LEBLANC MAURICE

THE HOLLOW NEEDLE; FURTHER ADVENTURES OF ARSENE LUPIN

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Содержание

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CHAPTER ONE
THE SHOT

Raymonde listened. The noise was repeated twice over, clearly enough to be distinguished from the medley of vague sounds that formed the great silence of the night and yet too faintly to enable her to tell whether it was near or far, within the walls of the big country-house, or outside, among the murky recesses of the park.

She rose softly. Her window was half open: she flung it back wide. The moonlight lay over a peaceful landscape of lawns and thickets, against which the straggling ruins of the old abbey stood out in tragic outlines, truncated columns, mutilated arches, fragments of porches and shreds of flying buttresses. A light breeze hovered over the face of things, gliding noiselessly through the bare motionless branches of the trees, but shaking the tiny budding leaves of the shrubs.

And, suddenly, she heard the same sound again. It was on the

left and on the floor below her, in the living rooms, therefore, that occupied the left wing of the house. Brave and plucky though she was, the girl felt afraid. She slipped on her dressing gown and took the matches.

"Raymonde—Raymonde!"

A voice as low as a breath was calling to her from the next room, the door of which had not been closed. She was feeling her way there, when Suzanne, her cousin, came out of the room and fell into her arms:

"Raymonde—is that you? Did you hear—?"

"Yes. So you're not asleep?"

"I suppose the dog woke me—some time ago. But he's not barking now. What time is it?"

"About four."

"Listen! Surely, some one's walking in the drawing room!"

"There's no danger, your father is down there, Suzanne."

"But there is danger for him. His room is next to the boudoir."

"M. Daval is there too—"

"At the other end of the house. He could never hear."

They hesitated, not knowing what course to decide upon. Should they call out? Cry for help? They dared not; they were frightened of the sound of their own voices. But Suzanne, who had gone to the window, suppressed a scream:

"Look!—A man!—Near the fountain!"

A man was walking away at a rapid pace. He carried under his arm a fairly large load, the nature of which they were unable to

distinguish: it knocked against his leg and impeded his progress. They saw him pass near the old chapel and turn toward a little door in the wall. The door must have been open, for the man disappeared suddenly from view and they failed to hear the usual grating of the hinges.

"He came from the drawing room," whispered Suzanne.

"No, the stairs and the hall would have brought him out more to the left—Unless—"

The same idea struck them both. They leant out. Below them, a ladder stood against the front of the house, resting on the first floor. A glimmer lit up the stone balcony. And another man, who was also carrying something, bestrode the baluster, slid down the ladder and ran away by the same road as the first.

Suzanne, scared to the verge of swooning, fell on her knees, stammering:

"Let us call out—let us call for help—"

"Who would come? Your father—and if there are more of them left—and they throw themselves upon him—?"

"Then—then—we might call the servants—Your bell rings on their floor."

"Yes—yes—perhaps, that's better. If only they come in time!"

Raymonde felt for the electric push near her bed and pressed it with her finger. They heard the bell ring upstairs and had an impression that its shrill sound must also reach any one below.

They waited. The silence became terrifying and the very breeze no longer shook the leaves of the shrubs.

"I'm frightened—frightened," said Suzanne.

And, suddenly, from the profound darkness below them, came the sound of a struggle, a crash of furniture overturned, words, exclamations and then, horrible and ominous, a hoarse groan, the gurgle of a man who is being murdered—

Raymonde leapt toward the door. Suzanne clung desperately to her arm:

"No—no—don't leave me—I'm frightened—"

Raymonde pushed her aside and darted down the corridor, followed by Suzanne, who staggered from wall to wall, screaming as she went. Raymonde reached the staircase, flew down the stairs, flung herself upon the door of the big drawing room and stopped short, rooted to the threshold, while Suzanne sank in a heap by her side. Facing them, at three steps' distance, stood a man, with a lantern in his hand. He turned it upon the two girls, blinding them with the light, stared long at their pale faces, and then, without hurrying, with the calmest movements in the world, took his cap, picked up a scrap of paper and two bits of straw, removed some footmarks from the carpet, went to the balcony, turned to the girls, made them a deep bow and disappeared.

