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ABOUT AUTHOR



Maurice Leblanc (1864-1941)

"The Mastermind Behind the Gentleman-Burglar"

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

Early Life and Literary Ambitions:

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

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

The Birth of Arsène Lupin:

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

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

The Literary World of Lupin:

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

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

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

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

Most Notable Works:

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

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

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

Later Years and Legacy:

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

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

PREFACE

A Colossal Inheritance.

A Trail of Poisoned Heirs.

The Return of a Legend Believed to Be Dead.

Cosmo Mornington, an eccentric American millionaire, dies in Paris, leaving behind a monumental testament: a staggering fortune of one hundred million francs to be distributed among his unknown, distant heirs. But the will carries a chilling clause. If no legitimate bloodlines are found within three months, the entire wealth will pass to his trusted friend—Don Luis Perenna, a mysterious, heavily decorated hero of the French Foreign Legion. But Don Luis is no ordinary soldier; he is none other than Arsène Lupin, the legendary gentleman-burglar whom the world believes committed suicide years ago.

Before the ink on the will can dry, a ruthless, invisible predator strikes. One by one, potential heirs and even the investigating police inspector are brutally murdered, all dying in the exact same manner as Mornington. At every grisly crime scene, the killer leaves behind a bizarre, terrifying signature: an apple bearing the distinct imprint of human teeth. Framed for the murders by the Paris police

and hunted by a sadistic mastermind, Lupin must step out of his quiet retirement to defend his honor and protect the remaining survivors.

Experience one of Maurice Leblanc’s most sophisticated, high-stakes, and intensely human mystery novels. Showing a more vulnerable but fiercely brilliant side of literature's greatest rogue, this definitive classic delivers a breathtaking web of historical secrets, multi-million franc conspiracies, and relentless psychological detection that will keep you guessing until the final trap is sprung.

I

D'ARTAGNAN, PORTHOS … AND MONTE CRISTO

It was half-past four; M. Desmalions, the Prefect of Police, was not yet back at the office. His private secretary laid on the desk a bundle of letters and reports which he had annotated for his chief, rang the bell and said to the messenger who entered by the main door:

"Monsieur le Préfet has sent for a number of people to see him at five o'clock. Here are their names. Show them into separate waiting-rooms, so that they can't communicate with one another, and let me have their cards when they come."

The messenger went out. The secretary was turning toward the small door that led to his room, when the main door opened once more and admitted a man who stopped and leaned swaying over the back of a chair.

"Why, it's you, Vérot!" said the secretary. "But what's happened? What's the matter?"

Inspector Vérot was a very stout, powerfully built man, with a big neck and shoulders and a florid complexion. He had obviously been upset by some violent excitement, for his face, streaked with red veins and usually so apoplectic, seemed almost pale.

“Oh, nothing, Monsieur le Secrétaire!” he said.

“Yes, yes; you’re not looking your usual self. You’re gray in the face. … And the way you’re perspiring. …”

Inspector Vérot wiped his forehead and, pulling himself together, said:

“It’s just a little tiredness. … I’ve been overworking myself lately: I was very keen on clearing up a case which Monsieur Desmalions had put in my hands. All the same, I have a funny sort of feeling—”

“Will you have a pick-me-up?”

“No, no; I’m more thirsty.”

“A glass of water?”

“No, thank you.”

“What then?”

“I should like—I should like—”

His voice faltered. He wore a troubled look, as if he had suddenly lost his power of getting out another word. But he recovered himself with an effort and asked:

“Isn’t Monsieur Desmalions here?”

“No; he won’t be back till five, when he has an important meeting.”

“Yes … I know … most important. That’s what I’m here for. But I should have liked to see him first. I should so much have liked to see him!”

The secretary stared at Vérot and said:

“What a state you’re in! Is your message so urgent as all

that?"

"It's very urgent, indeed. It has to do with a crime that took place a month ago, to the day. And, above all, it's a matter of preventing two murders which are the outcome of that other crime and which are to be committed tonight. Yes, tonight, inevitably, unless we take the necessary steps."

"Sit down, Vérot, won't you?"

"You see, the whole thing has been planned in such an infernal manner! You would never have imagined—"

"Still, Vérot, as you know about it beforehand, and as Monsieur le Préfet is sure to give you full powers—"

"Yes, of course, of course. But, all the same, it's terrible to think that I might miss him. So I wrote him this letter, telling him all I know about the business. I thought it safer."

He handed the secretary a large yellow envelope and added:

"And here's a little box as well; I'll leave it on this table. It contains something that will serve to complete and explain the contents of the letter."

"But why don't you keep all that by you?"

"I'm afraid to. They're watching me. They're trying to get rid of me. I shan't be easy in my mind until someone besides myself knows the secret."

"Have no fear, Vérot. Monsieur le Préfet is bound to be back soon. Meanwhile, I advise you to go to the infirmary and ask for a pick-me-up."

The inspector seemed undecided what to do. Once more

he wiped away the perspiration that was trickling down his forehead. Then, drawing himself up, he left the office. When he was gone the secretary slipped the letter into a big bundle of papers that lay on the Prefect's desk and went out by the door leading to his own room.

He had hardly closed it behind him when the other door opened once again and the inspector returned, spluttering:

"Monsieur le Secrétaire … it'd be better if I showed you—"

The unfortunate man was as white as a sheet. His teeth were chattering. When he saw that the secretary was gone, he tried to walk across to his private room. But he was seized with an attack of weakness and sank into a chair, where he remained for some minutes, moaning helplessly:

"What's the matter with me? … Have I been poisoned, too? … Oh, I don't like this; I don't like the look of this!"

The desk stood within reach of his hand. He took a pencil, drew a writing-pad toward him and began to scribble a few characters. But he next stammered:

"Why, no, it's not worth while. The Prefect will be reading my letter. … What on earth's the matter with me. I don't like this at all!"

Suddenly he rose to his feet and called out:

"Monsieur le Secrétaire, we've got … we've got to … It's for tonight. Nothing can prevent—"

Stiffening himself with an effort of his whole will, he made for the door of the secretary's room with little short steps, like an automaton. But he reeled on the way—and

had to sit down a second time.

A mad terror shook him from head to foot; and he uttered cries which were too faint, unfortunately, to be heard. He realized this and looked round for a bell, for a gong; but he was no longer able to distinguish anything. A veil of darkness seemed to weigh upon his eyes.

Then he dropped on his knees and crawled to the wall, beating the air with one hand, like a blind man, until he ended by touching some woodwork. It was the partition-wall.

He crept along this; but, as ill-luck would have it, his bewildered brain showed him a false picture of the room, so that, instead of turning to the left as he should have done, he followed the wall to the right, behind a screen which concealed a third door.

