

Part 1
The Blonde Lady

Chapter 1

Number 514, Series 26

On the 8th of December last, M. Gerbois, professor of mathematics at Versailles College, rummaging among the stores at a second-hand dealer's, discovered a small mahogany writing-desk, which took his fancy because of its many drawers.

"That's just what I want for Suzanne's birthday," he thought.

M. Gerbois' means were limited and, anxious as he was to please his daughter, he felt it his duty to beat the dealer down. He ended by paying sixty-five francs. As he was writing down his address, a well-groomed and well-dressed young man, who had been hunting through the shop in every direction, caught sight of the writing-desk and asked:

"How much for this?"

"It's sold," replied the dealer.

"Oh ... to this gentleman?"

M. Gerbois bowed and, feeling all the happier that one of his fellow-men envied him his purchase, left the shop. But he had not taken ten steps in the street before the young man caught him up and, raising his hat, said, very politely:

"I beg a thousand pardons, sir... . I am going to ask you an indiscreet question... . Were you looking for this desk rather than anything else?"

"No. I went to the shop to see if I could find a cheap set of scales for my experiments."

"Therefore, you do not want it very particularly?"

"I want it, that's all."

"Because it's old I suppose?"

"Because it's useful."

"In that case, would you mind exchanging it for another desk, quite as useful, but in better condition?"

"This one is in good condition and I see no point in exchanging it."

"Still ... "

M. Gerbois was a man easily irritated and quick to take offense. He replied curtly:

"I must ask you to drop the subject, sir."

The young man placed himself in front of him.

"I don't know how much you paid, sir ... but I offer you double the price."

"No, thank you."

"Three times the price."

"Oh, that will do," exclaimed the professor, impatiently. "The desk belongs to me and is not for sale."

The young man stared at him with a look that remained imprinted on M. Gerbois' memory, then turned on his heel, without a word, and walked away.

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An hour later, the desk was brought to the little house on the Viroflay Road where the professor lived. He called his daughter:

"This is for you, Suzanne; that is, if you like it."

Suzanne was a pretty creature, of a demonstrative temperament and easily pleased. She threw her arms round her father's neck and kissed him as rapturously as though he had made her a present fit for a queen.

That evening, assisted by Hortense the maid, she carried up the desk to her room, cleaned out the drawers and neatly put away her papers, her stationery, her correspondence, her picture postcards and a few secret souvenirs of her cousin Philippe.

M. Gerbois went to the college at half-past seven the next morning. At ten o'clock Suzanne, according to her daily custom, went to meet him at the exit; and it was a great pleasure to him to see her graceful, smiling figure waiting on the pavement opposite the gate.

They walked home together.

"And how do you like the desk?"

"Oh, it's lovely! Hortense and I have polished up the brass handles till they shine like gold."

"So you're pleased with it?"

"I should think so! I don't know how I did without it all this time."

They walked up the front garden. The professor said:

"Let's go and look at it before lunch."

"Yes, that's a good idea."

She went up the stairs first, but, on reaching the door of her room, she gave a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed M. Gerbois.

He followed her into the room. The writing-desk was gone.

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What astonished the police was the wonderful simplicity of the means employed. While Suzanne was out and the maid making her purchases for the day, a ticket-porter, wearing his badge, had stopped his cart before the garden, in sight of the neighbours, and rung the bell twice. The neighbours, not knowing that the servant had left the house, suspected nothing, so that the man was able to effect his object absolutely undisturbed.

This fact must be noted: not a cupboard had been broken open, not so much as a clock displaced. Even Suzanne's purse, which she had left on the marble slab of the desk, was found on the adjacent table, with the gold which it contained. The object of the theft was clearly determined, therefore, and this made it the more difficult to understand; for, after all, why should a man run so great a risk to secure so trivial a spoil?

The only clue which the professor could supply was the incident of the day before:

"From the first, that young man displayed a keen annoyance at my refusal; and I have a positive impression that he left me under a threat."

It was all very vague. The dealer was questioned. He knew neither of the two gentlemen. As for the desk, he had bought it for forty francs at Chevreuse, at the sale of a person deceased, and he considered that he had re-sold it at a fair price. A persistent inquiry revealed nothing further.

