MEMOIRS OF ARSÈNE LUPIN

MAURICE LEBLANC

UNITED STATES

1925

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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

Before He Was a Legend, He Was a Man.

Discover the Origin of Arsène Lupin.

This is the story of the first adventure of Arsène Lupin, and undoubtedly it would have been published before the stories of the others if he had not so often and so resolutely opposed it.

"No," he would say, "there are one or two little matters yet to be settled between the Countess of Cagliostro and me. We must wait."

The waiting lasted longer than he foresaw. More than a quarter of a century passed before the final settlement; and only today am I permitted to relate the frightful duel of love and hate which brought a boy of twenty to grips with Cagliostro's daughter.

* * *

Before he became the world's most elusive gentleman-thief, he was merely Ralph d'Andrésy—a passionate, headstrong twenty-year-old trying to win the hand of his forbidden first love, Clarice d'Étiges. But when he stumbles upon a dark, estate conspiracy to murder a mysterious woman, he is violently thrust into a world of

ancient secrets. The target of the plot is none other than Josephine Balsamo, the captivating Countess of Cagliostro, a dangerous woman rumored to possess supernatural longevity and the key to a monumental, centuries-old treasure.

Caught in a deadly three-way race between a ruthless secret society, a vengeful countess, and his own moral compass, the young Lupin must quickly learn to outsmart his enemies to survive. In this brilliant crucible of danger and deception, the traits that would later define the master thief are forged. Torn between the pure devotion of his first love and the dark, hypnotic influence of the Countess, he must use every ounce of his emerging intellect to decipher a legendary enigma that could grant ultimate power.

Experience the definitive origin story crafted by Maurice Leblanc, capturing a youthful Lupin balancing between absolute confidence and desperate self-doubt. Richly atmospheric, romantic, and charged with gothic suspense, this spectacular novel uncovers the hidden past of literature's greatest rogue, revealing the exact moment a gentleman adventurer was born.

I

ARSÈNE LUPIN AT TWENTY

Ralph d'Andresy extinguished the lamp, and thrust his bicycle behind a bank. At that moment the clock of Benouville struck three.

In the deep shadow of the night he followed the lane which led to the estate of La Haie d'Etigues and so came to the wall which ran round it. He waited a little—the sound of horses pawing the ground, of wheels which rang on the pavement of the courtyard, the sound of harness bells. Then the two leaves of the big door were thrown open and a carriage passed out. It passed so quickly that Ralph barely caught the sound of men's voices and perceived the barrel of gun before the vehicle reached the high road and took the way to Etretat.

"Come," said he. "Shooting gulls is an attractive sport and the rock where they shoot them is a long way off. At last I'm going to know the meaning of this improvised shooting-party and of all these odd comings and goings."

He took his way along the boundary wall to the left, turned a corner and then another, and stopped forty yards along the wall. In his hand he held two keys. The first of them opened a small, low door. He went through it up a staircase hollowed out of the wall, half fallen to ruin, which,

running along its left wing, had formed one of the old defences of the château. The second key opened for him a secret door in the first floor of the château itself.

He lit a small bull's-eye lantern and without taking any special precautions, since he knew that the staff of servants lived in the other wing and that Clarice d'Etigues, the only daughter of the Baron, had her rooms on the second floor, went down a passage which brought him to a large study. In that very room some weeks previously he had asked the Baron for his daughter's hand in marriage. His proposal had been received with an explosion of indignant anger of which he retained a most disagreeable recollection.

A mirror showed him the pale face of a young man, even paler than usual. However, inured to emotion, he remained master of himself and coolly addressed himself to his task.

He was not long about it. In the course of his interview with the Baron he had observed that that gentleman now and then cast a glance at a large mahogany roll-top desk of which the top had not been drawn down. Ralph knew all the places in which it is possible to put a secret drawer and all the mechanical devices that work such secret drawers. In a very short time he discovered in a cranny of the desk a tiny drawer which held a letter written on very thin paper and rolled up into the shape of a cigarette. No signature. No address.