His fingers touched the handle of this door and he managed to open it. He gasped, "Help! Help!" and fell at his full length in a sort of cupboard or closet which the Prefect of Police used as a dressing-room.

"Tonight!" he moaned, believing that he was making himself heard and that he was in the secretary's room. "Tonight! The job is fixed for tonight! You'll see … The mark of the teeth! … It's awful! … Oh, the pain I'm in! … It's the poison! Save me! Help!"

The voice died away. He repeated several times, as though in a nightmare:

"The teeth! the teeth! They're closing!"

Then his voice grew fainter still; and inarticulate sounds

issued from his pallid lips. His mouth munched the air like the mouth of one of those old men who seem to be interminably chewing the cud. His head sank lower and lower on his breast. He heaved two or three sighs; a great shiver passed through his body; and he moved no more.

And the death-rattle began in his throat, very softly and rhythmically, broken only by interruptions in which a last instinctive effort appeared to revive the flickering life of the intelligence, and to rouse fitful gleams of consciousness in the dimmed eyes.

The Prefect of Police entered his office at ten minutes to five. M. Desmalions, who had filled his post for the past three years with an authority that made him generally respected, was a heavily built man of fifty with a shrewd and intelligent face. His dress, consisting of a gray jacket-suit, white spats, and a loosely flowing tie, in no way suggested the public official. His manners were easy, simple, and full of good-natured frankness.

He touched a bell, and when his secretary entered, asked:

"Are the people whom I sent for here?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet, and I gave orders that they were to wait in different rooms."

"Oh, it would not have mattered if they had met! However, perhaps it's better as it is. I hope that the American Ambassador did not trouble to come in person?"

"No, Monsieur le Préfet."

“Have you their cards?”

“Yes.”

The Prefect of Police took the five visiting cards which his secretary handed him and read:

“Mr. Archibald Bright, First Secretary United States Embassy; Maître Lepertuis, Solicitor; Juan Caceres, Attaché to the Peruvian Legation; Major Comte d’Astrignac, retired.”

The fifth card bore merely a name, without address or quality of any kind—

DON LUIS PERENNA

“That’s the one I’m curious to see!” said M. Desmalions. “He interests me like the very devil! Did you read the report of the Foreign Legion?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Préfet, and I confess that this gentleman puzzles me, too.”

“He does, eh? Did you ever hear of such pluck? A sort of heroic madman, something absolutely wonderful! And then there’s that nickname of Arsène Lupin which he earned among his messmates for the way in which he used to boss them and astound them! … How long is it since the death of Arsène Lupin?”

“It happened two years before your appointment, Monsieur le Préfet. His corpse and Mme. Kesselbach’s were discovered under the ruins of a little chalet which was burnt down close to the Luxembourg frontier. It was found at the inquest that he had strangled that monster, Mrs. Kesselbach, whose crimes came to light afterward, and that he hanged himself after setting fire to the chalet.”

“It was a fitting end for that—rascal,” said M. Desmalions, “and I confess that I, for my part, much prefer not having him to fight against. Let’s see, where were we? Are the papers of the Mornington inheritance ready for me?”

“On your desk, Monsieur le Préfet.”

“Good. But I was forgetting: is Inspector Vérot here?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Préfet. I expect he’s in the infirmary getting something to pull him together.”

“Why, what’s the matter with him?”

“He struck me as being in a queer state—rather ill.”

“How do you mean?”

The secretary described his interview with Inspector Vérot.

“And you say he left a letter for me?” said M. Desmalions with a worried air. “Where is it?”

“Among the papers, Monsieur le Préfet.”

“Very odd: it’s all very odd. Vérot is a first-rate inspector, a very sober-minded fellow; and he doesn’t get frightened easily. You might go and fetch him. Meanwhile, I’ll look through my letters.”

The secretary hurried away. When he returned, five minutes later, he stated, with an air of astonishment, that he had not seen Inspector Vérot.

“And what’s more curious still,” he added, “is that the messenger who saw him leave this room saw him come in again almost at once and did not see him go out a second time.”

“Perhaps he only passed through here to go to you.”

“To me, Monsieur le Préfet? I was in my room all the time.”

“Then it’s incomprehensible.”

“Yes … unless we conclude that the messenger’s attention was distracted for a second, as Vérot is neither here nor next door.”

“That must be it. I expect he’s gone to get some air outside; and he’ll be back at any moment. For that matter, I shan’t want him to start with.”

The Prefect looked at his watch.

“Ten past five. You might tell the messenger to show those gentlemen in. … Wait, though—”

M. Desmalions hesitated. In turning over the papers he had found Vérot’s letter. It was a large, yellow, business envelope, with “Café du Pont-Neuf” printed at the top.

The secretary suggested:

“In view of Vérot’s absence, Monsieur le Préfet, and of what he said, it might be as well for you to see what’s in the letter first.”

M. Desmalions paused to reflect.

“Perhaps you’re right.”

And, making up his mind, he inserted a paper-knife into the envelope and cut it open. A cry escaped him.

“Oh, I say, this is a little too much!”

“What is it, Monsieur le Préfet?”

“Why, look here, a blank … sheet of paper! That’s all the envelope contains!”

“Impossible!”

“See for yourself—a plain sheet folded in four, with not a word on it.”

“But Vérot told me in so many words that he had said in that letter all that he knew about the case.”

“He told you so, no doubt, but there you are! Upon my word, if I didn’t know Inspector Vérot, I should think he was trying to play a game with me.”

“It’s a piece of carelessness, Monsieur le Préfet, at the worst.”

“No doubt, a piece of carelessness, but I’m surprised at him. It doesn’t do to be careless when the lives of two people are at stake. For he must have told you that there is a double murder planned for tonight?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Préfet, and under particularly alarming conditions; infernal was the word he used.”

M. Desmalions was walking up and down the room, with his hands behind his back. He stopped at a small table.

“What’s this little parcel addressed to me? ‘Monsieur le Préfet de Police—to be opened in case of accident.’ ”

“Oh, yes,” said the secretary, “I was forgetting! That’s from Inspector Vérot, too; something of importance, he said, and serving to complete and explain the contents of the letter.”

“Well,” said M. Desmalions, who could not help laughing,

“the letter certainly needs explaining; and, though there’s no question of ‘accident,’ I may as well open the parcel.”

As he spoke, he cut the string and discovered, under the paper, a box, a little cardboard box, which might have come from a druggist, but which was soiled and spoiled by the use to which it had been put.

He raised the lid. Inside the box were a few layers of cotton wool, which were also rather dirty, and in between these layers was half a cake of chocolate.

“What the devil does this mean?” growled the Prefect in surprise.