But M. Gerbois remained convinced that he had suffered an enormous loss. A fortune must have been concealed in some secret drawer and that was why the young man, knowing of the hiding-place, had acted with such decision.

"Poor father! What should we have done with the fortune?" Suzanne kept saying.

"What! Why, with that for your dowry, you could have made the finest match going!"

Suzanne aimed at no one higher than her cousin Philippe, who had not a penny to bless himself with, and she gave a bitter sigh. And life in the little house at Versailles went on gaily, less carelessly than before, shadowed over as it now was with regret and disappointment.

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Two months elapsed. And suddenly, one after the other, came a sequence of the most serious events, forming a surprising run of alternate luck and misfortune.

On the 1st of February, at half-past five, M. Gerbois, who had just come home, with an evening paper in his hand, sat down, put on his spectacles and began to read. The political news was uninteresting. He turned the page and a paragraph at once caught his eye, headed:

"THIRD DRAWING OF THE PRESS-ASSOCIATION LOTTERY"

"First prize, 1,000,000 francs: No. 514, Series 23."

The paper dropped from his hands. The walls swam before his eyes and his heart stopped beating. Number 514, series 23, was the number of his ticket! He had bought it by accident, to oblige one of his friends, for he did not believe in luck; and now he had won!

He took out his memorandum-book, quick! He was quite right: number 514, series 23, was jotted down on the fly-leaf. But where was the ticket?

He flew to his study to fetch the box of stationery in which he had put the precious ticket away; and he stopped short as he entered and staggered back, with a pain at his heart: the box was not there and—what an awful thing!—he suddenly realized that the box had not been there for weeks.

"Suzanne! Suzanne!"

She had just come in and ran up the stairs hurriedly. He stammered, in a choking voice:

"Suzanne ... the box ... the box of stationery... ."

"Which one?"

"The one I bought at Louvre ... on a Thursday ... it used to stand at the end of the table."

"But don't you remember, father?... We put it away together... ."

"When?"

"That evening ... you know, the day before... ."

"But where?... Quick, tell me ... it's more than I can bear... ."

"Where?... In the writing-desk."

"In the desk that was stolen?"

"Yes."

"In the desk that was stolen!"

He repeated the words in a whisper, with a sort of terror. Then he took her hand, and lower still:

"It contained a million, Suzanne... ."

"Oh, father, why didn't you tell me?" she murmured innocently.

"A million!" he repeated. "It was the winning number in the press lottery."

The hugeness of the disaster crushed them and, for a long time, they maintained a silence which they had not the courage to break. At last Suzanne said:

"But, father, they will pay you all the same."

"Why? On what evidence?"

"Does it require evidence?"

"Of course!"

"And have you none?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well?"

"It was in the box."

"In the box that has disappeared?"

"Yes. And the other man will get the money."

"Why, that would be outrageous! Surely, father, you can stop the payment?"

"Who knows? Who knows? That man must be extraordinarily clever! He has such wonderful resources... . Remember ... think how he got hold of the desk... ."

His energy revived; he sprang up and, stamping his foot on the floor.

"No, no, no," he shouted, "he shan't have that million, he shan't! Why should he? After all, sharp as he may be, he can do nothing, either. If he calls for the money, they'll lock him up! Ah, we shall see, my friend!"

"Have you thought of something, father?"

"I shall defend our rights to the bitter end, come what may! And we shall succeed!... The million belongs to me and I mean to have it!"

A few minutes later, he dispatched this telegram:

"Governor, "Crédit Foncier, "Rue Capucines, "Paris.

"Am owner number 514, series 23; oppose by every legal method payment to any other person. "GERBOIS."

At almost the same time, the Crédit Foncier received another telegram:

"Number 514, series 23, is in my possession. "ARSÈNE LUPIN."

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Whenever I sit down to tell one of the numberless adventures which compose the life of Arsène Lupin, I feel a genuine embarrassment, because it is quite clear to me that even the least important of these adventures is known to every one of my readers. As a matter of fact, there is not a move on the part of "our national thief," as he has been happily called, but has been described all over the country, not an exploit but has been studied from every point of view, not an action but has been

commented upon with an abundance of detail generally reserved for stories of heroic deeds.

