THE SECRET TOMB

MAURICE LEBLANC

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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

An Ancient Cryptic Formula.

A Hidden Castle Treasure.

The One Mystery Arsène Lupin Left Unsolved.

When Dorothy, a spirited young rope-dancer and palmist, arrives at the historical Château de Roborey with her traveling circus of war orphans, she expects nothing more than a modest audience. Instead, she finds the castle grounds plagued by suspicious nighttime excavations and a heavy shroud of local fear. Guided by her razor-sharp intuition and the memory of a cryptic phrase uttered by her dying father—*In Robore Fortuna*—Dorothy quickly realizes she has stumbled onto a centuries-old puzzle that ties directly to her own forgotten lineage.

This is no ordinary treasure hunt; it is a race against a sinister, hidden enemy. The ground of Roborey conceals one of the four legendary fabulous secrets of Queen Marie-Antoinette—an immense, ancestral legacy so complex that even the great gentleman-burglar Arsène Lupin did not have the time to decipher it. Armed with her

brilliant wit, absolute courage, and the help of her fiercely loyal troupe, Dorothy must decode the mathematical riddles of the past while protecting her family from a ruthless nemesis closing in on their trail.

Experience a breathtaking adventure of historical cryptography and psychological suspense from the creator of Arsène Lupin, Maurice Leblanc. Perfect for fans of complex heist mysteries, vibrant heroines, and gothic estate secrets, this definitive tale delivers a spectacular, fast-paced journey where the greatest treasures are forged in blood, loyalty, and pure intellect.

I

THE CHÂTEAU DE ROBOREY

Under a sky heavy with stars and faintly brighter for a low-hanging sickle moon, the gipsy caravan slept on the turf by the roadside, its shutters closed, its shafts stretched out like arms. In the shadow of the ditch nearby a stertorous horse was snoring.

Far away, above the black crest of the hills, a bright streak of sky announced the coming of the dawn. A church clock struck four. Here and there a bird awoke and began to sing. The air was soft and warm.

Abruptly, from the interior of the caravan, a woman's voice cried:

"Saint-Quentin! Saint-Quentin!"

A head was thrust out of the little window which looked out over the box under the projecting roof.

"A nice thing this! I thought as much! The rascal has decamped in the night. The little beast! Nice discipline this is!"

Other voices joined in the grumbling. Two or three minutes passed, then the door in the back of the caravan opened and a shadowy figure descended the five steps of the ladder while two tousled heads appeared at the side

window.

“Dorothy! Where are you going?”

“To look for Saint-Quentin!” replied the shadowy figure.

“But he came back with you from your walk last night; and I saw him settle down on the box.”

“You can see that he isn’t there any longer, Castor.”

“Where is he?”

“Patience! I’m going to bring him back to you by the ears.”

But two small boys in their shirts came tumbling down the steps of the caravan and implored her:

“No, no, mummy Dorothy! Don’t you go away by yourself in the nighttime. It’s dangerous. …”

“What are you making a fuss about, Pollux? Dangerous? It’s no business of yours!”

She smacked them and kicked them gently, and brought them quickly back to the caravan into which they climbed. There, sitting on the stool, she took their two heads, pressed them against her face, and kissed them tenderly.

“No ill feeling, children. Danger? I’ll find Saint-Quentin in half an hour from now.”

“A nice business! … Saint-Quentin! … A beggar who isn’t sixteen!”

“While Castor and Pollux are twenty—taken together!” retorted Dorothy.

“But what does he want to go traipsing about like this at night for? And it isn’t the first time either. … Where is it he

makes these expeditions to?"

"To snare rabbits," she said. "There's nothing wrong in it, you see. But come, there's been talk enough about it. Go to bye-bye again, boys. And above all, Castor and Pollux, don't fight. D'you hear? And no noise. The Captain's asleep; and he doesn't like to be disturbed, the Captain doesn't."