He studied this letter, which at first appeared to him too commonplace for anyone to have taken so much trouble to hide it, and after working on it with the most minute care, giving the most earnest consideration to certain words which seemed significant and ignoring certain phrases

evidently intended to fill the gaps between them, he was able to disentangle the following:

I found at Rouen traces of our enemy and I have had published in the local newspapers a story that a peasant in the vicinity of Etretat has dug up in his field an old copper candlestick with seven branches. At once she telegraphed to the livery stable at Etretat to send, at three o'clock in the afternoon on the twelfth, a brougham to meet her at Fécamp station.

On the morning of that day I will see that the livery stable receives another telegram, countermanding this order. Therefore it will be your brougham that she will find at Fécamp station and which will bring her to us, under a sufficient escort, at the very moment at which we are holding our meeting. We shall be able to constitute ourselves a tribunal and pronounce upon her a relentless sentence.

In those days in which the greatness of the end justified the means, the punishment would have been immediate. Dead men tell no tales. Choose what end you please; but remember the conclusions to which we came during our last interview and bear in mind that the success of our enterprises and our very existence itself depends on this infernal creature.

Be prudent. Arrange a shooting-party to divert suspicion. I will arrive by way of le Hâvre at four o'clock exactly, with two of our friends. Do not destroy this letter. You will give it back to me.

"An excess of precaution is a mistake," thought Ralph. "If the Baron's correspondent had not been so distrustful, the

Baron would have burnt this letter and I should not have known about this scheme of abduction, this scheme of an illegal tribunal and even, heaven help us! this scheme of assassination … Hang it! My future father-in-law, devout Catholic though he may be, seems to me to be entangled in combinations that are not Catholic at all. … Will he go as far as murder? … All this is devilishly serious and may very well give me a hold on him."

He rubbed his hands. The business gave him considerable satisfaction and excited in him no great astonishment, since for several days he had been noticing some queer facts. He resolved then to return to his inn and sleep there and then to come back in good time to learn what the Baron and his guests were plotting and who this "infernal creature" was whom they desired to suppress.

He rerolled the letter, cigarette-wise, carefully, and put it back in the drawer, but, instead of departing, he sat down in front of a small round table on which there was a photograph of Clarice, and drawing it directly in front of him contemplated it with a profound tenderness. Clarice d'Etigues, very little younger than he was himself … eighteen. Voluptuous lips … eyes full of dreams … a clear-skinned, pink, and delicate fair face, crowned by a mass of fair hair such as the hair of those little girls who run about the roads in the neighborhood of Caux … and such a sweet expression and such charm!

Ralph's eyes grew fonder and fonder as he gazed. Thus, naturally, the desire came to him to be with the object of his adoration. Why not? Clarice was alone in her isolated suite of rooms above him. Twice already, making use of the keys

which she had entrusted to him, he had made his way to them in the afternoon. What was there to hinder him now? No sound they would make could reach the servants. The Baron would not return till the afternoon. Why go away? Compromise her? Why should he compromise her? No one could possibly know that he had been with her.

Besides, it was such a delightful night. The moon, nearly at the full, was shining with all its brightness. On such a night, under an even brighter moon and clearer sky, Romeo had made love to Juliet. He went quickly, but quietly, up the stairs.

Before the closed door of her boudoir he hesitated. Suppose someone *should* learn that he had been with her? No one could. He knocked with a rather uncertain hand. He waited. He knocked again louder and again waited. There was a sound in the room. The door opened, revealing Clarice, candle in hand, dressed in a lace peignoir, her charming face enframed in the silken mass of fair hair loosely held together by a ribbon.

"Ralph?" she murmured softly. "It seemed impossible. But I knew it was you. But—you oughtn't to have come."

"I couldn't keep away. I wanted so to be with you. It's quite safe. No one saw me come. No one can know I'm here," he said in pleasing accents.