Who, for instance, does not know that strange case of the blonde lady, with the curious episodes which were reported under flaring headlines as "NUMBER 514, SERIES 23!" ... "THE MURDER IN THE AVENUE HENRI-MARTIN!" ... and "THE BLUE DIAMOND!" ... What an excitement there was about the intervention of Holmlock Shears, the famous English detective! What an effervescence surrounded the varying fortunes that marked the struggle between those two great artists! And what a din along the boulevards on the day when the newsboys shouted:

"Arrest of Arsène Lupin!"

My excuse is that I can supply something new: I can furnish the key to the puzzle. There is always a certain mystery about these adventures: I can dispel it. I reprint articles that have been read over and over again; I copy out old interviews: but all these things I rearrange and classify and put to the exact test of truth. My collaborator in this work is Arsène Lupin himself, whose kindness to me is inexhaustible. I am also under an occasional obligation to the unspeakable Wilson, the friend and confidant of Holmlock Shears.

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My readers will remember the Homeric laughter that greeted the publication of the two telegrams. The name of Arsène Lupin alone was a guarantee of originality, a promise of amusement for the gallery. And the gallery, in this case, was the whole world.

An inquiry was immediately set on foot by the Crédit Foncier and it was ascertained that number 514, series 23, had been sold by the Versailles branch of the Crédit Lyonnais to Major Bressy of the artillery. Now the major had died of a fall from his horse; and it appeared that he told his brother officers, some time before his death, that he had been obliged to part with his ticket to a friend.

"That friend was myself," declared M. Gerbois.

"Prove it," objected the governor of the Crédit Foncier.

"Prove it? That's quite easy. Twenty people will tell you that I kept up constant relations with the major and that we used to meet at the café on the Place d'Armes. It was there that, one day, to oblige him in a moment of financial embarrassment, I took his ticket off him and gave him twenty francs for it."

"Have you any witnesses to the transaction?"

"No."

"Then upon what do you base your claim?"

"Upon the letter which he wrote me on the subject."

"What letter?"

"A letter pinned to the ticket."

"Produce it."

"But it was in the stolen writing-desk!"

"Find it."

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The letter was communicated to the press by Arsène Lupin. A paragraph inserted in the *Écho de France*—which has the honour of being his official organ and in which he seems to be one of the principal shareholders—announced that he was placing in the hands of Maître Detinan, his counsel, the letter which Major Bressy had written to him, Lupin, personally.

There was a burst of delight: Arsène Lupin was represented by counsel! Arsène Lupin, respecting established customs, had appointed a member of the bar to act for him!

The reporters rushed to interview Maître Detinan, an influential radical deputy, a man endowed with the highest integrity and a mind of uncommon shrewdness, which was, at the same time, somewhat skeptical and given to paradox.

Maître Detinan was exceedingly sorry to say that he had never had the pleasure of meeting Arsène Lupin, but he had, in point of fact, received his instructions, was greatly flattered at being selected, keenly alive to the honour shown him and determined to defend his client's rights to the utmost. He opened his brief and without hesitation showed the major's letter. It proved the sale of the ticket, but did not mention the purchaser's name. It began, "My dear friend," simply.

"'My dear friend' means me," added Arsène Lupin, in a note enclosing the major's letter. "And the best proof is that I have the letter."

The bevy of reporters at once flew off to M. Gerbois, who could do nothing but repeat:

"'My dear friend' is no one but myself. Arsène Lupin stole the major's letter with the lottery-ticket."

"Tell him to prove it," was Lupin's rejoinder to the journalists.

"But he stole the desk!" exclaimed M. Gerbois in front of the same journalists.

"Tell him to prove it!" retorted Lupin once again.

And a delightful entertainment was provided for the public by this duel between the two owners of number 514, series 23, by the constant

coming and going of the journalists and by the coolness of Arsène Lupin as opposed to the frenzy of poor M. Gerbois.

Unhappy man! The press was full of his lamentations! He confessed the full extent of his misfortunes in a touchingly ingenuous way:

"It's Suzanne's dowry, gentlemen, that the villain has stolen!... For myself, personally, I don't care; but for Suzanne! Just think, a million! Ten hundred thousand francs! Ah, I always said the desk contained a treasure!"