Suzanne was the first to run to the little boudoir which separated the big drawing-room from her father's bedroom. But, at the entrance, a hideous sight appalled her. By the slanting rays of the moon, she saw two apparently lifeless bodies lying close to each other on the floor. She leaned over one of them:

"Father!—Father!—Is it you? What has happened to you?"

she cried, distractedly.

After a moment, the Comte de Gesvres moved. In a broken voice, he said:

"Don't be afraid—I am not wounded—Daval?—Is he alive? —The knife?—The knife?—"

Two men-servants now arrived with candles. Raymonde flung herself down before the other body and recognized Jean Daval, the count's private secretary. A little stream of blood trickled from his neck. His face already wore the pallor of death.

Then she rose, returned to the drawing room, took a gun that hung in a trophy of arms on the wall and went out on the balcony. Not more than fifty or sixty seconds had elapsed since the man had set his foot on the top rung of the ladder. He could not, therefore, be very far away, the more so as he had taken the precaution to remove the ladder, in order to prevent the inmates of the house from using it. And soon she saw him skirting the remains of the old cloister. She put the gun to her shoulder, calmly took aim and fired. The man fell.

"That's done it! That's done it!" said one of the servants. "We've got this one. I'll run down."

"No, Victor, he's getting up.... You had better go down by the staircase and make straight for the little door in the wall. That's the only way he can escape."

Victor hurried off, but, before he reached the park, the man fell down again. Raymonde called the other servant:

"Albert, do you see him down there? Near the main cloister?

—"

"Yes, he's crawling in the grass. He's done for—"

"Watch him from here."

"There's no way of escape for him. On the right of the ruins is the open lawn—"

"And, Victor, do you guard the door, on the left," she said, taking up her gun.

"But, surely, you are not going down, miss?"

"Yes, yes," she said, with a resolute accent and abrupt movements; "let me be—I have a cartridge left—If he stirs—"

She went out. A moment later, Albert saw her going toward the ruins. He called to her from the window:

"He's dragged himself behind the cloister. I can't see him. Be careful, miss—"

Raymonde went round the old cloisters, to cut off the man's retreat, and Albert soon lost sight of her. After a few minutes, as he did not see her return, he became uneasy and, keeping his eye on the ruins, instead of going down by the stairs he made an effort to reach the ladder. When he had succeeded, he scrambled down and ran straight to the cloisters near which he had seen the man last. Thirty paces farther, he found Raymonde, who was searching with Victor.

"Well?" he asked.

"There's no laying one's hands on him," replied Victor.

"The little door?"

"I've been there; here's the key."

"Still—he must—"

"Oh, we've got him safe enough, the scoundrel—He'll be ours in ten minutes."

The farmer and his son, awakened by the shot, now came from the farm buildings, which were at some distance on the right, but within the circuit of the walls. They had met no one.

"Of course not," said Albert. "The ruffian can't have left the ruins—We'll dig him out of some hole or other."

They organized a methodical search, beating every bush, pulling aside the heavy masses of ivy rolled round the shafts of the columns. They made sure that the chapel was properly locked and that none of the panes were broken. They went round the cloisters and examined every nook and corner. The search was fruitless.

There was but one discovery: at the place where the man had fallen under Raymonde's gun, they picked up a chauffeur's cap, in very soft buff leather; besides that, nothing.

The gendarmerie of Ouville-la-Riviere were informed at six o'clock in the morning and at once proceeded to the spot, after sending an express to the authorities at Dieppe with a note describing the circumstances of the crime, the imminent capture of the chief criminal and "the discovery of his headgear and of the dagger with which the crime had been committed."

At ten o'clock, two hired conveyances came down the gentle slope that led to the house. One of them, an old-fashioned calash, contained the deputy public prosecutor and the examining

magistrate, accompanied by his clerk. In the other, a humble fly, were seated two reporters, representing the Journal de Rouen and a great Paris paper.