She smiled at him adorably and stepped back. He entered and shut the door and turned the key. He took the candle from her, blew it out, and set it on the table. Then, gently, he put his arms around her, drew her to him, and kissed her eyes and her lips with long, lingering kisses.

Then he drew her to a couch in front of the long, low window, and they sank down on to it, his arm round her waist, and her arm round his neck; and in the intervals between their languorous, passionate kisses, they gazed down on the plain and across the sea bathed in the silver radiance of the queen of the night.

They sat, murmuring to one another the lovely thoughts which their nearness in the night evoked in their ardent souls, thrilling and intoxicated, till the moonlight faded in the golden dawn and the sun rose over the seat.

They had loved one another for three months—since the day of their meeting in the south, where Clarice was spending some time at the home of a schoolgirl friend. Forthwith they felt themselves united by a bond, which was for him the most delightful thing in the world, for her the symbol of slavery which she cherished more and more fondly. From the beginning he appeared to her to be an extraordinarily elusive creature, mysterious, one whom she would never understand. He grieved her by occasional moods of flippancy, of malicious irony, of deep gloom. But in spite of that, what a fascination he had! What a gaiety! What bursts of enthusiasm and youthful exaltation!

All his faults assumed the appearance of qualities in excess; and his vices had the air of virtues ignorant of themselves and about to expand.

After her return to Normandy she was surprised one morning to perceive the slender figure of the young man, perched on a wall in front of her windows. He had chosen an inn a few kilometers away, and from there, almost every

day, he came on his bicycle to find her in the neighborhood of La Haie d'Etigues.

A motherless girl, Clarice was not fortunate in her father, a hard man, gloomy in character, a fanatic in religion, inordinately proud of his title, greedy of gain to the point that the farmers who rented his land looked upon him as an enemy.

When Ralph, who had not even been introduced to him, had the audacity to ask his daughter's hand in marriage, the Baron fell into such a fury with this beardless suitor, without a career and without relations, that he would have horsewhipped him if the young man had not quietly held him with something of the gaze of a tamer of wild beasts.

It was in consequence of this interview and to efface the memory of it from Ralph's spirit that Clarice had entrusted to him the two keys which gave him secret access to her suite.

Later in the morning, pretending that she was not feeling well, she had her midday déjeuner brought up to her boudoir while Ralph hid himself in a room at the end of the corridor. After the meal they returned to the couch in front of the window and renewed the transports of the magical night.

A fresh breeze, rising from the sea and blowing across the high ground, caressed their faces. In front of them, beyond the great park enclosed by the wall, and among the plains all golden with the blossom of the colza, a depression allowed them to see, on the right, the white line of the high cliffs as far as Fécamp, on the left Etretat Bay, Aval Harbor, and the point of the enormous Needle.

A cloud fell on Clarice's spirit. The tears welled up into her eyes.

He said to her gently:

"Don't be sad, my dearest darling. Life is so sweet at our age; and it will be sweeter still for us when we shall have swept away all the obstacles. Don't be sad."

She dried her tears and, gazing at him, tried to smile. He was slender as was she, but broad-shouldered, of a build at once elegant and solid. His face, full of character, displayed a mischievous mouth and eyes shining with gaiety. Wearing knickerbockers and an open jacket over a white woollen sweater, he had an air of incredible suppleness.

"Ralph," she said in a tone of distress, "at this very moment even while you are looking at me, you are not thinking about me! You are not thinking about me any longer, even though you are with me. It hardly seems possible! What are you thinking about, darling?"

He laughed gently and said:

"About your father."

"About my father?"

"Yes: about the Baron d'Etigues and his guests. How on earth can men of their age waste their time killing off poor innocent birds on a rock?"

"It's their amusement."

"Are you sure of that? For my part I'm rather puzzled about the matter. In fact, if we were not in the year of grace 1892 I should be inclined to think rather … You're not going to feel hurt?"

"Go on, dear."