He was told in vain that his adversary, when taking away the desk, knew nothing of the existence of the lottery-ticket and that, in any case, no one could have foreseen that this particular ticket would win the first prize. All he did was to moan:

"Don't talk to me; of course he knew!... If not, why should he have taken the trouble to steal that wretched desk?"

"For unknown reasons, but certainly not to get hold of a scrap of paper which, at that time, was worth the modest sum of twenty francs."

"The sum of a million! He knew it... He knows everything!... Ah, you don't know the sort of a man he is, the ruffian!... He hasn't defrauded you of a million, you see!... "

This talk could have gone on a long time yet. But, twelve days later, M. Gerbois received a letter from Arsène Lupin, marked "Private and confidential," which worried him not a little:

"DEAR SIR:

"The gallery is amusing itself at our expense. Do you not think that the time has come to be serious? I, for my part, have quite made up my mind.

"The position is clear: I hold a ticket which I am not entitled to cash and you are entitled to cash a ticket which you do not hold. Therefore neither of us can do anything without the other.

"Now you would not consent to surrender *your* rights to *me* nor I to give up *my* ticket to *you*.

"What are we to do?"

"I see only one way out of the difficulty: let us divide. Half a million for you, half a million for me. Is not that fair? And would not this judgment of Solomon satisfy the sense of justice in each of us?"

"I propose this as an equitable solution, but also an immediate solution. It is not an offer which you have time to discuss, but a necessity before which circumstances compel you to bow. I give you three days for reflection. I hope that, on Friday morning, I may have the pleasure of seeing a discreet advertisement in the agony-column of the *Écho de*

France, addressed to 'M. Ars. Lup.' and containing, in veiled terms, your unreserved assent to the compact which I am suggesting to you. In that event, you will at once recover possession of the ticket and receive the million, on the understanding that you will hand me five hundred thousand francs in a way which I will indicate hereafter.

"Should you refuse, I have taken measures that will produce exactly the same result; but, apart from the very serious trouble which your obstinacy would bring upon you, you would be the poorer by twenty-five thousand francs, which I should have to deduct for additional expenses.

"I am, dear sir, "Very respectfully yours, "ARSÈNE LUPIN."

M. Gerbois, in his exasperation, was guilty of the colossal blunder of showing this letter and allowing it to be copied. His indignation drove him to every sort of folly:

"Not a penny! He shall not have a penny!" he shouted before the assembled reporters. "Share what belongs to me? Never! Let him tear up his ticket if he likes!"

"Still, half a million francs is better than nothing."

"It's not a question of that, but of my rights; and those rights I shall establish in a court of law."

"Go to law with Arsène Lupin? That would be funny!"

"No, but the *Crédit Foncier*. They are bound to hand me the million."

"Against the ticket or at least against evidence that you bought it?"

"The evidence exists, seeing that Arsène Lupin admits that he stole the desk."

"What judge is going to take Arsène Lupin's word?"

"I don't care, I shall go to law!"

The gallery was delighted. Bets were made, some people being certain that Lupin would bring M. Gerbois to terms, others that he would not go beyond threats. And the people felt a sort of apprehension; for the adversaries were unevenly matched, the one being so fierce in his attacks, while the other was as frightened as a hunted deer.

On Friday, there was a rush for the *Écho de France* and the agony-column on the fifth page was scanned with feverish eyes. There was not a line addressed to "M. Ars. Lup." M. Gerbois had replied to Arsène Lupin's demands with silence. It was a declaration of war.

That evening the papers contained the news that Mlle. Gerbois had been kidnapped.

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The most delightful factor in what I may call the Arsène Lupin entertainment is the eminently ludicrous part played by the police.

Everything passes outside their knowledge. Lupin speaks, writes, warns, orders, threatens, carries out his plans, as though there were no police, no detectives, no magistrates, no impediment of any kind in existence. They seem of no account to him whatever. No obstacle enters into his calculations.

And yet the police struggle to do their best. The moment the name of Arsène Lupin is mentioned, the whole force, from top to bottom, takes fire, boils and foams with rage. He is the enemy, the enemy who mocks you, provokes you, despises you, or, even worse, ignores you. And what can one do against an enemy like that?