He took the chocolate, looked at it, and at once perceived what was peculiar about this cake of chocolate, which was also undoubtedly the reason why Inspector Vérot had kept it. Above and below, it bore the prints of teeth, very plainly marked, very plainly separated one from the other, penetrating to a depth of a tenth of an inch or so into the chocolate. Each possessed its individual shape and width, and each was divided from its neighbours by a different interval. The jaws which had started eating the cake of chocolate had dug into it the mark of four upper and five lower teeth.

M. Desmalions remained wrapped in thought and, with his head sunk on his chest, for some minutes resumed his walk up and down the room, muttering:

“This is queer … There’s a riddle here to which I should like to know the answer. That sheet of paper, the marks of those teeth: what does it all mean?”

But he was not the man to waste much time over a

mystery which was bound to be cleared up presently, as Inspector Vérot must be either at the police office or somewhere just outside; and he said to his secretary:

"I can't keep those five gentlemen waiting any longer. Please have them shown in now. If Inspector Vérot arrives while they are here, as he is sure to do, let me know at once. I want to see him as soon as he comes. Except for that, see that I'm not disturbed on any pretext, won't you?"

Two minutes later the messenger showed in Maître Lepertuis, a stout, red-faced man, with whiskers and spectacles, followed by Archibald Bright, the Secretary of Embassy, and Caceres, the Peruvian attaché. M. Desmalions, who knew all three of them, chatted to them until he stepped forward to receive Major Comte d'Astrignac, the hero of La Chouïa, who had been forced into premature retirement by his glorious wounds. The Prefect was complimenting him warmly on his gallant conduct in Morocco when the door opened once more.

"Don Luis Perenna, I believe?" said the Prefect, offering his hand to a man of middle height and rather slender build, wearing the military medal and the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour.

The newcomer's face and expression, his way of holding himself, and his very youthful movements inclined one to look upon him as a man of forty, though there were wrinkles at the corners of the eyes and on the forehead, which perhaps pointed to a few years more. He bowed.

“Yes, Monsieur le Préfet.”

“Is that you, Perenna?” cried Comte d’Astrignae. “So you are still among the living?”

“Yes, Major, and delighted to see you again.”

“Perenna alive! Why, we had lost all sight of you when I left Morocco! We thought you dead.”

“I was a prisoner, that’s all.”

“A prisoner of the tribesmen; the same thing!”

“Not quite, Major; one can escape from anywhere. The proof stands before you.”

The Prefect of Police, yielding to an irresistible attraction to resist, spent some seconds in examining that powerful face, with the smiling glance, the frank and resolute eyes, and the bronzed complexion, which looked as if it had been baked and baked again by the sun.

Then, motioning to his visitors to take chairs around his desk, M. Desmalions himself sat down and made a preliminary statement in clear and deliberate tones:

“The summons, gentlemen, which I addressed to each of you, must have appeared to you rather peremptory and mysterious. And the manner in which I propose to open our conversation is not likely to diminish your surprise. But if you will attach a little credit to my method, you will soon realize that the whole thing is very simple and very natural. I will be as brief as I can.”

He spread before him the bundle of documents prepared for him by his secretary and, consulting his notes as he spoke, continued:

“Over fifty years ago, in 1860, three sisters, three orphans, Ermeline, Elizabeth, and Armande Roussel, aged twenty-two, twenty, and eighteen respectively, were living at Saint-Etienne with a cousin named Victor, who was a few years younger. The eldest, Ermeline, was the first to leave Saint-Etienne. She went to London, where she married an Englishman of the name Mornington, by whom she had a son, who was christened Cosmo.

“The family was very poor and went through hard times. Ermeline repeatedly wrote to her sisters to ask for a little assistance. Receiving no reply, she broke off the correspondence altogether. In 1870 Mr. and Mrs. Mornington left England for America. Five years later they were rich. Mr. Mornington died in 1878; but his widow continued to administer the fortune bequeathed to her and, as she had a genius for business and speculation, she increased this fortune until it attained a colossal figure. At her decease, in 1900, she left her son the sum of four hundred million francs.”

The amount seemed to make an impression on the Prefect’s hearers. He saw the major and Don Luis Perenna exchange a glance and asked:

“You knew Cosmo Mornington, did you not?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Préfet,” replied Comte d’Astrignac. “He was in Morocco when Perenna and I were fighting there.”

“Just so,” said M. Desmalions. “Cosmo Mornington had begun to travel about the world. He took up the practise of medicine, from what I hear, and, when occasion offered, treated the sick with great skill and, of course, without charge. He lived first in Egypt and then in Algiers and

Morocco. Last year he settled down in Paris, where he died four weeks ago as the result of a most stupid accident."

"A carelessly administered hypodermic injection, was it not, Monsieur le Préfet?" asked the secretary of the American Embassy. "It was mentioned in the papers and reported to us at the embassy."

"Yes," said Desmalions. "To assist his recovery from a long attack of influenza which had kept him in bed all the winter, Mr. Mornington, by his doctor's orders, used to give himself injections of glycero-phosphate of soda. He must have omitted the necessary precautions on the last occasion when he did so, for the wound was poisoned, inflammation set in with lightning rapidity, and Mr. Mornington was dead in a few hours."

The Prefect of Police turned to the solicitor and asked:

"Have I summed up the facts correctly, Maître Lepertuis?"

"Absolutely, Monsieur le Préfet."

M. Desmalions continued:

"The next morning, Maître Lepertuis called here and, for reasons which you will understand when you have heard the document read, showed me Cosmo Mornington's will, which had been placed in his hands."

While the Prefect was looking through the papers, Maître Lepertuis added:

"I may be allowed to say that I saw my client only once before I was summoned to his deathbed; and that was on the day when he sent for me to come to his room in the hotel to hand me the will which he had just made. This was

at the beginning of his influenza. In the course of conversation he told me that he had been making some inquiries with a view to tracing his mother's family, and that he intended to pursue these inquiries seriously after his recovery. Circumstances, as it turned out, prevented his fulfilling his purpose."

Meanwhile, the Prefect of Police had taken from among the documents an open envelope containing two sheets of paper. He unfolded the larger of the two and said:

"This is the will. I will ask you to listen attentively while I read it and also the document attached to it."

The others settled themselves in their chairs; and the Prefect read out:

"The last will and testament of me, Cosmo Mornington, eldest son of Hubert Mornington and Ermeline Roussel, his wife, a naturalized citizen of the United States of America. I give and bequeath to my adopted country three fourths of my estate, to be employed on works of charity in accordance with the instructions, written in my hand, which Maître Lepertuis will be good enough to forward to the Ambassador of the United States. The remainder of my property, to the value of about one hundred million francs, consisting of deposits in various Paris and London banks, a list of which is in the keeping of Maître Lepertuis, I give and bequeath, in memory of my dear mother, to her favourite sister Elizabeth Roussel or her direct heirs; or, in default of Elizabeth and her heirs, to her second sister Armande Roussel or her direct heirs; or, in default of both sisters and their heirs, to their cousin Victor Roussel or his direct heirs.