"Well, they have the air of playing at conspirators! Yes; it really is so … the Marquis de Rolleville, Matthew de la Vaupaliere, Count Oscar de Bennetot, Rufus d'Estiers, etc., all these noble lords of the Caux country are up to their necks in a conspiracy!"

She looked at him with incredulous eyes.

"You're talking nonsense, darling," she murmured.

"But you listen so prettily," he replied, assured of her complete ignorance of the plot. "You have such a delightful way of waiting for me to tell you serious things."

"Things about love, darling."

He drew her to him almost roughly.

"The whole of my life is nothing but love for you, darling. If I have other cares, other ambitions, they are to win you outright. Suppose that your father, this conspiracy discovered, is arrested and condemned to death and all at once I save him. After that how would he be able to refuse me his daughter's hand?"

"He will give way some day or other, darling."

"Never! I have no money … no means of support."

"You have your name: Ralph d'Andresy."

"Not even that."

"What do you mean?"

"D'Andresy was my mother's name, which she took again when she became a widow, and at the bidding of her family whom her marriage had outraged."

“Why?” said Clarice somewhat dumbfounded by these unexpected revelations.

“Why? Because my father was only an outsider … as poor as Job … a simple professor … and a professor of what? Of gymnastics, fencing, and boxing!”

“Then what *is* your name?”

“An uncommonly vulgar one.”

“What is it?”

“Arsène Lupin.”

“Arsène Lupin?”

“Yes; it’s hardly a brilliant name, is it? And the best thing to do was to change it, don’t you think?”

Clarice appeared overwhelmed. It made no difference what his name was—to her. But in the eyes of the Baron the particle “de” was the very first qualification of a son-in-law.

She murmured however:

“You ought not to have disowned your father. There’s nothing to be ashamed of in being a professor.”

“Nothing to be ashamed of at all,” said he, laughing cheerfully, but with a rather hard laugh which hurt Clarice. “And I can assure you that I’ve benefited to the greatest possible extent by the lessons in boxing and gymnastics which he gave me when I was still at the bottle. But it may be that my mother had other reasons for denying the noble fellow. But that is nobody’s business.”

He hugged her with a sudden violence and then began to dance and pirouette. Then coming back to her:

“But smile, little girl—laugh!” he exclaimed. “All this is really very funny. So laugh. Arsène Lupin or Ralph d’Andresy, what on earth does it matter? The main thing is to succeed. And I shall succeed. About that there is no doubt. Every fortune-teller I have ever come across has predicted a great future and universal renown for me. Ralph d’Andresy will be a general, or a minister, or an ambassador. … Always supposing that he does not remain Arsène Lupin. It is an affair settled before the throne of Destiny, agreed on, signed by both parties. I am quite ready. Muscles of steel and a number one brain! Come, would you like me to walk on my hands, or carry you about at arms’ length? Or would you prefer that I took your watch without your perceiving it, or shall I recite by heart Homer in Greek and Milton in English? Heavens, how sweet life is! Ralph d’Andresy … Arsène Lupin. The statue with two faces! Which of them will be illumined by glory, the sun of those who really live?”

He stopped short. His lightness seemed all at once to chafe him. Silent, he looked round the quiet little room, the security of which he was troubling, as he had troubled the young girl’s pure and peaceful heart; and with one of those unexpected changes which were the charm of his disposition, he knelt down before Clarice and said to her gravely:

“Forgive me. I did wrong to come here. … But it is not my fault. It is so difficult for me to keep my balance … Good and evil, they attract me in turn. You must help me, Clarice, to choose my path, and you must forgive me if I miss my way.”

She took his head between her hands and in passionate accents cried:

"I have nothing to forgive you, darling. I'm happy. You will cause me bitter suffering—I'm sure of it—and I accept beforehand and joyfully all those sorrows you will bring upon me. Here, take my photo, and act in such a way that you never need to blush when you look at it. For my part, I shall always be just what I am today—your sweetheart and your wife. I love you, Ralph."