According to the evidence of the servant, Suzanne went out at twenty minutes to ten. At five minutes past ten, her father, on leaving the college, failed to see her on the pavement where she usually waited for him. Everything, therefore, must have taken place in the course of the short twenty minutes' walk which brought Suzanne from her door to the college, or at least quite close to the college.

Two neighbours declared that they had passed her about three hundred yards from the house. A lady had seen a girl walking along the avenue whose description corresponded with Suzanne's. After that, all was blank.

Inquiries were made on every side. The officials at the railway-stations and the customs-barriers were questioned. They had seen nothing on that day which could relate to the kidnapping of a young girl. However, a grocer at Ville-d'Avray stated that he had supplied a closed motor-car, coming from Paris, with petrol. There was a chauffeur on the front seat and a lady with fair hair—exceedingly fair hair, the witness said—inside. The car returned from Versailles an hour later. A block in the traffic compelled it to slacken speed and the grocer was able to perceive that there was now another lady seated beside the blonde lady whom he had seen first. This second lady was wrapped up in veils and shawls. No doubt it was Suzanne Gerbois.

Consequently, the abduction must have taken place in broad daylight, on a busy road, in the very heart of the town! How? At what spot? Not a cry had been heard, not a suspicious movement observed.

The grocer described the car, a Peugeot limousine, 24 horse-power, with a dark blue body. Inquiries were made, on chance, of Mme. Bob-Walthour, the manageress of the Grand Garage, who used to make a specialty of motor-car elopements. She had, in fact, on Friday morning, hired out a Peugeot limousine for the day to a fair-haired lady, whom she had not seen since.

"But the driver?"

"He was a man called Ernest, whom I engaged the day before on the strength of his excellent testimonials."

"Is he here?"

"No, he brought back the car and has not been here since."

"Can't we get hold of him?"

"Certainly, by applying to the people who recommended him. I will give you the addresses."

The police called on these persons. None of them knew the man called Ernest.

And every trail which they followed to find their way out of the darkness led only to greater darkness and denser fogs.

M. Gerbois was not the man to maintain a contest which had opened in so disastrous a fashion for him. Inconsolable at the disappearance of his daughter and pricked with remorse, he capitulated. An advertisement which appeared in the *Écho de France* and aroused general comment proclaimed his absolute and unreserved surrender. It was a complete defeat: the war was over in four times twenty-four hours.

Two days later, M. Gerbois walked across the courtyard of the Crédit Foncier. He was shown in to the governor and handed him number 514, series 23. The governor gave a start:

"Oh, so you have it? Did they give it back to you?"

"I mislaid it and here it is," replied M. Gerbois.

"But you said... . There was a question... ."

"That's all lies and tittle-tattle."

"But nevertheless we should require some corroborative document."

"Will the major's letter do?"

"Certainly."

"Here it is."

"Very well. Please leave these papers with us. We are allowed a fortnight in which to verify them. I will let you know when you can call for the money. In the meanwhile, I think that you would be well-advised to say nothing and to complete this business in the most absolute silence."

"That is what I intend to do."

M. Gerbois did not speak, nor the governor either. But there are certain secrets which leak out without any indiscretion having been committed, and the public suddenly learnt that Arsène Lupin had had the pluck to send number 514, series 23, back to M. Gerbois! The news was received with a sort of stupefied admiration. What a bold player he must be, to fling so important a trump as the precious ticket upon the table! True, he

had parted with it wittingly, in exchange for a card which equalized the chances. But suppose the girl escaped? Suppose they succeeded in recapturing his hostage?

The police perceived the enemy's weak point and redoubled their efforts. With Arsène Lupin disarmed and despoiled by himself, caught in his own toils, receiving not a single sou of the coveted million ... the laugh would at once be on the other side.

But the question was to find Suzanne. And they did not find her, nor did she escape!

"Very well," people said, "that's settled: Arsène has won the first game. But the difficult part is still to come! Mlle. Gerbois is in his hands, we admit, and he will not hand her over without the five hundred thousand francs. But how and where is the exchange to take place? For the exchange to take place, there must be a meeting; and what is to prevent M. Gerbois from informing the police and thus both recovering his daughter and keeping the money?"

The professor was interviewed. Greatly cast down, longing only for silence, he remained impenetrable:

"I have nothing to say; I am waiting."

"And Mlle. Gerbois?"

"The search is being continued."

