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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

Nine Baffling Mysteries.

One Legendary Rogue.

The Ultimate Confession.

Step behind the curtain and listen to the master thief himself. In this brilliant collection of interconnected stories, Arsène Lupin shares his most daring, complex, and deeply personal capers, offering a rare glimpse into the mind of a criminal genius. From impenetrable bank vaults and high-society weddings to cryptic codes hidden in plain sight, no lock can keep him out, and no detective can pin him down. But these are not just ordinary thefts; they are masterpieces of psychological misdirection where justice is often served in the most unexpected ways.

Armed with his trademark wit, flawless disguises, and an unbreakable moral code, Lupin navigates a world of greedy aristocrats, desperate damsels, and helpless police inspectors. Whether he is solving a centuries-old family mystery to help

an innocent victim or staging a spectacular heist just to prove it can be done, his actions defy human logic and keep the reader guessing until the final sentence. It is a thrilling journey where crime becomes an art form and the law is merely a playground for a brilliant mind.

Experience one of Maurice Leblanc's most entertaining and fast-paced anthologies. Richly atmospheric, clever, and filled with sharp dialogue, this definitive collection showcases the gentleman-burglar at the absolute height of his powers, delivering a spectacular blend of high-stakes adventure and brilliant deduction.

I

TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND FRANCS REWARD! ...

"Lupin," I said, "tell me something about yourself."

"Why, what would you have me tell you? Everybody knows my life!" replied Lupin, who lay drowsing on the sofa in my study.

"Nobody knows it!" I protested. "People know from your letters in the newspapers that you were mixed up in this case, that you started that case. But the part which you played in it all, the plain facts of the story, the upshot of the mystery: these are things of which they know nothing."

"Pooh! A heap of uninteresting twaddle!"

"What! Your present of fifty thousand francs to Nicolas Dugrival's wife! Do you call that uninteresting? And what about the way in which you solved the puzzle of the three pictures?"

Lupin laughed:

"Yes, that was a queer puzzle, certainly. I can

suggest a title for you if you like: what do you say to *The Sign of the Shadow*?"

"And your successes in society and with the fair sex?" I continued. "The dashing Arsène's love-affairs! … And the clue to your good actions? Those chapters in your life to which you have so often alluded under the names of *The Wedding-Ring*, *Shadowed by Death*, and so on! … Why delay these confidences and confessions, my dear Lupin? … Come, do what I ask you! …"

It was at the time when Lupin, though already famous, had not yet fought his biggest battles; the time that preceded the great adventures of *The Hollow Needle* and *813*. He had not yet dreamt of annexing the accumulated treasures of the French Royal House nor of changing the map of Europe under the Kaiser's nose: he contented himself with milder surprises and humbler profits, making his daily effort, doing evil from day to day and doing a little good as well, naturally and for the love of the thing, like a whimsical and compassionate Don Quixote.

He was silent; and I insisted:

"Lupin, I wish you would!"

To my astonishment, he replied:

"Take a sheet of paper, old fellow, and a pencil."

I obeyed with alacrity, delighted at the thought

that he at last meant to dictate to me some of those pages which he knows how to clothe with such vigour and fancy, pages which I, unfortunately, am obliged to spoil with tedious explanations and boring developments.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Quite."

"Write down, 20, 1, 11, 5, 14, 15."

"What?"

"Write it down, I tell you."

He was now sitting up, with his eyes turned to the open window and his fingers rolling a Turkish cigarette. He continued:

"Write down, 21, 14, 14, 5. …"

He stopped. Then he went on:

"3, 5, 19, 19 …"

And, after a pause:

"5, 18, 25 …"

Was he mad? I looked at him hard and, presently, I saw that his eyes were no longer listless, as they had been a little before, but keen and attentive and that they seemed to be watching, somewhere, in space, a sight that apparently captivated them.

Meanwhile, he dictated, with intervals between each number:

“18, 9, 19, 11, 19 …”

There was hardly anything to be seen through the window but a patch of blue sky on the right and the front of the building opposite, an old private house, whose shutters were closed as usual. There was nothing particular about all this, no detail that struck me as new among those which I had had before my eyes for years. …

“1, 2. …”

And suddenly I understood … or rather I thought I understood, for how could I admit that Lupin, a man so essentially levelheaded under his mask of frivolity, could waste his time upon such childish nonsense? What he was counting was the intermittent flashes of a ray of sunlight playing on the dingy front of the opposite house, at the height of the second floor!

“15, 22 …” said Lupin.

The flash disappeared for a few seconds and then struck the house again, successively, at regular intervals, and disappeared once more.