She kissed him on the brow. But even now he was again laughing; and as he rose to his feet, he said:

"You have armed your knight, lady. Behold me henceforth invincible and ready to confound my enemies. Appear, men of Navarre! … I enter the lists!"

Ralph's plan—let us drop the name of Arsène Lupin since at that moment, ignorant of his destiny, he himself held it in some contempt—Ralph's plan was very simple. In the park, on the left of the château, and resting against the boundary wall, of which it formerly formed one of the bastions, there was a truncated tower, very low, roofed over, and almost hidden by waves of ivy. Now he had no doubt that the meeting fixed for four o'clock would take place in the great chamber inside it, where the Baron interviewed his tenants. And Ralph had also observed that an opening, an old window or air-hole, looked over the country.

The ascent to it was easy for a young man of his agility. Leaving the château and creeping along under the ivy, he raised himself, thanks to the huge roots, to the opening in the thick wall. He found it deep enough to allow him to stretch himself at full length in it. So placed, nearly twenty feet from the ground, his head hidden by the leaves, he

could not be seen, and he could see the whole of the chamber. It was furnished with a score of chairs, a table, and in the middle of it was set a great bench from some church.

Forty minutes later the Baron entered with his friends. Ralph had foreseen exactly what would happen.

The Baron Godfrey d'Etigues enjoyed the muscular development of a strong man of the music-halls. His face was brick-red and the lower part of it was covered with a red beard. His eyes shone with a strongly vital intelligence. He was accompanied by his cousin, whom Ralph knew by sight, Oscar de Bennetot, who had the same air of the Normandy squire, but was of a commoner and duller type. Both of them appeared to be in a state of considerable excitement.

The Baron walked up and down restlessly and ran over the arrangements: "La Vaupaliere, Rolleville and d'Auppegard are on their way to join us. At four o'clock Beaumagnan will arrive with the Prince of Arcola and de Brie, by way of the park of which I have left the big gate open … And then … then *she* will arrive … if by good luck she falls into the trap."

"That's doubtful," murmured Bennetot.

"Why? She has ordered a brougham; the brougham will be there and she will get into it. D'Ormont, who is driving it, drives her here. At the edge of the four crossroads Rufus d'Estiers jumps on to the step, opens the door, and overpowers the lady. The two of them truss her up. This is bound to happen."

They came right under Ralph's hiding-place; so that he

caught Bennetot's murmur:

"And then?"

"Then I explain the situation to our friends, the part that this woman is playing," growled the Baron.

"And you imagine that you will be able to get them to agree to condemn her?"

"It doesn't matter whether they agree or whether they don't; the result will be the same. Beaumagnan demands it. How can we refuse?" said the Baron.

"That man will be the ruin of us," affirmed Bennetot.

The Baron d'Etigues shrugged his shoulders and protested:

"We need a man like him, to struggle against a woman like her. Is everything ready?"

"Yes. The two boats are on the beach at the bottom of the priests' staircase. The smaller is scuttled and will sink ten minutes after it is set afloat."

"You have put a stone in it?" asked the Baron.

"Yes, a good-sized boulder with a hole in it, through which you can run the rope."

They were silent, casting uneasy glances at the door of the chamber.

Not one of the words they had spoken had escaped the keen ears of Ralph d'Andresy and not one of them had failed to put a keener edge on his already keen curiosity.

"Hang it all! I wouldn't give up this box on the first tier for an Empire," he murmured. "What hot stuff they are! They

talk about murdering as other people talk about putting on a clean collar."

Above all Godfrey d'Etigues astonished him. How could the gentle Clarice be the daughter of this gloomy soul? What end was he trying to compass? What were the dark motives on which he was acting? Hate, greed, the lust for revenge, the instinct of cruelty? He brought to one's mind an executioner of bygone days ready to set about some sinister task. His brick-red face and red beard seemed to be lit up by internal flames.