"But Arsène Lupin has written to you?"

"No."

"Do you swear that?"

"No."

"That means yes. What are his instructions?"

"I have nothing to say."

Maître Detinan was next besieged and showed the same discretion.

"M. Lupin is my client," he replied, with an affectation of gravity. "You will understand that I am bound to maintain the most absolute reserve."

All these mysteries annoyed the gallery. Plots were evidently hatching in the dark. Arsène Lupin was arranging and tightening the meshes of his nets, while the police were keeping up a watch by day and night round M. Gerbois. And people discussed the only three possible endings: arrest, triumph, or grotesque and pitiful failure.

But, as it happened, public curiosity was destined to be only partially satisfied; and the exact truth is revealed for the first time in these pages.

On Thursday, the 12th of March, M. Gerbois received the notice from the Crédit Foncier, in an ordinary envelope.

At one o'clock on Friday, he took the train for Paris. A thousand notes of a thousand francs each were handed to him at two.

While he was counting them over, one by one, with trembling hands—for was this money not Suzanne's ransom?—two men sat talking in a cab drawn up at a short distance from the main entrance. One of these men had grizzled hair and a powerful face, which contrasted oddly with his dress and bearing, which was that of a small clerk. It was Chief-Inspector Ganimard, old Ganimard, Lupin's implacable enemy. And Ganimard said to Detective-Sergeant Folenfant:

"The old chap won't be long ... we shall see him come out in five minutes. Is everything ready?"

"Quite."

"How many are we?"

"Eight, including two on bicycles."

"And myself, who count as three. It's enough, but not too many. That Gerbois must not escape us at any price ... if he does, we're diddled: he'll meet Lupin at the place they have agreed upon; he'll swap the young lady for the half-million; and the trick's done."

"But why on earth won't the old chap act with us? It would be so simple! By giving us a hand in the game, he could keep the whole million."

"Yes, but he's afraid. If he tries to jockey the other, he won't get his daughter back."

"What other?"

"Him."

Ganimard pronounced this word "him" in a grave and rather awe-struck tone, as though he were speaking of a supernatural being who had already played him a nasty trick or two.

"It's very strange," said Sergeant Folenfant, judiciously, "that we should be reduced to protecting that gentleman against himself."

"With Lupin, everything is upside down," sighed Ganimard.

A minute elapsed.

"Look out!" he said.

M. Gerbois was leaving the bank. When he came to the end of the Rue des Capucines, he turned down the boulevard, keeping to the left-hand side. He walked away slowly, along the shops, and looked into the windows.

"Our friend's too quiet," said Ganimard. "A fellow with a million in his pocket does not keep so quiet as all that."

"What can he do?"

"Oh, nothing, of course... . No matter, I mistrust him. It's Lupin, Lupin... ."

At that moment M. Gerbois went to a kiosk, bought some newspapers, took his change, unfolded one of the sheets and, with outstretched arms, began to read, while walking on with short steps. And, suddenly, with a bound, he jumped into a motor-cab which was waiting beside the curb. The power must have been on, for the car drove off rapidly, turned the corner of the Madeleine and disappeared.

"By Jupiter!" cried Ganimard. "Another of his inventions!"

He darted forward and other men, at the same time as himself, ran round the Madeleine. But he burst out laughing. The motor-car had broken down at the beginning of the Boulevard Malesherbes and M. Gerbois was getting out.

"Quick, Folenfant ... the driver ... perhaps it's the man called Ernest."

Folenfant tackled the chauffeur. It was a man called Gaston, one of the motor-cab company's drivers; a gentleman had engaged him ten minutes before and had told him to wait by the newspaper-kiosk, "with steam up," until another gentleman came.

"And what address did the second fare give?" asked Folenfant.

"He gave me no address... . 'Boulevard Malesherbes ... Avenue de Messine ... give you an extra tip': that's all he said."

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During this time, however, M. Gerbois, without losing a minute, had sprung into the first passing cab:

"Drive to the Concorde tube-station!"

The professor left the tube at the Place du Palais-Royal, hurried into another cab and drove to the Place de la Bourse. Here he went by tube again, as far as the Avenue de Villiers, where he took a third cab:

"25, Rue Clapeyron!"