"In the event of my dying without discovering the

surviving members of the Roussel family, or of the cousin of the three sisters, I request my friend Don Luis Perenna to make all the necessary investigations. With this object, I hereby appoint him the executor of my will in so far as concerns the European portion of my estate, and I beg him to undertake the conduct of the events that may arise after my death or in consequence of my death to consider himself my representative and to act in all things for the benefit of my memory and the accomplishment of my wishes. In gratitude for this service and in memory of the two occasions on which he saved my life, I give and bequeath to the said Don Luis Perenna the sum of one million francs."

The Prefect stopped for a few seconds. Don Luis murmured:

"Poor Cosmo! ... I should not have needed that inducement to carry out his last wishes."

M. Desmalions continued his reading:

"Furthermore, if, within three months of my death, the investigations made by Don Luis Perenna and by Maître Lepertuis have led to no result; if no heir and no survivor of the Roussel family have come forward to receive the bequest, then the whole hundred million francs shall definitely, all later claims notwithstanding, accrue to my friend Don Luis Perenna. I know him well enough to feel assured that he will employ this fortune in a manner which shall accord with the loftiness of his schemes and the greatness of the plans which he described to me so enthusiastically in our tent in Morocco."

M. Desmalions stopped once more and raised his eyes to Don Luis, who remained silent and impassive, though a tear

glistened on his lashes. Comte d'Astrignac said:

"My congratulations, Perenna."

"Let me remind you, Major," he answered, "that this legacy is subject to a condition. And I swear that, if it depends on me, the survivors of the Roussel family shall be found."

"I'm sure of it," said the officer. "I know you."

"In any case," asked the Prefect of Police of Don Luis, "you do not refuse this conditional legacy?"

"Well, no," said Perenna, with a laugh. "There are things which one can't refuse."

"My question," said the Prefect, "was prompted by the last paragraph of the will: 'If, for any reason, my friend Perenna should refuse this legacy, or if he should have died before the date fixed for its payment, I request the Ambassador of the United States and the Prefect of Police for the time being to consult as to the means of building and maintaining in Paris a university confined to students and artists of American nationality and to devote the money to this purpose. And I hereby authorize the Prefect of Police in any case to receive a sum of three hundred thousand francs out of my estate for the benefit of the Paris Police Fund.' "

M. Desmalions folded the paper and took up another.

"There is a codicil to the will. It consists of a letter which Mr. Mornington wrote to Maître Lepertuis some time after and which explains certain points with greater precision:

"I request Maître Lepertuis to open my will on the day after my death, in the presence of the Prefect of Police, who will

be good enough to keep the matter an entire secret for a month. One month later, to the day, he will have the kindness to summon to his office Maître Lepertuis, Don Luis Perenna, and a prominent member of the United States Embassy. Subsequent to the reading of the will, a cheque for one million francs shall be handed to my friend and legatee Don Luis Perenna, after a simple examination of his papers and a simple verification of his identity. I should wish this verification to be made as regards the personality by Major Comte d'Astrignac, who was his commanding officer in Morocco, and who unfortunately had to retire prematurely from the army; and as regards birth by a member of the Peruvian Legation, as Don Luis Perenna, though retaining his Spanish nationality, was born in Peru.

"Furthermore, I desire that my will be not communicated to the Roussel heirs until two days later, at Maître Lepertuis's office. Finally—and this is the last expression of my wishes as regards the disposal of my estate and the method of proceeding with that disposal—the Prefect of Police will be good enough to summon the persons aforesaid to his office, for a second time, at a date to be selected by himself, not less than sixty nor more than ninety days after the first meeting. Then and not till then will the definite legatee be named and proclaimed according to his rights, nor shall any be so named and proclaimed unless he be present at this meeting, at the conclusion of which Don Luis Perenna, who must also attend it, shall become the definite legatee if, as I have said, no survivor nor heir of the Roussel sisters or of their cousin Victor have come forward to claim the bequest."

Replacing both documents in the envelope the Prefect of

Police concluded:

"You have now, gentlemen, heard the will of Mr. Cosmo Mornington, which explains your presence here. A sixth person will join us shortly: one of my detectives, whom I instructed to make the first inquiries about the Roussel family and who will give you the result of his investigations. But, for the moment, we must proceed in accordance with the testator's directions.

"Don Luis Perenna's papers, which he sent me, at my request, a fortnight ago, have been examined by myself and are perfectly in order. As regards his birth, I wrote and begged his Excellency the Peruvian minister to collect the most precise information."

"The minister entrusted this mission to me," said Señor Caceres, the Peruvian attaché. "It offered no difficulties. Don Luis Perenna comes of an old Spanish family which emigrated thirty years ago, but which retained its estates and property in Europe. I knew Don Luis's father in America; and he used to speak of his only son with the greatest affection. It was our legation that informed the son, three years ago, of his father's death. I produce a copy of the letter sent to Morocco."

"And I have the original letter here, among the documents forwarded by Don Luis Perenna to the Prefect of Police. Do you, Major, recognize Private Perenna, who fought under your orders in the Foreign Legion?"

"I recognize him," said Comte d'Astrignac.

"Beyond the possibility of a mistake?"

"Beyond the possibility of a mistake and without the least

feeling of hesitation."

The Prefect of Police, with a laugh, hinted:

"You recognize Private Perenna, whom the men, carried away by a sort of astounded admiration of his exploits, used to call Arsène Lupin?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet," replied the major sharply, "the one whom the men called Arsène Lupin, but whom the officers called simply the Hero, the one who we used to say was as brave as d'Artagnan, as strong as Porthos. …"

"And as mysterious as Monte Cristo," said the Prefect of Police, laughing. "I have all this in the report which I received from the Fourth Regiment of the Foreign Legion. It is not necessary to read the whole of it; but it contains the unprecedented fact that Private Perenna, in the space of two years' time, received the military medal, received the Legion of Honour for exceptional services, and was mentioned fourteen times in dispatches. I will pick out a detail here and there."

"Monsieur le Préfet, I beg of you," protested Don Luis. "These are trivial matters, of no interest to anybody; and I do not see the reason. …"

"There is every reason, on the contrary," declared M. Desmalions. "You gentlemen are here not only to hear a will read, but also to authorize its execution as regards the only one of its clauses that is to be carried out at once, the payment of a legacy of a million francs. It is necessary, therefore, that all of you should know what there is to know of the personality of the legatee. Consequently, I propose to continue …"

“In that case, Monsieur le Préfet,” said Perenna, rising and making for the door, “you will allow me …”

“Right about turn! Halt! … Eyes front!” commanded Major d’Astrignac in a jesting tone.