Then three other guests arrived together. Ralph knew them as frequent visitors at La Haie d'Etigues. They sat down with their backs to the two windows which lighted the chamber as if they desired their faces to be blurred in the shadow.

On the very stroke of four two newcomers entered. One, a man of considerable age and of a soldierly stiffness, tightly buttoned up in a frock coat and wearing on his chin the little beard which in the days of Napoleon III was called an imperial, stopped short on the threshold. Everyone rose and stepped forward to greet the other. Ralph did not doubt for a moment that he was the author of the unsigned letter, the man for whom they were waiting, whom the Baron had called Beaumagnan. Although he was the only one of them to have no title, nor even the "de" before his name, they welcomed him as one welcomes a leader, with a respect which his air domination and his imperious eyes seemed naturally to exact. His face was clean-shaven; his cheeks were hollow; there was in the glances of his fine black eyes a quality of passion. In his manner and in his dress there

was something severe, even ascetic; he had the air of a dignitary of the Church.

He begged them to sit down, apologized for having been unable to bring his friend the Count de Brie, beckoned his companion forward and introduced him:

"The Prince of Arcola. … I believe you know that the Prince of Arcola is one of us, but, as luck would have it, was unable to be present at our meetings and that his activities were exercised at a distance and with the happiest results. Today his evidence is necessary to us, since twice already, in eighteen-seventy, he met the infernal creature who threatens us."

Ralph was conscious of a slight disappointment; working it out, the "infernal creature" must be more than fifty years of age, since her meetings with the Prince of Arcola had taken place two and twenty years before.

Thereupon the Prince sat down beside Oscar de Bennetot; and Beaumagnan drew Godfrey d'Etigues aside. The Baron handed him an envelope, containing doubtless the compromising letter. Then they held in low voices a discussion of a certain liveliness, which Beaumagnan cut short with a gesture of virile command.

"There is no doing anything with the gentlemen," said Ralph to himself. "The verdict is fixed. Dead men tell no tales. The drowning will take place, for it seems quite clear that that is the solution on which he is resolved."

Beaumagnan sat down behind the other conspirators. But before sitting down he said in cold and measured tones:

"You know, my friends, to what a degree this hour is

serious for us. All of us, in complete agreement and of one mind about the magnificent end which we wish to accomplish, have undertaken a common task of immense importance. It appears to us, and rightly, that the interests of our country, those of our party, and those of our religion—I do not separate the one from the others—are linked with the success of our schemes. Now these schemes have for some time been brought up short by the audacious and implacable hostility of a woman, who, being in possession of certain evidence, has set herself to discover the secret which we are on the very point of discovering. If she discovers it before we do, it means that all our efforts have been wasted, utterly. Her or us: there is no room for the two. Let us pray earnestly that the struggle in which we are engaged may be decided in our favor!"

He sat down, and resting his two arms on the back of a chair, bent his tall figure as if he wished to remain unseen.

Some minutes passed.

The silence of these men met together for reasons which should have excited them to lively converse, was absolute, so keenly was the attention of all fixed on the distant noises which came from the surrounding country. The capture of this woman obsessed their minds. They were in a hurry to hold and to see their adversary.

The Baron d'Etigues raised his hand. They began to catch the dull rhythm of a horse's hoofs.

"It is my brougham," he said.

Yes: but was their enemy inside it?

The Baron rose and went to the door. As usual the Park

was empty, since the servants' work kept them busy in the courtyard in front of the château.

The sound of hoofs grew louder. The carriage left the high road and came along the lane. Then it suddenly appeared between the two pillars of the entrance to the Park. The driver waved a reassuring hand; and the Baron exclaimed:

"Victory! They've got her!"

The brougham stopped at the door. D'Ormont, who was driving it, jumped smartly down. Rufus d'Estiers stepped out of it. With the help of the Baron they drew from the interior a woman whose wrists and ankles were bound. A gauze scarf covered her face. They carried her to the church bench which stood in the middle of the chamber.