I had instinctively counted the flashes and I said, aloud:

“5. …”

“Caught the idea? I congratulate you!” he replied, sarcastically.

He went to the window and leant out, as though to discover the exact direction followed by the ray of light. Then he came and lay on the sofa again, saying:

"It's your turn now. Count away!"

The fellow seemed so positive that I did as he told me. Besides, I could not help confessing that there was something rather curious about the ordered frequency of those gleams on the front of the house opposite, those appearances and disappearances, turn and turn about, like so many flash signals.

They obviously came from a house on our side of the street, for the sun was entering my windows slantwise. It was as though someone were alternately opening and shutting a casement, or, more likely, amusing himself by making sunlight flashes with a pocket-mirror.

"It's a child having a game!" I cried, after a moment or two, feeling a little irritated by the trivial occupation that had been thrust upon me.

"Never mind, go on!"

And I counted away. … And I put down rows of figures. … And the sun continued to play in front of me, with mathematical precision.

"Well?" said Lupin, after a longer pause than usual.

"Why, it seems finished. … There has been nothing for some minutes. …"

We waited and, as no more light flashed through space, I said, jestingly:

"My idea is that we have been wasting our time. A few figures on paper: a poor result!"

Lupin, without stirring from his sofa, rejoined:

"Oblige me, old chap, by putting in the place of each of those numbers the corresponding letter of the alphabet. Count A as 1, B as 2 and so on. Do you follow me?"

"But it's idiotic!"

"Absolutely idiotic, but we do such a lot of idiotic things in this life. … One more or less, you know! …"

I sat down to this silly work and wrote out the first letters:

"Take no. …"

I broke off in surprise:

"Words!" I exclaimed. "Two English words meaning. …"

"Go on, old chap."

And I went on and the next letters formed two more words, which I separated as they appeared. And, to my great amazement, a complete English sentence lay before my eyes.

"Done?" asked Lupin, after a time.

"Done! … By the way, there are mistakes in the

spelling. …"

"Never mind those and read it out, please. … Read slowly."

Thereupon I read out the following unfinished communication, which I will set down as it appeared on the paper in front of me:

"Take no unnecessery risks. Above all, avoid atacks, approach ennemy with great prudance and. …"

I began to laugh:

"And there you are! *Fiat lux!* We're simply dazed with light! But, after all, Lupin, confess that this advice, dribbled out by a kitchen-maid, doesn't help you much!"

Lupin rose, without breaking his contemptuous silence, and took the sheet of paper.

I remembered soon after that, at this moment, I happened to look at the clock. It was eighteen minutes past five.

Lupin was standing with the paper in his hand; and I was able at my ease to watch, on his youthful features, that extraordinary mobility of expression which baffles all observers and constitutes his great strength and his chief safeguard. By what signs can one hope to identify a face which changes at pleasure, even without the help of makeup, and whose every transient expression seems to be the

final, definite expression? … By what signs? There was one which I knew well, an invariable sign: Two little crossed wrinkles that marked his forehead whenever he made a powerful effort of concentration. And I saw it at that moment, saw the tiny telltale cross, plainly and deeply scored.

He put down the sheet of paper and muttered:

"Child's play!"

The clock struck half-past five.

"What!" I cried. "Have you succeeded? … In twelve minutes? …"

He took a few steps up and down the room, lit a cigarette and said:

"You might ring up Baron Repstein, if you don't mind, and tell him I shall be with him at ten o'clock this evening."

"Baron Repstein?" I asked. "The husband of the famous baroness?"

"Yes."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite serious."

Feeling absolutely at a loss, but incapable of resisting him, I opened the telephone-directory and unhooked the receiver. But, at that moment, Lupin stopped me with a peremptory gesture and said,

with his eyes on the paper, which he had taken up again:

"No, don't say anything. … It's no use letting him know. … There's something more urgent … a queer thing that puzzles me. … Why on earth wasn't the last sentence finished? Why is the sentence. …"

He snatched up his hat and stick:

"Let's be off. If I'm not mistaken, this is a business that requires immediate solution; and I don't believe I *am* mistaken."