He dragged Don Luis back to the middle of the room and forced him into a chair.

“Monsieur le Préfet,” he said, “I plead for mercy for my old comrade-in-arms, whose modesty would really be put to too severe a test if the story of his prowess were read out in front of him. Besides, the report is here; and we can all of us consult it for ourselves. Without having seen it, I second every word of praise that it contains; and I declare that, in the course of my whole military career, I have never met a soldier who could compare with Private Perenna. And yet I saw plenty of fine fellows over there, the sort of demons whom you only find in the Legion and who will get themselves cut to bits for the sheer pleasure of the thing, for the lark of it, as they say, just to astonish one another.

“But not one of them came anywhere near Perenna. The chap whom we nicknamed d’Artagnan, Porthos, and de Bussy deserved to be classed with the most amazing heroes of legend and history. I have seen him perform feats which I should not care to relate, for fear of being treated as an impostor; feats so improbable that today, in my calmer moments, I wonder if I am quite sure that I did see them. One day, at Settat, as we were being pursued—”

“Another word, Major,” cried Don Luis, gayly, “and this time I really will go out! I must say you have a nice way of sparing my modesty!”

“My dear Perenna,” replied Comte d’Astrignac, “I always told you that you had every good quality and only one fault, which was that you were not a Frenchman.”

“And I always answered, Major, that I was French on my mother’s side and a Frenchman in heart and temperament. There are things which only a Frenchman can do.”

The two men again gripped each other’s hands affectionately.

“Come,” said the Prefect, “we’ll say no more of your feats of prowess, Monsieur, nor of this report. I will mention one thing, however, which is that, after two years, you fell into an ambush of forty Berbers, that you were captured, and that you did not rejoin the Legion until last month.”

“Just so, Monsieur le Préfet, in time to receive my discharge, as my five years’ service was up.”

“But how did Mr. Cosmo Mornington come to mention you in his will, when, at the time when he was making it, you had disappeared from view for eighteen months?”

“Cosmo and I used to correspond.”

“What!”

“Yes; and I had informed him of my approaching escape and my return to Paris.”

“But how did you manage it? Where were you? And how did you find the means? …”

Don Luis smiled without answering.

“Monte Cristo, this time,” said M. Desmalions. “The mysterious Monte Cristo.”

“Monte Cristo, if you like, Monsieur le Préfet. In point of fact, the mystery of my captivity and escape is a rather strange one. It may be interesting to throw some light upon it one of these days. Meanwhile, I must ask for a little credit.”

A silence ensued. M. Desmalions once more inspected this curious individual; and he could not refrain from saying, as though in obedience to an association of ideas for which he himself was unable to account:

“One word more, and one only. What were your comrades’ reasons for giving you that rather odd nickname of Arsène Lupin? Was it just an allusion to your pluck, to your physical strength?”

“There was something besides, Monsieur le Préfet: the discovery of a very curious theft, of which certain details, apparently incapable of explanation, had enabled me to name the perpetrator.”

“So you have a gift for that sort of thing?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Préfet, a certain knack which I had the opportunity of employing in Africa on more than one occasion. Hence my nickname of Arsène Lupin. It was soon after the death of the man himself, you know, and he was much spoken of at the time.”

“Was it a serious theft?”

“It was rather; and it happened to be committed upon Cosmo Mornington, who was then living in the Province of Oran. That was really what started our relations.”

There was a fresh silence; and Don Luis added:

“Poor Cosmo! That incident gave him an unshakable confidence in my little detective talents. He was always saying, ‘Perenna, if I die murdered’—he had a fixed notion in his head that he would meet with a violent death—‘if I die murdered, swear that you will pursue the culprit.’ ”

“His presentiment was not justified,” said the Prefect of Police. “Cosmo Mornington was not murdered.”

“That’s where you make a mistake, Monsieur le Préfet,” said Don Luis.

M. Desmalions gave a start.

“What! What’s that? Cosmo Mornington—?”

“I say that Cosmo Mornington did not die, as you think, of a carelessly administered injection, but that he died, as he feared he would, by foul play.”

“But, Monsieur, your assertion is based on no evidence whatever!”

“It is based on fact, Monsieur le Préfet.”

“Were you there? Do you know anything?”

“I was not there. A month ago I was still with the colours. I even admit that, when I arrived in Paris, not having seen the newspapers regularly, I did not know of Cosmo’s death. In fact, I learned it from you just now, Monsieur le Préfet.”

“In that case, Monsieur, you cannot know more about it than I do, and you must accept the verdict of the doctor.”

“I am sorry, but his verdict fails to satisfy me.”

“But look here, Monsieur, what prompts you to make the accusation? Have you any evidence?”

“Yes.”

“What evidence?”

“Your own words, Monsieur le Préfet.”

“My own words? What do you mean?”

“I will tell you, Monsieur le Préfet. You began by saying that Cosmo Mornington had taken up medicine and practised it with great skill; next, you said that he had given himself an injection which, carelessly administered, set up inflammation and caused his death within a few hours.”

“Yes.”

“Well, Monsieur le Préfet, I maintain that a man who practises medicine with great skill and who is accustomed to treating sick people, as Cosmo Mornington was, is incapable of giving himself a hypodermic injection without first taking every necessary antiseptic precaution. I have seen Cosmo at work, and I know how he set about things.”

“Well?”

“Well, the doctor just wrote a certificate as any doctor will when there is no sort of clue to arouse his suspicions.”

“So your opinion is—”

“Maître Lepertuis,” asked Perenna, turning to the solicitor, “did you notice nothing unusual when you were summoned to Mr. Mornington’s deathbed?”

“No, nothing. Mr. Mornington was in a state of coma.”

“It’s a strange thing in itself,” observed Don Luis, “that an injection, however badly administered, should produce such rapid results. Were there no signs of suffering?”

“No … or rather, yes. … Yes, I remember the face showed brown patches which I did not see on the occasion of my first visit.”

“Brown patches? That confirms my supposition Cosmo Mornington was poisoned.”

“But how?” exclaimed the Prefect.

“By some substance introduced into one of the phials of glycero-phosphate, or into the syringe which the sick man employed.”

“But the doctor?” M. Desmalions objected.

“Maître Lepertuis,” Perenna continued, “did you call the doctor’s attention to those brown patches?”

“Yes, but he attached no importance to them.”

“Was it his ordinary medical adviser?”

“No, his ordinary medical adviser, Doctor Pujol, who happens to be a friend of mine and who had recommended me to him as a solicitor, was ill. The doctor whom I saw at his deathbed must have been a local practitioner.”

