all right, for at last you will measure your strength with an adversary worthy of you. … And Lupin will meet his master. … Lupin will cease to exist. … Lupin …"

"Ferret!" said M. Lenormand, cutting him short.

It was like an order given by a sportsman to his dog. And Gourel ferreted after the manner of a good dog, a lively and intelligent animal, working under his master's eyes. M. Lenormand pointed his stick to a corner, to an easy chair, just as one points to a bush or a tuft of grass, and Gourel beat up the bush or the tuft of grass with conscientious thoroughness.

"Nothing," said the sergeant, when he finished.

"Nothing for you!" grunted M. Lenormand.

"That's what I meant to say. … I know that, for you, chief, there are things that talk like human beings, real living witnesses. For all that, here is a murder well and duly added to our score against Master Lupin."

"The first," observed M. Lenormand.

"The first, yes. … But it was bound to come. You can't lead that sort of life without, sooner or later, being driven by circumstances to serious crime. Mr. Kesselbach must have defended himself. …"

"No, because he was bound."

"That's true," owned Gourel, somewhat disconcertedly, "and it's rather curious too. … Why kill an adversary who has practically ceased to exist? … But, no matter, if I had collared him yesterday, when we were face to face at the hall-door …"

M. Lenormand had stepped out on the balcony. Then he went to Mr. Kesselbach's bedroom, on the right, and tried the fastenings of the windows and doors.

"The windows of both rooms were shut when I came in," said Gourel.

"Shut, or just pushed to?"

"No one has touched them since. And they are shut, chief."

A sound of voices brought them back to the sitting-room. Here they found the divisional surgeon, engaged in examining the body, and M. Formerie, the magistrate. M. Formerie exclaimed:

"Arsène Lupin! I am glad that at last a lucky chance has brought me into touch with that scoundrel again! I'll show the fellow the stuff I'm made of! … And this time it's a murder! … It's a fight between you and me now, Master Lupin!"

M. Formerie had not forgotten the strange adventure of the Princesse de Lamballe's diadem, nor the wonderful way in which Lupin had tricked him a few years before. The thing had remained famous in the annals of the law-courts. People still laughed at it; and in M. Formerie it had left a just feeling of resentment, combined with the longing for a striking revenge.

“The nature of the crime is self-evident,” he declared, with a great air of conviction, “and we shall have no difficulty in discovering the motive. So all is well. … M. Lenormand, how do you do? … I am delighted to see you. …”

M. Formerie was not in the least delighted. On the contrary, M. Lenormand’s presence did not please him at all, seeing that the chief detective hardly took the trouble to disguise the contempt in which he held him. However, the magistrate drew himself up and, in his most solemn tones:

“So, doctor, you consider that death took place about a dozen hours ago, perhaps more! … That, in fact, was my own idea. … We are quite agreed. … And the instrument of the crime?”

“A knife with a very thin blade, Monsieur le Juge d’Instruction,” replied the surgeon. “Look, the blade has been wiped on the dead man’s own handkerchief. …”

“Just so … just so … you can see the mark. … And now let us go and question Mr. Kesselbach’s secretary and manservant. I have no doubt that their examination will throw some more light on the case.”

Chapman, who together with Edwards, had been moved to his own room, on the left of the sitting-room, had already recovered from his experiences. He described in detail the events of the previous day, Mr. Kesselbach’s restlessness, the expected visit of the Colonel and, lastly, the attack of which they had been the victims.

“Aha!” cried M. Formerie. “So there’s an accomplice! And you heard his name! … Marco, you say? … This is very

important. When we've got the accomplice, we shall be a good deal further advanced. …"

"Yes, but we've not got him," M. Lenormand ventured to remark.

"We shall see. … One thing at a time. … And then, Mr. Chapman, this Marco went away immediately after M. Gourel had rung the bell?"

"Yes, we heard him go."

"And after he went, did you hear nothing else?"

"Yes … from time to time, but vaguely. … The door was shut."

"And what sort of noises did you hear?"

"Bursts of voices. The man …"

"Call him by his name, Arsène Lupin."

"Arsène Lupin must have telephoned."

"Capital! We will examine the person of the hotel who has charge of the branch exchange communicating with the outside. And, afterward, did you hear him go out, too?"

"He came in to see if we were still bound; and, a quarter of an hour later, he went away, closing the hall-door after him."

"Yes, as soon as his crime was committed. Good. … Good. … It all fits in. … And, after that?"