No. 25, Rue Clapeyron, is separated from the Boulevard des Batignolles by the house at the corner. The professor went up to the first floor and rang. A gentleman opened the door.

"Does Maître Detinan live here?"

"I am Maître Detinan. M. Gerbois, I presume?"

"That's it."

"I was expecting you. Pray come in."

When M. Gerbois entered the lawyer's office, the clock was striking three and he at once said:

"This is the time he appointed. Isn't he here?"

"Not yet."

M. Gerbois sat down, wiped his forehead, looked at his watch as though he did not know the time and continued, anxiously:

"Will he come?"

The lawyer replied:

"You are asking me something, sir, which I myself am most curious to know. I have never felt so impatient in my life. In any case, if he comes, he is taking a big risk, for the house has been closely watched for the past fortnight... . They suspect me."

"And me even more," said the professor. "I am not at all sure that the detectives set to watch me have been thrown off my track."

"But then... ."

"It would not be my fault," cried the professor, vehemently, "and he can have nothing to reproach me with. What did I promise to do? To obey his orders. Well, I have obeyed his orders blindly: I cashed the ticket at the time which he fixed and came on to you in the manner which he ordered. I am responsible for my daughter's misfortune and I have kept my engagements in all good faith. It is for him to keep his." And he added, in an anxious voice, "He will bring back my daughter, won't he?"

"I hope so."

"Still ... you've seen him?"

"I? No. He simply wrote asking me to receive you both, to send away my servants before three o'clock and to let no one into my flat between the time of your arrival and his departure. If I did not consent to this proposal, he begged me to let him know by means of two lines in the *Écho de France*. But I am only too pleased to do Arsène Lupin a service and I consent to everything."

M. Gerbois moaned:

"Oh, dear, how will it all end?"

He took the bank-notes from his pocket, spread them on the table and divided them into two bundles of five hundred each. Then the two men sat silent. From time to time, M. Gerbois pricked up his ears: wasn't that a ring at the door-bell?... His anguish increased with every minute that passed. And Maître Detinan also experienced an impression that was almost painful.

For a moment, in fact, the advocate lost all his composure. He rose abruptly from his seat:

"We shan't see him... . How can we expect to?... It would be madness on his part! He trusts us, no doubt: we are honest men, incapable of betraying him. But the danger lies elsewhere."

And M. Gerbois, shattered, with his hands on the notes, stammered:

"If he would only come, oh, if he would only come! I would give all this to have Suzanne back."

The door opened.

"Half will do, M. Gerbois."

Some one was standing on the threshold—a young man, fashionably dressed—and M. Gerbois at once recognized the person who had accosted him outside the curiosity-shop. He leapt toward him:

"And Suzanne? Where is my daughter?"

Arsène Lupin closed the door carefully and, quietly unbuttoning his gloves, said to the lawyer:

"My dear maître, I can never thank you sufficiently for your kindness in consenting to defend my rights. I shall not forget it."

Maître Detinan could only murmur:

"But you never rang... I did not hear the door... ."

"Bells and doors are things that have to do their work without ever being heard. I am here all the same; and that is the great thing."

"My daughter! Suzanne! What have you done with her?" repeated the professor.

"Heavens, sir," said Lupin, "what a hurry you're in! Come, calm yourself; your daughter will be in your arms in a moment."

He walked up and down the room and then, in the tone of a magnate distributing praises:

"I congratulate you, M. Gerbois, on the skilful way in which you acted just now. If the motor hadn't had that ridiculous accident we should simply have met at the Étoile and saved Maître Detinan the annoyance of this visit... . However, it was destined otherwise!"

He caught sight of the two bundles of bank-notes and cried:

"Ah, that's right! The million is there!... Let us waste no time... . Will you allow me?"

"But," said Maître Detinan, placing himself in front of the table, "Mlle. Gerbois is not here yet."

"Well?"

"Well, isn't her presence indispensable?"

"I see, I see! Arsène Lupin inspires only a partial confidence. He pockets his half-million, without restoring the hostage. Ah, my dear maître, I am sadly misunderstood! Because fate has obliged me to perform acts of a rather ... special character, doubts are cast upon my good faith ... mine! I, a man all scruples and delicacy!... However, my dear maître, if you're afraid, open your window and call out. There are quite a dozen detectives in the street."

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