“I have his name and address here,” said the Prefect of Police, who had turned up the certificate. “Doctor Bellavoine, 14 Rue d’Astorg.”

“Have you a medical directory, Monsieur le Préfet?”

M. Desmalions opened a directory and turned over the pages. Presently he declared:

“There is no Doctor Bellavoine; and there is no doctor living at 14 Rue d’Astorg.”

II

A MAN DEAD

The declaration was followed by a silence of some length. The Secretary of the American Embassy and the Peruvian attaché had followed the conversation with eager interest. Major d'Astrignac nodded his head with an air of approval. To his mind, Perenna could not be mistaken.

The Prefect of Police confessed:

"Certainly, certainly … we have a number of circumstances here … that are fairly ambiguous. … Those brown patches; that doctor. … It's a case that wants looking into." And, questioning Don Luis Perenna as though in spite of himself, he asked, "No doubt, in your opinion, there is a possible connection between the murder … and Mr. Mornington's will?"

"That, Monsieur le Préfet, I cannot tell. If there is, we should have to suppose that the contents of the will were known. Do you think they can have leaked out, Maître Lepertuis?"

"I don't think so, for Mr. Mornington seemed to behave with great caution."

"And there's no question, is there, of any indiscretion committed in your office?"

“By whom? No one handled the will except myself; and I alone have the key of the safe in which I put away documents of that importance every evening.”

“The safe has not been broken into? There has been no burglary at your office?”

“No.”

“You saw Cosmo Mornington in the morning?”

“Yes, on a Friday morning.”

“What did you do with the will until the evening, until you locked it away up your safe?”

“I probably put it in the drawer of my desk.”

“And the drawer was not forced?”

Maître Lepertuis seemed taken aback and made no reply.

“Well?” asked Perenna.

“Well, yes, I remember … there was something that day … that same Friday.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. When I came in from lunch I noticed that the drawer was not locked, although I had locked it beyond the least doubt. At the time I attached comparatively little importance to the incident. Today, I understand, I understand—”

Thus, little by little, were all the suppositions conceived by Don Luis verified: suppositions resting, it is true, upon just one or two clues, but yet containing an amount of intuition, of divination, that was really surprising in a man who had been present at none of the events between which

he traced the connection so skilfully.

"We will lose no time, Monsieur," said the Prefect of Police, "in checking your statements, which you will confess to be a little venturesome, by the more positive evidence of one of my detectives who has the case in charge … and who ought to be here by now."

"Does his evidence bear upon Cosmo Mornington's heirs?" asked the solicitor.

"Upon the heirs principally, because two days ago he telephoned to me that he had collected all the particulars, and also upon the very points which—But wait: I remember that he spoke to my secretary of a murder committed a month ago today. … Now it's a month today since Mr. Cosmo Mornington—"

M. Desmalions pressed hard on a bell. His private secretary at once appeared.

"Inspector Vérot?" asked the Prefect sharply.

"He's not back yet."

"Have him fetched! Have him brought here! He must be found at all costs and without delay."

He turned to Don Luis Perenna.

"Inspector Vérot was here an hour ago, feeling rather unwell, very much excited, it seems, and declaring that he was being watched and followed. He said he wanted to make a most important statement to me about the Mornington case and to warn the police of two murders which are to be committed tonight … and which would be a consequence of the murder of Cosmo Mornington."

“And he was unwell, you say?”

“Yes, ill at ease and even very queer and imagining things. By way of being prudent, he left a detailed report on the case for me. Well, the report is simply a blank sheet of letter-paper.

“Here is the paper and the envelope in which I found it, and here is a cardboard box which he also left behind him. It contains a cake of chocolate with the marks of teeth on it.”

“May I look at the two things you have mentioned, Monsieur le Préfet?”

“Yes, but they won’t tell you anything.”

“Perhaps so—”

Don Luis examined at length the cardboard box and the yellow envelope, on which were printed the words, “Café du Pont-Neuf.” The others awaited his words as though they were bound to shed an unexpected light. He merely said:

“The handwriting is not the same on the envelope and the box. The writing on the envelope is less plain, a little shaky, obviously imitated.”

“Which proves—?”

“Which proves, Monsieur le Préfet, that this yellow envelope does not come from your detective. I presume that, after writing his report at a table in the Café du Pont-Neuf and closing it, he had a moment of inattention during which somebody substituted for his envelope another with the same address, but containing a blank sheet of paper.”

“That’s a supposition!” said the Prefect.

“Perhaps; but what is certain, Monsieur le Préfet, is that your inspector’s presentiments are well-grounded, that he is being closely watched, that the discoveries about the Mornington inheritance which he has succeeded in making are interfering with criminal designs, and that he is in terrible danger.”

“Come, come!”

“He must be rescued, Monsieur le Préfet. Ever since the commencement of this meeting I have felt persuaded that we are up against an attempt which has already begun. I hope that it is not too late and that your inspector has not been the first victim.”

“My dear sir,” exclaimed the Prefect of Police, “you declare all this with a conviction which rouses my admiration, but which is not enough to establish the fact that your fears are justified. Inspector Vérot’s return will be the best proof.”

“Inspector Vérot will not return.”

“But why not?”

“Because he has returned already. The messenger saw him return.”

“The messenger was dreaming. If you have no proof but that man’s evidence—”

“I have another proof, Monsieur le Préfet, which Inspector Vérot himself has left of his presence here: these few, almost illegible letters which he scribbled on this memorandum pad, which your secretary did not see him write and which have just caught my eye. Look at them. Are

they not a proof, a definite proof that he came back?"

The Prefect did not conceal his perturbation. The others all seemed impressed. The secretary's return but increased their apprehensions: nobody had seen Inspector Vérot.

"Monsieur le Préfet," said Don Luis, "I earnestly beg you to have the office messenger in."

And, as soon as the messenger was there, he asked him, without even waiting for M. Desmalions to speak:

"Are you sure that Inspector Vérot entered this room a second time?"

"Absolutely sure."

"And that he did not go out again?"

"Absolutely sure."

"And your attention was not distracted for a moment?"

"Not for a moment."

"There, Monsieur, you see!" cried the Prefect. "If Inspector Vérot were here, we should know it."

"He is here, Monsieur le Préfet."

"What!"

"Excuse my obstinacy, Monsieur le Préfet, but I say that, when someone enters a room and does not go out again, he is still in that room."

"Hiding?" said M. Desmalions, who was growing more and more irritated.

"No, but fainting, ill—dead, perhaps."

"But where, hang it all?"

"Behind that screen."

"There's nothing behind that screen, nothing but a door."

"And that door—?"

"Leads to a dressing-room."