The old chateau came into view—once the abbey residence of the priors of Ambrumesy, mutilated under the Revolution, both restored by the Comte de Gesvres, who had now owned it for some twenty years. It consists of a main building, surmounted by a pinnacled clock-tower, and two wings, each of which is surrounded by a flight of steps with a stone balustrade. Looking across the walls of the park and beyond the upland supported by the high Norman cliffs, you catch a glimpse of the blue line of the Channel between the villages of Sainte-Marguerite and Varengeville.

Here the Comte de Gesvres lived with his daughter Suzanne, a delicate, fair-haired, pretty creature, and his niece Raymonde de Saint-Veran, whom he had taken to live with him two years before, when the simultaneous death of her father and mother left Raymonde an orphan. Life at the chateau was peaceful and regular. A few neighbors paid an occasional visit. In the summer, the count took the two girls almost every day to Dieppe. He was a tall man, with a handsome, serious face and hair that was turning gray. He was very rich, managed his fortune himself and looked after his extensive estates with the assistance of his secretary, Jean Daval.

Immediately upon his arrival, the examining magistrate took down the first observations of Sergeant Quevillon of the

gendarmes. The capture of the criminal, imminent though it might be, had not yet been effected, but every outlet of the park was held. Escape was impossible.

The little company next crossed the chapter-hall and the refectory, both of which are on the ground floor, and went up to the first story. They at once remarked the perfect order that prevailed in the drawing room. Not a piece of furniture, not an ornament but appeared to occupy its usual place; nor was there any gap among the ornaments or furniture. On the right and left walls hung magnificent Flemish tapestries with figures. On the panels of the wall facing the windows were four fine canvases, in contemporary frames, representing mythological scenes. These were the famous pictures by Rubens which had been left to the Comte de Gesvres, together with the Flemish tapestries, by his maternal uncle, the Marques de Bobadilla, a Spanish grandee.

M. Filleul remarked:

"If the motive of the crime was theft, this drawing room, at any rate, was not the object of it."

"You can't tell!" said the deputy, who spoke little, but who, when he did, invariably opposed the magistrate's views.

"Why, my dear sir, the first thought of a burglar would be to carry off those pictures and tapestries, which are universally renowned."

"Perhaps there was no time."

"We shall see."

At that moment, the Comte de Gesvres entered, accompanied

by the doctor. The count, who did not seem to feel the effects of the attack to which he had been subjected, welcomed the two officials. Then he opened the door of the boudoir.

This room, which no one had been allowed to enter since the discovery of the crime, differed from the drawing room inasmuch as it presented a scene of the greatest disorder. Two chairs were overturned, one of the tables smashed to pieces and several objects—a traveling-clock, a portfolio, a box of stationery—lay on the floor. And there was blood on some of the scattered pieces of note-paper.

The doctor turned back the sheet that covered the corpse. Jean Daval, dressed in his usual velvet suit, with a pair of nailed boots on his feet, lay stretched on his back, with one arm folded beneath him. His collar and tie had been removed and his shirt opened, revealing a large wound in the chest.

"Death must have been instantaneous," declared the doctor. "One blow of the knife was enough."

"It was, no doubt, the knife which I saw on the drawing-room mantelpiece, next to a leather cap?" said the examining magistrate.

"Yes," said the Comte de Gesvres, "the knife was picked up here. It comes from the same trophy in the drawing room from which my niece, Mlle. de Saint-Veran, snatched the gun. As for the chauffeur's cap, that evidently belongs to the murderer."