She took herself off, jumped over the ditch, crossed a meadow, in which her feet splashed up the water in the puddles, and gained a path which wound through a copse of young trees which only reached her shoulders. Twice already, the evening before, strolling with her comrade Saint-Quentin, she had followed this half-formed path, so that she went briskly forward without hesitating. She crossed two roads, came to a stream, the white pebbly bottom of which gleamed under the quiet water, stepped into it, and walked up it against the current, as if she wished to hide her tracks, and when the first light of day began to invest objects with clear shapes, darted forth afresh through the woods, light, graceful, not very tall, her legs bare below a very short skirt from which streamed behind her a flutter of many-colored ribbons.

She ran, with effortless ease, surefooted, with never a chance of spraining an ankle, over the dead leaves, among the flowers of early spring, lilies of the valley, violet anemones, or white narcissi.

Her black hair, not very long, was divided into two heavy masses which flapped like two wings. Her smiling face, parted lips, dilated nostrils, her half-closed eyes proclaimed all her delight in her swift course through the fresh air of the morning. Her neck, long and flexible, rose from a blouse

of gray linen, closed by a kerchief of orange silk. She looked to be fifteen or sixteen years old.

The wood came to an end. A valley lay before her, sunk between two walls of rock and turning off abruptly. Dorothy stopped short. She had reached her goal.

Facing her, on a pedestal of granite, cleanly cut down, and not more than a hundred feet in diameter, rose the main building of a château, which though it lacked grandeur of style itself, yet drew from its position and the impressive nature of its construction an air of being a seigniorial residence. To the right and left the valley, narrowed to two ravines, appeared to envelop it like an old-time moat. But in front of Dorothy the full breadth of the valley formed a slightly undulating glacis, strewn with boulders and traversed by hedges of briar, which ended at the foot of the almost vertical cliff of the granite pedestal.

“A quarter to five striking,” murmured the young girl. “Saint-Quentin won’t be long.”

She crouched down behind the enormous trunk of an uprooted tree and watched with unwinking eyes the line of demarcation between the château itself and its rocky base.

A narrow shelf of rock lengthened this line, running below the windows of the ground floor; and there was a spot in this exiguous cornice at which there came to an end a slanting fissure in the face of the cliff, very narrow, something of the nature of a crevice in the face of a wall.

The evening before, during their walk, Saint-Quentin had said, his finger pointing at the fissure:

“Those people believe themselves to be perfectly secure;

and yet nothing could be easier than to haul one's self up along that crack to one of the windows. … Look; there's one which is actually half-open … the window of some pantry."

Dorothy had no doubt whatever that the idea of climbing the granite pedestal had gripped Saint-Quentin and that that very night he had stolen away to attempt it. What had become of him after the attempt? Had there not been someone in the room he had entered? Knowing nothing of the place he was exploring nor of the dwellers in it, had he not let himself be taken? Or was he merely waiting for the break of day?

She was greatly troubled. For all that she could see no sign of a path along the ravine, some countryman might come along at the very moment at which Saint-Quentin took the risk of making his descent, a far more difficult business than climbing up.

Of a sudden she quivered. One might have said that in thinking of this mischance she had brought it on them. She heard the sound of heavy footfalls coming along the ravine and making for its main entrance. She buried herself among the roots of the tree and they hid her. A man came in sight. He was wearing a long blouse; his face was encircled and hidden by a gray muffler; old, furred gloves covered his hands; he carried a gun on his arm, a mattock over his shoulder.

She thought that he must be a sportsman, or rather a poacher, for he walked with an uneasy air, looking carefully about him, like one who feared to be seen, and who was carefully changing his usual bearing. But he came to a standstill near the wall fifty or sixty yards from the spot at

which Saint-Quentin had made the ascent, and studied the ground, turning over some flat stones and bending down over them.

At last he made up his mind and seizing one of these slabs by its narrower end, he raised it and set it up on end in such a manner that it was balanced after the fashion of a cromlech. So doing he uncovered a hole which had been hollowed out in the center of the deep imprint left by the slab. Then he took his mattock and set about enlarging it, removing the earth very quietly, evidently taking great care to make no noise.

A few minutes more slipped away. Then the inevitable event which Dorothy had at once desired and feared took place. The window of the château, through which Saint-Quentin had climbed the night before, opened; and there appeared a long body clad in a long black coat, its head covered with a high hat, which, even at that distance, were plainly shiny, dirty, and patched.