"Well, Monsieur le Préfet, Inspector Vérot, tottering, losing his head, imagining himself to be going from your office to your secretary's room, fell into your dressing-room."

M. Desmalions ran to the door, but, at the moment of opening it, shrank back. Was it apprehension, the wish to withdraw himself from the influence of that astonishing man, who gave his orders with such authority and who seemed to command events themselves?

Don Luis stood waiting imperturbably, in a deferential attitude.

"I cannot believe—" said M. Desmalions.

"Monsieur le Préfet, I would remind you that Inspector Vérot's revelations may save the lives of two persons who are doomed to die tonight. Every minute lost is irreparable."

M. Desmalions shrugged his shoulders. But that man mastered him with the power of his conviction; and the Prefect opened the door.

He did not make a movement, did not utter a cry. He simply muttered:

"Oh, is it possible!—"

By the pale gleam of light that entered through a ground-glass window they saw the body of a man lying on the floor.

“The inspector! Inspector Vérot!” gasped the office messenger, running forward.

He and the secretary raised the body and placed it in an armchair in the Prefect’s office.

Inspector Vérot was still alive, but so little alive that they could scarcely hear the beating of his heart. A drop of saliva trickled from the corner of his mouth. His eyes were devoid of all expression. However, certain muscles of the face kept moving, perhaps with the effort of a will that seemed to linger almost beyond life.

Don Luis muttered:

“Look, Monsieur le Préfet—the brown patches!”

The same dread unnerved all. They began to ring bells and open doors and call for help.

“Send for the doctor!” ordered M. Desmalions. “Tell them to bring a doctor, the first that comes—and a priest. We can’t let the poor man—”

Don Luis raised his arm to demand silence.

“There is nothing more to be done,” he said. “We shall do better to make the most of these last moments. Have I your permission, Monsieur le Préfet?”

He bent over the dying man, laid the swaying head against the back of the chair, and, in a very gentle voice, whispered:

“Vérot, it’s Monsieur le Préfet speaking to you. We should

like a few particulars about what is to take place tonight. Do you hear me, Vérot? If you hear me, close your eyelids."

The eyelids were lowered. But was it not merely chance? Don Luis went on:

"You have found the heirs of the Roussel sisters, that much we know; and it is two of those heirs who are threatened with death. The double murder is to be committed tonight. But what we do not know is the name of those heirs, who are doubtless not called Roussel. You must tell us the name.

"Listen to me: you wrote on a memorandum pad three letters which seem to form the syllable Fau. … Am I right? Is this the first syllable of a name? Which is the next letter after those three? Close your eyes when I mention the right letter. Is it *b*? Is it *c*?"

But there was now not a flicker in the inspector's pallid face. The head dropped heavily on the chest. Vérot gave two or three sighs, his frame shook with one great shiver, and he moved no more.

He was dead.

The tragic scene had been enacted so swiftly that the men who were its shuddering spectators remained for a moment confounded. The solicitor made the sign of the cross and went down on his knees. The Prefect murmured:

"Poor Vérot! … He was a good man, who thought only of the service, of his duty. Instead of going and getting himself seen to—and who knows? Perhaps he might have been saved—he came back here in the hope of communicating his secret. Poor Vérot!—"

“Was he married? Are there any children?” asked Don Luis.

“He leaves a wife and three children,” replied the Prefect.

“I will look after them,” said Don Luis simply.

Then, when they brought a doctor and when M. Desmalions gave orders for the corpse to be carried to another room, Don Luis took the doctor aside and said:

“There is no doubt that Inspector Vérot was poisoned. Look at his wrist: you will see the mark of a puncture with a ring of inflammation round it.”

“Then he was pricked in that place?”

“Yes, with a pin or the point of a pen; and not as violently as they may have wished, because death did not ensue until some hours later.”

The messengers removed the corpse; and soon there was no one left in the office except the five people whom the Prefect had originally sent for. The American Secretary of Embassy and the Peruvian attaché, considering their continued presence unnecessary, went away, after warmly complimenting Don Luis Perenna on his powers of penetration.

Next came the turn of Major d’Astrignac, who shook his former subordinate by the hand with obvious affection. And Maître Lepertais and Perenna, having fixed an appointment for the payment of the legacy, were themselves on the point of leaving, when M. Desmalions entered briskly.

"Ah, so you're still here, Don Luis Perenna! I'm glad of that. I have an idea: those three letters which you say you made out on the writing-table, are you sure they form the syllable Fau?"

"I think so, Monsieur le Préfet. See for yourself: are not these an *F*, an *A* and a *U*? And observe that the *F* is a capital, which made me suspect that the letters are the first syllable of a proper name."

"Just so, just so," said M. Desmalions. "Well, curiously enough, that syllable happens to be—But wait, we'll verify our facts—"

M. Desmalions searched hurriedly among the letters which his secretary had handed him on his arrival and which lay on a corner of the table.

"Ah, here we are!" he exclaimed, glancing at the signature of one of the letters. "Here we are! It's as I thought: 'Fauville.' … The first syllable is the same. … Look, 'Fauville,' just like that, without Christian name or initials. The letter must have been written in a feverish moment: there is no date nor address. … The writing is shaky—"

And M. Desmalions read out:

"MONSIEUR LE PRÉFET:

"A great danger is hanging over my head and over the head of my son. Death is approaching apace. I shall have tonight, or tomorrow morning at the latest, the proofs of the abominable plot that threatens us. I ask leave to bring them to you in the course of the morning. I am in need of protection and I call for your assistance.

"Permit me to be, etc.
FAUVILLE."

"No other designation?" asked Perenna. "No letter-heading?"

"None. But there is no mistake. Inspector Vérot's declarations agree too evidently with this despairing appeal. It is clearly M. Fauville and his son who are to be murdered tonight. And the terrible thing is that, as this name of Fauville is a very common one, it is impossible for our inquiries to succeed in time."

"What, Monsieur le Préfet? Surely, by straining every nerve—"

"Certainly, we will strain every nerve; and I shall set all my men to work. But observe that we have not the slightest clue."

"Oh, it would be awful!" cried Don Luis. "Those two creatures doomed to death; and we unable to save them! Monsieur le Préfet, I ask you to authorize me—"

He had not finished speaking when the Prefect's private secretary entered with a visiting-card in his hand.

"Monsieur le Préfet, this caller was so persistent. … I hesitated—"

M. Desmalions took the card and uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and joy.

"Look, Monsieur," he said to Perenna.

And he handed him the card.

Hippolyte *Fauville,*

Civil *Engineer.*
14 bis Boulevard Suchet.

"Come," said M. Desmalions, "chance is favouring us. If this M. Fauville is one of the Roussel heirs, our task becomes very much easier."