M. Filleul examined certain further details in the room, put a few questions to the doctor and then asked M. de Gesvres to

tell him what he had seen and heard. The count worded his story as follows:

"Jean Daval woke me up. I had been sleeping badly, for that matter, with gleams of consciousness in which I seemed to hear noises, when, suddenly opening my eyes, I saw Daval standing at the foot of my bed, with his candle in his hand and fully dressed —as he is now, for he often worked late into the night. He seemed greatly excited and said, in a low voice: 'There's some one in the drawing room.' I heard a noise myself. I got up and softly pushed the door leading to this boudoir. At the same moment, the door over there, which opens into the big drawing room, was thrown back and a man appeared who leaped at me and stunned me with a blow on the temple. I am telling you this without any details, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, for the simple reason that I remember only the principal facts, and that these facts followed upon one another with extraordinary swiftness."

"And after that?—"

"After that, I don't know—I fainted. When I came to, Daval lay stretched by my side, mortally wounded."

"At first sight, do you suspect no one?"

"No one."

"You have no enemy?"

"I know of none."

"Nor M. Daval either?"

"Daval! An enemy? He was the best creature that ever lived. M. Daval was my secretary for twenty years and, I may say, my

confidant; and I have never seen him surrounded with anything but love and friendship."

"Still, there has been a burglary and there has been a murder: there must be a motive for all that."

"The motive? Why, it was robbery pure and simple."

"Robbery? Have you been robbed of something, then?"

"No, nothing."

"In that case—?"

"In that case, if they have stolen nothing and if nothing is missing, they at least took something away."

"What?"

"I don't know. But my daughter and my niece will tell you, with absolute certainty, that they saw two men in succession cross the park and that those two men were carrying fairly heavy loads."

"The young ladies—"

"The young ladies may have been dreaming, you think? I should be tempted to believe it, for I have been exhausting myself in inquiries and suppositions ever since this morning. However, it is easy enough to question them."

The two cousins were sent for to the big drawing room. Suzanne, still quite pale and trembling, could hardly speak. Raymonde, who was more energetic, more of a man, better looking, too, with the golden glint in her brown eyes, described the events of the night and the part which she had played in them.

"So I may take it, mademoiselle, that your evidence is

positive?"

"Absolutely. The men who went across the park were carrying things away with them."

"And the third man?"

"He went from here empty-handed."

"Could you describe him to us?"

"He kept on dazzling us with the light of his lantern. All that I could say is that he is tall and heavily built."

"Is that how he appeared to you, mademoiselle?" asked the magistrate, turning to Suzanne de Gesvres.

"Yes—or, rather, no," said Suzanne, reflecting. "I thought he was about the middle height and slender."

M. Filleul smiled; he was accustomed to differences of opinion and sight in witnesses to one and the same fact:

"So we have to do, on the one hand, with a man, the one in the drawing room, who is, at the same time, tall and short, stout and thin, and, on the other, with two men, those in the park, who are accused of removing from that drawing room objects—which are still here!"

M. Filleul was a magistrate of the ironic school, as he himself would say. He was also a very ambitious magistrate and one who did not object to an audience nor to an occasion to display his tactful resource in public, as was shown by the increasing number of persons who now crowded into the room. The journalists had been joined by the farmer and his son, the gardener and his wife, the indoor servants of the chateau and the two cabmen who had

driven the flies from Dieppe.

M. Filleul continued:

"There is also the question of agreeing upon the way in which the third person disappeared. Was this the gun you fired, mademoiselle, and from this window?"

"Yes. The man reached the tombstone which is almost buried under the brambles, to the left of the cloisters."

"But he got up again?"

"Only half. Victor ran down at once to guard the little door and I followed him, leaving the second footman, Albert, to keep watch here."

Albert now gave his evidence and the magistrate concluded:

"So, according to you, the wounded man was not able to escape on the left, because your fellow-servant was watching the door, nor on the right, because you would have seen him cross the lawn. Logically, therefore, he is, at the present moment, in the comparatively restricted space that lies before our eyes."

"I am sure of it."

"And you, mademoiselle?"

"Yes."

"And I, too," said Victor.

The deputy prosecutor exclaimed, with a leer:

"The field of inquiry is quite narrow. We have only to continue the search commenced four hours ago."

"We may be more fortunate."