"Not the least difficulty," said d'Ormont in a tone of triumph. "She came straight out of the train and stepped into the brougham. At the crossroads we tied her up before she had time to let out more than two squeals."

"Remove that scarf," said the Baron; and as D'Ormont stooped to do so, he added: "After all, we may as well restore her freedom of movement. We have her safe."

He himself untied the cords.

D'Ormont raised the veil and uncovered her face.

There came a cry of amazement from the spectators; and Ralph, up in his observation post, from which he had a view of the prisoner in full daylight, was hard put to it not to betray his presence by a similar exclamation, when there was revealed a young woman in all the splendor of her youth and beauty.

Then a voice rose above the murmurs of astonishment. The Prince of Arcola stepped forward, and his starting eyes glaring in a twitching face, stammered:

"It's she! ... It *is* she. ... I recognize her. ... But what a frightful thing it is!"

"What is it?" snapped the Baron. "What's frightful? Explain!"

And the Prince of Arcola uttered these incredible words:

"*She is no older than she was two and twenty years ago!*"

The woman was sitting, and sitting quite upright, her clenched fists resting on her knees. Her hat must have fallen off in the course of the attack on her, and her hair, half-undone, fell behind her in a thick mass, partly held up by a gold comb, while two rolls with tawny gleams in them were drawn back evenly above her brow, and were waved a little above her temples.

Her face was of a wonderful beauty, its lines of an astonishing purity; and it was animated by an expression which, even in her impassibility, even in her fear, appeared to be a smile. With her rather delicate chin, rather high cheek bones, deep-set eyes, and heavy eyelids, she recalled those women of Leonardo da Vinci, or rather of Bernardino Luini, all the charm of whom is in a smile you do not actually see, but which you divine, which at once moves and disquiets you.

She was simply dressed: a dust cloak which she let fall, a gray woollen dress which, fitting tightly, gave the lovely curves of her figure their full value.

“Well!” said Ralph, who could not take his eyes off her, softly to himself. “She appears quite inoffensive, this magnificent and infernal creature! And they’re nine or ten to one against her!”

She scrutinized with keen eyes the group of men round her, d’Etigues and his friends, and strove to see clearly those others in the shadow. Then she said:

“What is it you want? I do not recognize any of you. What have you brought me here for?”

“You’re our enemy,” declared Godfrey d’Etigues.

She shook her head gently.

“Your enemy? There must be some mistake. Are you quite sure that you’re not making a mistake? I am Madame Pellegrini.”

“You’re not Madame Pellegrini.”

“But I assure you …”

“You’re not!” the Baron exclaimed in a loud voice.

Then he added—and the words were little less disconcerting than those uttered a little while before by the Prince of Arcola:

“*Pellegrini was one of the aliases adopted in the eighteenth century by the man whose daughter you pretend to be.*”

She did not answer for a few seconds, seeming to be taken aback by the absurdity of the statement. Then she said tartly:

“Then what is my name—according to you?”

“*Josephine Balsamo, Countess of Cagliostro.*”

II

JOSEPHINE BALSAMO BORN IN 1788

Cagliostro! The astonishing man who puzzled all Europe and so thoroughly upset the Court of France in the reign of Louis XVI! The Queen's necklace … Cardinal de Rohan … Marie Antoinette … some of the most obscure episodes in history!

A strange man, and enigmatic, dowered with a veritable genius for intrigue. A man who exercised a genuine power of domination. A man on whom full light has not yet been thrown. Impostor? Who knows? Have we the right to deny that certain beings of more delicate sensibilities than ourselves can peer into the world of the living and the dead in a fashion which is forbidden to us? Is one to treat as charlatan or fool the man in whose mind rise the memories of past existences, who, recalling what he has seen, reaps the harvest of acquisitions in the past, of lost secrets, and forgotten knowledge, and exploits a power which we call supernatural, but which is merely putting into action, hesitating perhaps and stumbling action, forces of which we are, it may be, on the point of becoming masters?