Squeezed flat against the wall, Saint-Quentin lowered himself from the window and succeeded in setting his two feet on the rocky shelf. On the instant Dorothy, who was at the back of the man in the blouse, was on the point of rising and making a warning signal to her comrade. The movement was useless. The man had perceived what looked to be a black devil clinging to the face of the cliff, and dropping his mattock, he slipped into the hole.

For his part, Saint-Quentin, absorbed in his job of getting down, was paying no attention to what was going on below him, and could only have seen it by turning round, which was practically impossible. Uncoiling a rope, which he had,

without doubt, picked up in the mansion, he ran it round a pillar of the balcony of the window in such a fashion that the two ends hung down the face of the cliff an equal distance. With the help of this double rope the descent presented no difficulty.

Without losing a second, Dorothy, uneasy at being no longer able to see the man in a blouse, sprang from her hiding-place and raced to the hole. As she got a view of it, she smothered a cry. At the bottom of the hole, as at the bottom of a trench, the man, resting the barrel of his gun on the rampart of earth he had thrown up, was about to take deliberate aim at the unconscious climber.

Call out? Warn Saint-Quentin? That was to precipitate the event, to make her presence known and find herself engaged in an unequal struggle with an armed adversary. But do something she must. Up there Saint-Quentin was availing himself of the fissure in the face of the cliff, for all the world as if he were descending the shaft of a chimney. The whole of him stuck out, a black and lean silhouette. His high hat had been crushed down, concertina fashion, right on to his ears.

The man set the butt of his gun against his shoulder and took aim. Dorothy leapt forward and flung herself at the stone which stood up behind him and with the impetus of her spring and all her weight behind her outstretched hands, shoved it. It was badly balanced, gave at the shock, and toppled over, closing the excavation like a trapdoor of stone, crushing the gun, and imprisoning the man in the blouse. The young girl got just a glimpse of his head as it bent and his shoulders as they were thrust down into the

hole.

She thought that the attack was only postponed, that the enemy would lose no time in getting out of his grave, and dashed at full speed to the bottom of the fissure at which she arrived at the same time as Saint-Quentin.

“Quick … quick!” she cried. “We must bolt!”

In a flurry, he dragged down the rope by one of the ends, mumbling as he did so:

“What’s up? What d’you want? How did you know I was here?”

She gripped his arm and tugged at it.

“Bolt, idiot! … They’ve seen you! … They were going to take a shot at you! … Quick! They’ll be after us!”

“What’s that? Be after us? Who?”

“A queer-looking beggar disguised as a peasant. He’s in a hole over yonder. He was going to shoot you like a partridge when I tumbled the slab on to the top of him.”

“But—”

“Do as I tell you, idiot! And bring the rope with you. You mustn’t leave any traces!”

She turned and bolted; he followed her. They reached the end of the valley before the slab was raised, and without exchanging a word took cover in the wood.

Twenty minutes later they entered the stream and did not leave it till they could emerge on to a bank of pebbles on which their feet could leave no print.

Saint-Quentin was off again like an arrow; but Dorothy

stopped short, suddenly shaken by a spasm of laughter which bent her double.

"What is it?" he said. "What's the matter with you?"

She could not answer. She was convulsed, her hands pressed against her ribs, her face scarlet, her teeth, small, regular, whitely-gleaming teeth, bared. At last she managed to stutter:

"You—you—your high—high hat! … That b-b-black coat! … Your b-b-bare feet! … It's t-t-too funny! … Where did you sneak that disguise from? … Goodness! What a sight you are!"

Her laughter rang out, young and fresh, on the silence in which the leaves were fluttering. Facing her, Saint-Quentin, an awkward stripling who had outgrown his strength, with his face too pale, his hair too fair, his ears sticking out, but with admirable, very kindly black eyes, gazed, smiling, at the young girl, delighted by this diversion which seemed to be turning aside from him the outburst of wrath he was expecting.

Of a sudden, indeed, she fell upon him, attacking him with thumps and reproaches, but in a halfhearted fashion, with little bursts of laughter, which robbed the chastisement of its sting.