He put his arm through mine, as we went down the stairs, and said:

"I know what everybody knows. Baron Repstein, the company-promoter and racing-man, whose colt Etna won the Derby and the Grand Prix this year, has been victimized by his wife. The wife, who was well known for her fair hair, her dress and her extravagance, ran away a fortnight ago, taking with her a sum of three million francs, stolen from her husband, and quite a collection of diamonds, pearls and jewellery which the Princesse de Berny had placed in her hands and which she was supposed to buy. For two weeks the police have been pursuing the baroness across France and the continent: an easy job, as she scatters gold and jewels wherever she goes. They think they have her every moment. Two days ago, our champion detective, the egregious

Ganimard, arrested a visitor at a big hotel in Belgium, a woman against whom the most positive evidence seemed to be heaped up. On enquiry, the lady turned out to be a notorious chorus-girl called Nelly Darbal. As for the baroness, she has vanished. The baron, on his side, has offered a reward of two hundred thousand francs to whosoever finds his wife. The money is in the hands of a solicitor. Moreover, he has sold his racing-stud, his house on the Boulevard Haussmann and his country-seat of Roquencourt in one lump, so that he may indemnify the Princesse de Berny for her loss."

"And the proceeds of the sale," I added, "are to be paid over at once. The papers say that the princess will have her money tomorrow. Only, frankly, I fail to see the connection between this story, which you have told very well, and the puzzling sentence. …"

Lupin did not condescend to reply.

We had been walking down the street in which I live and had passed some four or five houses, when he stepped off the pavement and began to examine a block of flats, not of the latest construction, which looked as if it contained a large number of tenants:

"According to my calculations," he said, "this is where the signals came from, probably from that open window."

"On the third floor?"

“Yes.”

He went to the portress and asked her:

“Does one of your tenants happen to be acquainted with Baron Repstein?”

“Why, of course!” replied the woman. “We have M. Lavernoux here, such a nice gentleman; he is the baron’s secretary and agent. I look after his flat.”

“And can we see him?”

“See him? … The poor gentleman is very ill.”

“Ill?”

“He’s been ill a fortnight … ever since the trouble with the baroness. … He came home the next day with a temperature and took to his bed.”

“But he gets up, surely?”

“Ah, that I can’t say!”

“How do you mean, you can’t say?”

“No, his doctor won’t let anyone into his room. He took my key from me.”

“Who did?”

“The doctor. He comes and sees to his wants, two or three times a day. He left the house only twenty minutes ago … an old gentleman with a grey beard and spectacles. … Walks quite bent. … But where are you going sir?”

“I’m going up, show me the way,” said Lupin, with his foot on the stairs. “It’s the third floor, isn’t it, on the left?”

“But I mustn’t!” moaned the portress, running after him. “Besides, I haven’t the key … the doctor. …”

They climbed the three flights, one behind the other. On the landing, Lupin took a tool from his pocket and, disregarding the woman’s protests, inserted it in the lock. The door yielded almost immediately. We went in.

At the back of a small dark room we saw a streak of light filtering through a door that had been left ajar. Lupin ran across the room and, on reaching the threshold, gave a cry:

“Too late! Oh, hang it all!”

The portress fell on her knees, as though fainting.

I entered the bedroom, in my turn, and saw a man lying half-dressed on the carpet, with his legs drawn up under him, his arms contorted and his face quite white, an emaciated, fleshless face, with the eyes still staring in terror and the mouth twisted into a hideous grin.

“He’s dead,” said Lupin, after a rapid examination.

“But why?” I exclaimed. “There’s not a trace of blood!”

“Yes, yes, there is,” replied Lupin, pointing to two

or three drops that showed on the chest, through the open shirt. “Look, they must have taken him by the throat with one hand and pricked him to the heart with the other. I say, ‘pricked,’ because really the wound can’t be seen. It suggests a hole made by a very long needle.”

He looked on the floor, all round the corpse. There was nothing to attract his attention, except a little pocket-mirror, the little mirror with which M. Lavernoux had amused himself by making the sunbeams dance through space.

But, suddenly, as the portress was breaking into lamentations and calling for help, Lupin flung himself on her and shook her:

“Stop that! … Listen to me … you can call out later. … Listen to me and answer me. It is most important. M. Lavernoux had a friend living in this street, had he not? On the same side, to the right? An intimate friend?”

“Yes.”

“A friend whom he used to meet at the café in the evening and with whom he exchanged the illustrated papers?”

“Yes.”

“Was the friend an Englishman?”

“Yes.”

"What's his name?"

"Mr. Hargrove."

"Where does he live?"

"At No. 92 in this street."

"One word more: had that old doctor been attending him long?"

"No. I did not know him. He came on the evening when M. Lavernoux was taken ill."

Without another word, Lupin dragged me away once more, ran down the stairs and, once in the street, turned to the right, which took us past my flat again. Four doors further, he stopped at No. 92, a small, low-storied house, of which the ground-floor was occupied by the proprietor of a dram-shop, who stood smoking in his doorway, next to the entrance-passage. Lupin asked if Mr. Hargrove was at home.