If Ralph d'Andresy, from the bottom of his post of observation, remained sceptical, if he laughed in his heart, not perhaps without certain reservations, at the fashion in which events were shaping themselves, it seemed that those

taking part in them were accepting on the instant and without question, as realities beyond all discussing, the most extravagant assertions.

Had they then proofs and an understanding of this matter peculiar to themselves? Had they found in her who, according to them, laid claim to be the daughter of Cagliostro, gifts of clairvoyance and divination which, in days gone by, the world attributed to that celebrated worker of wonders, and by reason of them treated him as magician and sorcerer?

Godfrey d'Etigues, who was the only one of them standing, bent towards the young woman and said:

"Your name really is Cagliostro, isn't it?"

She pondered. One would have said that, taking thought how best to defend herself, she was seeking the best counterstroke; that she wished, before definitely plunging into the struggle, to know what weapons the enemy had at his command. Then she answered quietly:

"Nothing compels me to give you an answer, since you have no right whatever to question me. However, why should I deny that on my birth certificate is the name Josephine Pellegrini and that it is my whim to call myself Josephine Balsamo, Countess of Cagliostro? The two names Cagliostro and Pellegrini complete the personality of Joseph Balsamo, a personality in which I have always taken the greatest interest."

"Then it follows that, contrary to certain declarations you used to make, you are not his direct descendant. Is that what you wish to imply?" said the Baron.

She shrugged her shoulders and said nothing. Was it prudence? Was it disdain? Or was it a protest against such an absurdity?

"I do not care to consider this silence either an avowal or a denial," said Godfrey d'Etigues, turning towards his friends. "What this woman says is of no importance; and it is a waste of time to refute her statements. We're here to make our decisions, most important decisions, in a matter which we all know in its entirety, but of which certain details are unknown to the majority of us. It is then necessary to run over the main facts. They are set forth as shortly as possible in the memorandum which I am going to read to you, and to which I beg you to give your most earnest attention."

And he read quietly a document which—at least Ralph had no doubt about—it must have been drawn up by Beaumagnan. It ran:

At the beginning of March, 1870, that is to say, four months before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, among the crowd of strangers who, as was usual every spring, descended on Paris, none excited greater interest than the Countess Cagliostro. Beautiful, charming, lavish of her money, generally alone, but sometimes accompanied by a young man, whom she introduced to people as her brother, everywhere she went, in every house into which she was welcomed, she was the object of the most lively curiosity.

First of all her mere name excited people's interest, then the truly impressive fashion in which she emphasized her relationship to the famous Cagliostro by her mysterious bearing, by certain miraculous cures she effected, and by

the answers she gave to those who consulted her concerning their past or their future. The novel of Alexander Dumas had made Joseph Balsamo, that is to say the Count of Cagliostro, the fashion. Employing the same methods, even more boldly, she boasted that she was Cagliostro's daughter, declared that she knew the secret of eternal youth, and with a smile spoke of this and that meeting, of this and that event which had befallen her in the days of Napoleon I.

Such was her prestige that she forced open for herself the doors of the Tuileries and appeared at the Court of Napoleon III. People even talked of private séances at which the Empress Eugenie gathered round the beautiful Countess her most faithful intimates. A secret number of that satirical journal, the *Charivari*, which was instantly suppressed, tells the story of one of the séances in which an occasional collaborator took part. I quote this passage from it:

She is truly a wonderful woman, with something of *La Joconde* about her. Her expression changes very little but it is very difficult to describe. It is quite as caressing and ingenuous as perverse and cruel. There is a wealth of experience in her gaze and a bitterness in her unchanging smile—such a wealth of experience, indeed, that one is willing to allow her the eighty years she allots to herself. Now and again she draws from her pocket a small golden mirror, lets fall on it two drops from a tiny flask, dries it, and look at herself in it. And once more she is Youth in its most adorable perfection.

When we questioned her about it, she replied:

"This mirror belonged to Cagliostro. For those who look