"In any case, Monsieur le Préfet," the solicitor interposed, "I must remind you that one of the clauses of the will stipulates that it shall not be read until forty-eight hours have elapsed. M. Fauville, therefore, must not be informed—"

The door was pushed open and a man hustled the messenger aside and rushed in.

"Inspector … Inspector Vérot?" he spluttered. "He's dead, isn't he? I was told—"

"Yes, Monsieur, he is dead."

"Too late! I'm too late!" he stammered.

And he sank into a chair, clasping his hands and sobbing:

"Oh, the scoundrels! the scoundrels!"

He was a pale, hollow-cheeked, sickly looking man of about fifty. His head was bald, above a forehead lined with deep wrinkles. A nervous twitching affected his chin and the lobes of his ears. Tears stood in his eyes.

The Prefect asked:

"Whom do you mean, Monsieur? Inspector Vérot's murderers? Are you able to name them, to assist our inquiry?"

Hippolyte Fauville shook his head.

“No, no, it would be useless, for the moment. … My proofs would not be sufficient. … No, really not.”

He had already risen from his chair and stood apologizing:

“Monsieur le Préfet, I have disturbed you unnecessarily, but I wanted to know. … I was hoping that Inspector Vérot might have escaped. … His evidence, joined to mine, would have been invaluable. But perhaps he was able to tell you?”

“No, he spoke of this evening—of tonight—”

Hippolyte Fauville started.

“This evening! Then the time has come! … But no, it’s impossible, they can’t do anything to me yet. … They are not ready—”

“Inspector Vérot declared, however, that the double murder would be committed tonight.”

“No, Monsieur le Préfet, he was wrong there. … I know all about it. … Tomorrow evening at the earliest … and we will catch them in a trap. … Oh, the scoundrels!”

Don Luis went up to him and asked:

“Your mother’s name was Ermeline Roussel, was it not?”

“Yes, Ermeline Roussel. She is dead now.”

“And she was from Saint-Etienne?”

“Yes. But why these questions?”

“Monsieur le Préfet will tell you tomorrow. One word more.” He opened the cardboard box left by Inspector Vérot. “Does this cake of chocolate mean anything to you? These marks?”

“Oh, how awful!” said the civil engineer, in a hoarse tone. “Where did the inspector find it?”

He dropped into his chair again, but only for a moment; then, drawing himself up, he hurried toward the door with a jerky step.

“I’m going, Monsieur le Préfet, I’m going. Tomorrow morning I’ll show you. … I shall have all the proofs. … And the police will protect me. … I am ill, I know, but I want to live! I have the right to live … and my son, too. … And we will live. … Oh, the scoundrels!—”

And he ran, stumbling out, like a drunken man.

M. Desmalions rose hastily.

“I shall have inquiries made about that man’s circumstances. … I shall have his house watched. I’ve telephoned to the detective office already. I’m expecting someone in whom I have every confidence.”

Don Luis said:

“Monsieur le Préfet, I beg you, with an earnestness which you will understand, to authorize me to pursue the investigation. Cosmo Mornington’s will makes it my duty and, allow me to say, gives me the right to do so. M. Fauville’s enemies have given proofs of extraordinary cleverness and daring. I want to have the honour of being at the post of danger tonight, at M. Fauville’s house, near his person.”

The Prefect hesitated. He was bound to reflect how greatly to Don Luis Perenna’s interest it was that none of the Mornington heirs should be discovered, or at least be

able to come between him and the millions of the inheritance. Was it safe to attribute to a noble sentiment of gratitude, to a lofty conception of friendship and duty, that strange longing to protect Hippolyte Fauville against the death that threatened him?

For some seconds M. Desmalions watched that resolute face, those intelligent eyes, at once innocent and satirical, grave and smiling, eyes through which you could certainly not penetrate their owner's baffling individuality, but which nevertheless looked at you with an expression of absolute frankness and sincerity. Then he called his secretary:

"Has anyone come from the detective office?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet; Sergeant Mazeroux is here."

"Please have him shown in."

And, turning to Perenna:

"Sergeant Mazeroux is one of our smartest detectives. I used to employ him together with that poor Vérot when I wanted anyone more than ordinarily active and sharp. He will be of great use to you."

Sergeant Mazeroux entered. He was a short, lean, wiry man, whose drooping moustache, heavy eyelids, watery eyes and long, lank hair gave him a most doleful appearance.

"Mazeroux," said the Prefect, "you will have heard, by this time, of your comrade Vérot's death and of the horrible circumstances attending it. We must now avenge him and prevent further crimes. This gentleman, who knows the

case from end to end, will explain all that is necessary. You will work with him and report to me tomorrow morning."

This meant giving a free hand to Don Luis Perenna and relying on his power of initiative and his perspicacity. Don Luis bowed:

"I thank you, Monsieur le Préfet. I hope that you will have no reason to regret the trust which you are good enough to place in me."

And, taking leave of M. Desmalions and Maître Lepertuis, he went out with Sergeant Mazeroux.

As soon as they were outside, he told Mazeroux what he knew. The detective seemed much impressed by his companion's professional gifts and quite ready to be guided by his views.

They decided first to go to the Café du Pont-Neuf. Here they learned that Inspector Vérot, who was a regular customer of the place, had written a long letter there that morning. And the waiter remembered that a man at the next table, who had entered the café at almost the same time as the inspector, had also asked for writing-paper and called twice for yellow envelopes.

"That's it," said Mazeroux to Don Luis. "As you suspected, one letter has been substituted for the other."

The description given by the waiter was pretty explicit: a tall man, with a slight stoop, wearing a reddish-brown beard cut into a point, a tortoiseshell eyeglass with a black silk ribbon, and an ebony walking-stick with a handle shaped like a swan's head.

"That's something for the police to go upon," said Mazeroux.

They were leaving the café when Don Luis stopped his companion.

"One moment."

"What's the matter?"

"We've been followed."

"Followed? What next? And by whom, pray?"

"No one that matters. I know who it is and I may as well settle his business and have done with it. Wait for me. I shall be back; and I'll show you some fun. You shall see one of the 'nuts,' I promise you."

He returned in a minute with a tall, thin man with his face set in whiskers. He introduced him:

"M. Mazeroux, a friend of mine, Señor Caceres, an attaché at the Peruvian Legation. Señor Caceres took part in the interview at the Prefect's just now. It was he who, on the Peruvian Minister's instructions, collected the documents bearing upon my identity." And he added gayly: "So you were looking for me, dear Señor Caceres. Indeed, I expected, when we left the police office—"

The Peruvian attaché made a sign and pointed to Sergeant Mazeroux. Perenna replied:

"Oh, pray don't mind M. Mazeroux! You can speak before him; he is the soul of discretion. Besides, he knows all about the business."

The attaché was silent. Perenna made him sit down in