"After that, we heard nothing more. … The night passed. … I fell asleep from exhaustion. … So did Edwards. … And it was not until this morning …"

"Yes, I know. … There, it's not going badly … it all fits in. …"

And, marking off the stages of his investigation, in a tone as though he were enumerating so many victories over the stranger, he muttered thoughtfully:

"The accomplice … the telephone … the time of the murder … the sounds that were heard. … Good. … Very good. … We have still to establish the motive of the crime. … In this case, as we have Lupin to deal with, the motive is obvious. M. Lenormand, have you noticed the least sign of anything being broken open?"

"No."

"Then the robbery must have been effected upon the person of the victim himself. Has his pocketbook been found?"

"I left it in the pocket of his jacket," said Gourel.

They all went into the sitting-room, where M. Formerie discovered that the pocketbook contained nothing but visiting-cards and papers establishing the murdered man's identity.

"That's odd. Mr. Chapman, can you tell us if Mr. Kesselbach had any money on him?"

"Yes. On the previous day—that is, on Monday, the day before yesterday—we went to the Crédit Lyonnais, where Mr. Kesselbach hired a safe …"

"A safe at the Crédit Lyonnais? Good. … We must look into that."

"And, before we left, Mr. Kesselbach opened an account and drew out five or six thousand francs in banknotes."

"Excellent … that tells us just what we want to know."

Chapman continued:

"There is another point, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction. Mr. Kesselbach, who for some days had been very uneasy in his mind—I have told you the reason: a scheme to which he attached the utmost importance—Mr. Kesselbach seemed particularly anxious about two things. There was, first, a little ebony box, which he put away safely at the Crédit Lyonnais; and, next, a little black morocco notecase, in which he kept a few papers."

"And where is that?"

"Before Lupin's arrival, he put it, in my presence, into that travelling-bag."

M. Formerie took the bag and felt about in it. The notecase was not there. He rubbed his hands:

"Ah, everything fits in! … We know the culprit, the conditions and the motive of the crime. This case won't take long. Are we quite agreed upon everything, M. Lenormand?"

"Upon not one single thing."

There was a moment of stupefaction. The commissary of police had arrived: and, behind him, in spite of the constables keeping the door, a troop of journalists, and the hotel staff had forced their way in and were standing in the entrance-lobby.

Notorious though the old fellow was for his bluntness—a bluntness which was not without a certain discourtesy and

which had already procured him an occasional reprimand in high quarters—the abruptness of this reply took everyone aback. And M. Formerie in particular appeared utterly nonplussed:

"Still," he said, "I can see nothing that isn't quite simple. Lupin is the thief. …"

"Why did he commit the murder?" M. Lenormand flung at him.

"In order to commit the theft."

"I beg your pardon; the witnesses' story proves that the theft took place before the murder. Mr. Kesselbach was first bound and gagged, then robbed. Why should Lupin, who has never resorted to murder, choose this time to kill a man whom he had rendered helpless and whom he had already robbed?"

The examining-magistrate stroked his long, fair whiskers, with the gesture customary to him when a question seemed incapable of solution. He replied in a thoughtful tone:

"There are several answers to that. …"

"What are they?"

"It depends … it depends upon a number of facts as yet unknown. … And, moreover, the objection applies only to the nature of the motives. We are agreed as to the remainder."

"No."

This time, again, the denial was flat, blunt, almost impolite; so much so that the magistrate was absolutely nonplussed, dared not even raise a protest, and remained

abashed in the presence of this strange collaborator. At last he said:

"We all have our theories. I should like to know yours."

"I have none."

The chief detective rose and, leaning on his stick, took a few steps through the room. All the people around him were silent. … And it was rather curious, in a group in which, after all, his position was only that of an auxiliary, a subordinate, to see this ailing, decrepit, elderly man dominate the others by the sheer force of an authority which they had to feel, even though they did not accept it. After a long pause he said:

"I should like to inspect the rooms which adjoin this suite."

The manager showed him the plan of the hotel. The only way out of the right-hand bedroom, which was Mr. Kesselbach's, was through the little entrance-hall of the suite. But the bedroom on the left, the room occupied by the secretary, communicated with another apartment.

"Let us inspect it," said M. Lenormand.

M. Formerie could not help shrugging his shoulders and growling:

"But the communicating door is bolted and the window locked."

"Let us inspect it," repeated M. Lenormand.

He was taken into the apartment, which was the first of the five rooms reserved for Mrs. Kesselbach. Then, at his