"Wretch and rogue! You've been stealing again, have you? You're no longer satisfied with your salary as acrobat, aren't you, my fine fellow? You must still prig money or jewels to keep yourself in high hats, must you? What have you got, looter? Eh? Tell me!"

By dint of striking and laughing she had soothed her

righteous indignation. She set out again and Saint-Quentin, thoroughly abashed, stammered:

"Tell you? What's the good of telling you? You've guessed everything, as usual. … As a matter of fact I did get in through that window, last evening. … It was a pantry at the end of a corridor which led to the ground-floor rooms. … Not a soul about. … The family was at dinner. … A servant's staircase led me up into another passage, which ran round the house, with the doors of all the rooms opening into it. I went through them all. Nothing—that is to say, pictures and other things too big to carry away. Then I hid myself in a closet, from which I could see into a little sitting-room next to the prettiest bedroom. They danced till late; then came upstairs … fashionable people. … I saw them through a peephole in the door … the ladies décolletées, the gentlemen in evening dress. … At last one of the ladies went into the boudoir. She put her jewels into a jewel-box and the jewel-box into a small safe, saying out loud as she opened it the three letters of the combination of the lock, R. O. B. … So that, when she went to bed, all I had to do was to make use of them. … After that. … I waited for daylight. … I wasn't going to chance stumbling about in the dark."

"Let's see what you've got," she commanded.

He opened his hand and disclosed on the palm of it two earrings, set with sapphires. She took them and looked at them. Her face changed; her eyes sparkled; she murmured in quite a different voice:

"How lovely they are, sapphires! … The sky is sometimes like that—at night … that dark blue, full of light. …"

At the moment they were crossing a piece of land on

which stood a large scarecrow, simply clad in a pair of trousers. On one of the cross-sticks which served it for arms hung a jacket. It was the jacket of Saint-Quentin. He had hung it there the evening before, and in order to render himself unrecognizable, had borrowed the scarecrow's long coat and high hat. He took off that long coat, buttoned it over the plaster bosom of the scarecrow, and replaced the hat. Then he slipped on his jacket and rejoined Dorothy.

She was still looking at the sapphires with an air of admiration.

He bent over them and said: "Keep them, Dorothy. You know quite well that I'm not really a thief and that I only got them for you … that you might have the pleasure of looking at them and touching them. … It often goes to my heart to see you running about in that beggarly getup! … To think of you dancing on the tightrope! You who ought to live in luxury! … Ah, to think of all I'd do for you, if you'd let me!"

She raised her head, looked into his eyes, and said: "Would you really do anything for me?"

"Anything, Dorothy."

"Well, then, be honest, Saint-Quentin."

They set out again; and the young girl continued:

"Be honest, Saint-Quentin. That's all I ask of you. You and the other boys of the caravan, I've adopted you because, like me, you're war-orphans, and for the last two years we have wandered together along the high roads, happy rather than miserable, getting our fun, and on the whole, eating when we're hungry. But we must come to an understanding. I only like what is clean and straight and as clear as a ray of

sunlight. Are you like me? This is the third time you've stolen to give me pleasure. Is this the last time? If it is, I pardon it. If it isn't, it's 'goodbye.' "

She spoke very seriously, emphasizing each phrase by a toss of the head which made the two wings of her hair flap.

Overwhelmed, Saint-Quentin said imploringly:

"Don't you want to have anything more to do with me?"

"Yes. But swear you won't do it again."

"I swear I won't."

"Then we won't say anything more about it. I feel that you mean what you say. Take back these jewels. You can hide them in the big basket under the caravan. Next week you will send them back by post. It's the Château de Chagny, isn't it?"

"Yes, and I saw the lady's name on one of her bandboxes. She's the Comtesse de Chagny."

They went on hand in hand. Twice they hid themselves to avoid meeting peasants, and at last, after several detours, they reached the neighborhood of the caravan.

"Listen," said Saint-Quentin, pausing to listen himself. "Yes. That's what it is—Castor and Pollux fighting as usual, the rascals!"

He dashed towards the sound.