"Mr. Hargrove went out about half-an-hour ago," said the publican. "He seemed very much excited and took a taxicab, a thing he doesn't often do."

"And you don't know. …"

"Where he was going? Well, there's no secret about it. He shouted it loud enough! 'Prefecture of Police' is what he said to the driver. …"

Lupin was himself just hailing a taxi, when he changed his mind; and I heard him mutter:

"What's the good? He's got too much start of us. …"

He asked if anyone called after Mr. Hargrove had gone.

"Yes, an old gentleman with a grey beard and spectacles. He went up to Mr. Hargrove's, rang the bell, and went away again."

"I am much obliged," said Lupin, touching his hat.

He walked away slowly without speaking to me, wearing a thoughtful air. There was no doubt that the problem struck him as very difficult, and that he saw none too clearly in the darkness through which he seemed to be moving with such certainty.

He himself, for that matter, confessed to me:

"These are cases that require much more intuition than reflection. But this one, I may tell you, is well worth taking pains about."

We had now reached the boulevards. Lupin entered a public reading-room and spent a long time consulting the last fortnight's newspapers. Now and again, he mumbled:

"Yes … yes … of course … it's only a guess, but it explains everything. … Well, a guess that answers every question is not far from being the truth. …"

It was now dark. We dined at a little restaurant and I noticed that Lupin's face became gradually more animated. His gestures were more decided. He

recovered his spirits, his liveliness. When we left, during the walk which he made me take along the Boulevard Haussmann, towards Baron Repstein's house, he was the real Lupin of the great occasions, the Lupin who had made up his mind to go in and win.

We slackened our pace just short of the Rue de Courcelles. Baron Repstein lived on the left-hand side, between this street and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, in a three-storied private house of which we could see the front, decorated with columns and caryatides.

"Stop!" said Lupin, suddenly.

"What is it?"

"Another proof to confirm my supposition. …"

"What proof? I see nothing."

"I do. … That's enough. …"

He turned up the collar of his coat, lowered the brim of his soft hat and said:

"By Jove, it'll be a stiff fight! Go to bed, my friend. I'll tell you about my expedition tomorrow … if it doesn't cost me my life."

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, I know what I'm saying! I'm risking a lot. First of all, getting arrested, which isn't much. Next, getting killed, which is worse. But. …" He gripped my

shoulder. “But there’s a third thing I’m risking, which is getting hold of two millions. … And, once I possess a capital of two millions, I’ll show people what I can do! Good night, old chap, and, if you never see me again. …” He spouted Musset’s lines:

“Plant a willow by my grave,

The weeping willow that I love. …”

I walked away. Three minutes later—I am continuing the narrative as he told it to me next day—three minutes later, Lupin rang at the door of the Hôtel Repstein.

“Is monsieur le baron at home?”

“Yes,” replied the butler, examining the intruder with an air of surprise, “but monsieur le baron does not see people as late as this.”

“Does monsieur le baron know of the murder of M. Lavernoux, his land-agent?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, please tell monsieur le baron that I have come about the murder and that there is not a moment to lose.”

A voice called from above:

“Show the gentleman up, Antoine.”

In obedience to this peremptory order, the butler led the way to the first floor. In an open doorway stood a gentleman whom Lupin recognized from his photograph in the papers as Baron Repstein, husband of the famous baroness and owner of Etna, the horse of the year.

He was an exceedingly tall, square-shouldered man. His clean-shaven face wore a pleasant, almost smiling expression, which was not affected by the sadness of his eyes. He was dressed in a well-cut morning-coat, with a tan waistcoat and a dark tie fastened with a pearl pin, the value of which struck Lupin as considerable.

He took Lupin into his study, a large, three-windowed room, lined with bookcases, sets of pigeonholes, an American desk and a safe. And he at once asked, with ill-concealed eagerness:

"Do you know anything?"

"Yes, monsieur le baron."

"About the murder of that poor Lavernoux?"

"Yes, monsieur le baron, and about *madame le baronne* also."

"Do you really mean it? Quick, I entreat you. …"

He pushed forward a chair. Lupin sat down and began:

"Monsieur le baron, the circumstances are very

serious. I will be brief."

"Yes, do, please."

"Well, monsieur le baron, in a few words, it amounts to this: five or six hours ago, Lavernoux, who, for the last fortnight, had been kept in a sort of enforced confinement by his doctor, Lavernoux—how shall I put it?—telegraphed certain revelations by means of signals which were partly taken down by me and which put me on the track of this case. He himself was surprised in the act of making this communication and was murdered."

"But by whom? By whom?"

"By his doctor."

"Who is this doctor?"