"Saint-Quentin!" cried the young girl. "I forbid you to hit them!"

"You hit them often enough!"

"Yes. But they like me to hit them."

At the approach of Saint-Quentin, the two boys, who were fighting a duel with wooden swords, turned from one another to face the common enemy, howling:

“Dorothy! Mummy Dorothy! Stop Saint-Quentin! He’s a beast! Help!”

There followed a distribution of cuffs, bursts of laughter, and hugs.

“Dorothy, it’s my turn to be hugged!”

“Dorothy, it’s my turn to be smacked!”

But the young girl said in a scolding voice:

“And the Captain? I’m sure you’ve gone and woke him up!”

“The Captain? He’s sleeping like a sapper,” declared Pollux. “Just listen to his snoring!”

By the side of the road the two urchins had lit a fire of wood. The pot, suspended from an iron tripod, was boiling. The four of them ate a steaming thick soup, bread and cheese, and drank a cup of coffee.

Dorothy did not budge from her stool. Her three companions would not have permitted it. It was rather which of the three should rise to serve her, all of them attentive to her wants, eager, jealous of one another, even aggressive towards one another. The battles of Castor and Pollux were always started by the fact that she had shown favor to one or the other. The two urchins, stout and chubby, dressed alike in pants, a shirt, and jacket, when one least expected it and for all that they were as fond of one another as brothers, fell upon one another with ferocious

violence, because the young girl had spoken too kindly to one, or delighted the other with a too affectionate look.

As for Saint-Quentin, he cordially detested them. When Dorothy fondled them, he could have cheerfully wrung their necks. Never would she hug him. He had to content himself with good comradeship, trusting and affectionate, which only showed itself in a friendly handshake or a pleasant smile. The stripling delighted in them as the only reward which a poor devil like him could possibly deserve. Saint-Quentin was one of those who love with selfless devotion.

"The arithmetic lesson now," was Dorothy's order. "And you, Saint-Quentin, go to sleep for an hour on the box."

Castor brought his arithmetic. Pollux displayed his copybook. The arithmetic lesson was followed by a lecture delivered by Dorothy on the Merovingian kings, then by a lecture on astronomy.

The two children listened with almost impassioned attention; and Saint-Quentin on the box took good care not to go to sleep. In teaching, Dorothy gave full play to her lively fancy in a fashion which diverted her pupils and never allowed them to grow weary. She had an air of learning herself whatever she chanced to be teaching. And her discourse, delivered in a very gentle voice, revealed a considerable knowledge and understanding and the suppleness of a practical intelligence.

At ten o'clock the young girl gave the order to harness the horse. The journey to the next town was a long one; and they had to arrive in time to secure the best place in front of the town-hall.

“And the Captain? He hasn’t had breakfast!” cried Castor.

“All the better,” said she. “The Captain always eats too much. It will give his stomach a rest. Besides if anyone wakes him he’s always in a frightful temper. Let him sleep on.”

They set out. The caravan moved along at the gentle pace of One-eyed Magpie, a lean old mare, but still strong and willing. They called her “One-eyed Magpie” because she had a piebald coat and had lost an eye. Heavy, perched on two high wheels, rocking, jingling like old iron, loaded with boxes, pots and pans, steps, barrels, and ropes, the caravan had recently been repainted. On both sides it bore the pompous inscription, “Dorothy’s Circus, Manager’s Carriage,” which led one to believe that a file of wagons and vehicles was following at some distance with the staff, the properties, the baggage, and the wild beasts.

Saint-Quentin, whip in hand, walked at the head of the caravan. Dorothy, with the two small boys at her side, gathered flowers from the banks, sang choruses of marching songs with them, or told them stories. But at the end of half an hour, in the middle of some crossroads, she gave the order: “Halt!”

“What is it?” asked Saint-Quentin, seeing that she was reading the directions on a signpost.

“Look,” she said.

“There’s no need to look. It’s straight on. I looked it up on our map.”

“Look,” she repeated. “Chagny. A mile and a half.”

"Quite so. It's the village of our château of yesterday. Only to get to it we made a shortcut through the woods."

"Chagny. A mile and a half. Château de Roborey."

She appeared to be troubled and in a low voice she murmured again:

"Roborey—Roborey."

"Doubtless that's the proper name of the château," hazarded Saint-Quentin. "What difference can it make to you?"

"None—none."

"But you look as if it made no end of a difference."

"No. It's just a coincidence."

"In what way?"

"With regard to the name of Roborey—"

"Well?"

"Well, it's a word which was impressed on my memory … a word which was uttered in circumstances—"

"What circumstances, Dorothy?"

She explained slowly with a thoughtful air:

"Think a minute, Saint-Quentin. I told you that my father died of his wounds, at the beginning of the war, in a hospital near Chartres. I had been summoned; but I did not arrive in time. … But two wounded men, who occupied the beds next to his in the ward, told me that during his last hours he never stopped repeating the same word again and again: 'Roborey … Roborey.' It came like a litany, unceasingly, and

as if it weighed on his mind. Even when he was dying he still uttered the word: 'Roborey … Roborey.' "

"Yes," said Saint-Quentin. "I remember. … You did tell me about it."

"Ever since then I have been asking myself what it meant and by what memory my poor father was obsessed at the time of his death. It was, apparently, more than an obsession … it was a terror … a dread. Why? I have never been able to find the explanation of it. So now you understand, Saint-Quentin, on seeing this name … written there, staring me in the face … on learning that there was a château of that name. …"

Saint-Quentin was frightened:

"You never mean to go there, do you?"

"Why not?"

"It's madness, Dorothy!"

The young girl was silent, considering. But Saint-Quentin felt sure that she had not abandoned this unprecedented design. He was seeking for arguments to dissuade her when Castor and Pollux came running up:

"Three caravans are coming along!"

They issued on the instant, one after the other in single file, from a sunken lane, which opened on to the crossroads, and took the road to Roborey. They were an Aunt Sally, a Rifle-Range, and a Tortoise Merry-go-round. As he passed in front of Dorothy and Saint-Quentin, one of the men of the Rifle-Range called to them:

"Are you coming along too?"

“Where to?” said Dorothy.

“To the château. There’s a village fête in the grounds. Shall I keep a pitch for you?”

“Right. And thanks very much,” replied the young girl.

The caravans went on their way.

“What’s the matter, Saint-Quentin?” said Dorothy.

He was looking paler than usual.

“What’s the matter with you?” she repeated. “Your lips are twitching and you are turning green!”

He stammered:

“The p-p-police!”

From the same sunken lane two horsemen came into the crossroads, they rode on in front of the little party.

“You see,” said Dorothy, smiling, “they’re not taking any notice of us.”

“No; but they’re going to the château.”

“Of course they are. There’s a fête there; and two policemen have to be present.”

“Always supposing that they haven’t discovered the disappearance of the earrings and telephoned to the nearest police-station,” he groaned.

“It isn’t likely. The lady will only discover it tonight, when she dresses for dinner.”

“All the same, don’t let’s go there,” implored the unhappy stripling. “It’s simply walking into the trap. … Besides, there’s that man … the man in the hole.”

“Oh, he dug his own grave,” she said and laughed.

“Suppose he’s there. … Suppose he recognizes me?”

“You were disguised. All they could do would be to arrest the scarecrow in the tall hat!”

“And suppose they’ve already laid an information against me? If they searched us they’d find the earrings.”

“Drop them in some bushes in the park when we get there. I’ll tell the people of the château their fortunes; and thanks to me, the lady will recover her earrings. Our fortunes are made.”

“But if by any chance—”

“Rubbish! It would amuse me to go and see what is going on at the château which is named Roborey. So I’m going.”

“Yes; but I’m afraid … afraid for you as well.”

“Then stay away.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“We’ll chance it!” he said, and cracked his whip.

II

DOROTHY'S CIRCUS

The château, situated at no great distance from Domfront, in the most rugged district of the picturesque department of the Orne, only received the name of Roborey in the course of the eighteenth century. Earlier it took its name of the Château de Chagny from the village which was grouped round it. The village green is in fact only a prolongation of the courtyard of the château. When the iron gates are open the two form an esplanade, constructed over the ancient moat, from which one descends on the right and left by steep slopes. The inner courtyard, circular and enclosed by two battlemented walls which run to the buildings of the château, is adorned by a fine old fountain of dolphins and sirens and a sundial set up on a rockery in the worst taste.