"I don't know. But one of M. Lavernoux's friends, an Englishman called Hargrove, the friend, in fact, with whom he was communicating, is bound to know and is also bound to know the exact and complete meaning of the communication, because, without waiting for the end, he jumped into a motor-cab and drove to the Prefecture of Police."

"Why? Why? … And what is the result of that step?"

"The result, monsieur le baron, is that your house is surrounded. There are twelve detectives under your windows. The moment the sun rises, they will

enter in the name of the law and arrest the criminal."

"Then is Lavernoux's murderer concealed in my house? Who is he? One of the servants? But no, for you were speaking of a doctor! …"

"I would remark, monsieur le baron, that when this Mr. Hargrove went to the police to tell them of the revelations made by his friend Lavernoux, he was not aware that his friend Lavernoux was going to be murdered. The step taken by Mr. Hargrove had to do with something else. …"

"With what?"

"With the disappearance of madame la baronne, of which he knew the secret, thanks to the communication made by Lavernoux."

"What! They know at last! They have found the baroness! Where is she? And the jewels? And the money she robbed me of?"

Baron Repstein was talking in a great state of excitement. He rose and, almost shouting at Lupin, cried:

"Finish your story, sir! I can't endure this suspense!"

Lupin continued, in a slow and hesitating voice:

"The fact is … you see … it is rather difficult to explain … for you and I are looking at the thing from a totally different point of view."

"I don't understand."

"And yet you ought to understand, monsieur le baron. … We begin by saying—I am quoting the newspapers—by saying, do we not, that Baroness Repstein knew all the secrets of your business and that she was able to open not only that safe over there, but also the one at the Crédit Lyonnais in which you kept your securities locked up?"

"Yes."

"Well, one evening, a fortnight ago, while you were at your club, Baroness Repstein, who, unknown to yourself, had converted all those securities into cash, left this house with a travelling-bag, containing your money and all the Princesse de Berny's jewels?"

"Yes."

"And, since then, she has not been seen?"

"No."

"Well, there is an excellent reason why she has not been seen."

"What reason?"

"This, that Baroness Repstein has been murdered. …"

"Murdered! … The baroness! … But you're mad!"

"Murdered … and probably that same evening."

"I tell you again, you are mad! How can the

baroness have been murdered, when the police are following her tracks, so to speak, step by step?"

"They are following the tracks of another woman."

"What woman?"

"The murderer's accomplice."

"And who is the murderer?"

"The same man who, for the last fortnight, knowing that Lavernoux, through the situation which he occupied in this house, had discovered the truth, kept him imprisoned, forced him to silence, threatened him, terrorized him; the same man who, finding Lavernoux in the act of communicating with a friend, made away with him in cold blood by stabbing him to the heart."

"The doctor, therefore?"

"Yes."

"But who is this doctor? Who is this malevolent genius, this infernal being who appears and disappears, who slays in the dark and whom nobody suspects?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

"And do you want to know?"

"Do I want to know? … Why, speak, man, speak! … You know where he is hiding?"

"Yes."

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"And it is he whom the police are after?"

"Yes."

"And I know him?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"You!"

"I! …"

Lupin had not been more than ten minutes with the baron; and the duel was commencing. The accusation was hurled, definitely, violently, implacably.

Lupin repeated:

"You yourself, got up in a false beard and a pair of spectacles, bent in two, like an old man. In short, you, Baron Repstein; and it is you for a very good reason, of which nobody has thought, which is that, if it was not you who contrived the whole plot, the case becomes inexplicable. Whereas, taking you as the criminal, you as murdering the baroness in order to get rid of her and run through those millions with another woman, you as murdering Lavernoux, your agent, in order to suppress an unimpeachable

witness, oh, then the whole case is explained! Well, is it pretty clear? And are not you yourself convinced?"

The baron, who, throughout this conversation, had stood bending over his visitor, waiting for each of his words with feverish avidity, now drew himself up and looked at Lupin as though he undoubtedly had to do with a madman. When Lupin had finished speaking, the baron stepped back two or three paces, seemed on the point of uttering words which he ended by not saying, and then, without taking his eyes from his strange visitor, went to the fireplace and rang the bell.

Lupin did not make a movement. He waited smiling.

The butler entered. His master said:

"You can go to bed, Antoine. I will let this gentleman out."

"Shall I put out the lights, sir?"

"Leave a light in the hall."

Antoine left the room and the baron, after taking a revolver from his desk, at once came back to Lupin, put the weapon in his pocket and said, very calmly:

"You must excuse this little precaution, sir. I am obliged to take it in case you should be mad, though that does not seem likely. No, you are not mad. But you have come here with an object which I fail to