Dorothy's Circus passed through the village, preceded by its band, that is to say that Castor and Pollux did their best to wreck their lungs in the effort to extract the largest possible number of false notes from two trumpets. Saint-Quentin had arrayed himself in a black satin doublet and carried over his shoulder the trident which so awes wild beasts, and a placard which announced that the performance would take place at three o'clock.

Dorothy, standing upright on the roof of the caravan,

directed One-eyed Magpie with four reins, wearing the majestic air of one driving a royal coach.

Already a dozen vehicles stood on the esplanade; and round them the showmen were busily setting up their canvas tents and swings and wooden horses, etc. Dorothy's Circus made no such preparations. Its directress went to the mayor's office to have her license viséd, while Saint-Quentin unharnessed One-eyed Magpie, and the two musicians changed their profession and set about cooking the dinner.

The Captain slept on.

Towards noon the crowd began to flock in from all the neighboring villages. After the meal Saint-Quentin, Castor, and Pollux took a siesta beside the caravan. Dorothy again went off. She went down into the ravine, examined the slab over the excavation, went up out of it again, moved among the groups of peasants and strolled about the gardens, round the château, and everywhere else that one was allowed to go.

"Well, how's your search getting on?" said Saint-Quentin when she returned to the caravan.

She appeared thoughtful, and slowly she explained:

"The château, which has been empty for a long while, belongs to the family of Chagny-Roborey, of which the last representative, Count Octave, a man about forty, married, twelve years ago, a very rich woman. After the war the Count and Countess restored and modernized the château. Yesterday evening they had a housewarming to which they invited a large party of guests who went away at the end of the evening. Today they're having a kind of popular

housewarming for the villagers."

"And as regards this name of Roborey, have you learned anything?"

"Nothing. I'm still quite ignorant why my father uttered it."

"So that we can get away directly after the performance," said Saint-Quentin who was very eager to depart.

"I don't know. … We'll see. … I've found out some rather queer things."

"Have they anything to do with your father?"

"No," she said with some hesitation. "Nothing to do with him. Nevertheless I should like to look more closely into the matter. When there is darkness anywhere, there's no knowing what it may hide. … I should like. …"

She remained silent for a long time. At last she went on in a serious tone, looking straight into Saint-Quentin's face:

"Listen: you have confidence in me, haven't you? You know that I'm quite sensible at bottom … and very prudent. You know that I have a certain amount of intuition … and good eyes that see a little more than most people see. … Well, I've got a strong feeling that I ought to remain here."

"Because of the name of Roborey?"

"Because of that, and for other reasons, which will compel me perhaps, according to circumstances, to undertake unexpected enterprises … dangerous ones. At that moment, Saint-Quentin, you must follow me—boldly."

"Go on, Dorothy. Tell me what it is exactly."

“Nothing. … Nothing definite at present. … One word, however. The man who was aiming at you this morning, the man in the blouse, is here.”

“Never! He’s here, do you say? You’ve seen him? With the policemen?”

She smiled.

“Not yet. But that may happen. Where have you put those earrings?”

“At the bottom of the basket, in a little cardboard box with a rubber ring round it.”

“Good. As soon as the performance is over, stick them in that clump of rhododendrons between the gates and the coach-house.”

“Have they found out that they’ve disappeared?”

“Not yet,” said Dorothy. “From the things you told me I believe that the little safe is in the boudoir of the Countess. I heard some of the maids talking; and nothing was said about any robbery. They’d have been full of it.” She added: “Look! there are some of the people from the château in front of the shooting-gallery. Is it that pretty fair lady with the grand air?”

“Yes. I recognize her.”

“An extremely kindhearted woman, according to what the maids said, and generous, always ready to listen to the unfortunate. The people about her are very fond of her … much fonder of her than they are of her husband, who, it appears, is not at all easy to get on with.”

“Which of them is he? There are three men there.”