M. Filleul took the leather cap from the mantel, examined it

and, beckoning to the sergeant of gendarmes, whispered:

"Sergeant, send one of your men to Dieppe at once. Tell him to go to Maigret, the hatter, in the Rue de la Barre, and ask M. Maigret to tell him, if possible, to whom this cap was sold."

The "field of inquiry," in the deputy's phrase, was limited to the space contained between the house, the lawn on the right and the angle formed by the left wall and the wall opposite the house, that is to say, a quadrilateral of about a hundred yards each way, in which the ruins of Ambrumesy, the famous mediaeval monastery, stood out at intervals.

They at once noticed the traces left by the fugitive in the trampled grass. In two places, marks of blackened blood, now almost dried up, were observed. After the turn at the end of the cloisters, there was nothing more to be seen, as the nature of the ground, here covered with pine-needles, did not lend itself to the imprint of a body. But, in that case, how had the wounded man succeeded in escaping the eyes of Raymonde, Victor and Albert? There was nothing but a few brakes, which the servants and the gendarmes had beaten over and over again, and a number of tombstones, under which they had explored. The examining magistrate made the gardener, who had the key, open the chapel, a real gem of carving, a shrine in stone which had been respected by time and the revolutionaries, and which, with the delicate sculpture work of its porch and its miniature population of statuettes, was always looked upon as a marvelous specimen of the Norman-Gothic style. The chapel, which was very simple in

the interior, with no other ornament than its marble altar, offered no hiding-place. Besides, the fugitive would have had to obtain admission. And by what means?

The inspection brought them to the little door in the wall that served as an entrance for the visitors to the ruins. It opened on a sunk road running between the park wall and a copsewood containing some abandoned quarries. M. Filleul stooped forward: the dust of the road bore marks of anti-skid pneumatic tires. Raymonde and Victor remembered that, after the shot, they had seemed to hear the throb of a motor-car.

The magistrate suggested:

"The man must have joined his confederates."

"Impossible!" cried Victor. "I was here while mademoiselle and Albert still had him in view."

"Nonsense, he must be somewhere! Outside or inside: we have no choice!"

"He is here," the servants insisted, obstinately.

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders and went back to the house in a more or less sullen mood. There was no doubt that it was an unpromising case. A theft in which nothing had been stolen; an invisible prisoner: what could be less satisfactory?

It was late. M. de Gesvres asked the officials and the two journalists to stay to lunch. They ate in silence and then M. Filleul returned to the drawing room, where he questioned the servants. But the sound of a horse's hoofs came from the courtyard and, a moment after, the gendarme who had been sent to Dieppe

entered.

"Well, did you see the hatter?" exclaimed the magistrate, eager at last to obtain some positive information.

"I saw M. Maigret. The cap was sold to a cab-driver."

"A cab-driver!"

"Yes, a driver who stopped his fly before the shop and asked to be supplied with a yellow-leather chauffeur's cap for one of his customers. This was the only one left. He paid for it, without troubling about the size, and drove off. He was in a great hurry."

"What sort of fly was it?"

"A calash."

"And on what day did this happen?"

"On what day? Why, to-day, at eight o'clock this morning."

"This morning? What are you talking about?"

"The cap was bought this morning."

"But that's impossible, because it was found last night in the park. If it was found there, it must have been there; and, consequently, it must have been bought before."

"The hatter told me it was bought this morning."

There was a moment of general bewilderment. The nonplussed magistrate strove to understand. Suddenly, he started, as though struck with a gleam of light:

"Fetch the cabman who brought us here this morning! The man who drove the calash! Fetch him at once!"

The sergeant of gendarmes and his subordinate ran off to the stables. In a few minutes, the sergeant returned alone.

"Where's the cabman?"

"He asked for food in the kitchen, ate his lunch and then—"

"And then—?"

"He went off."

"With his fly?"

"No. Pretending that he wanted to go and see a relation at Ouville, he borrowed the groom's bicycle. Here are his hat and greatcoat."

"But did he leave bare-headed?"

"No, he took a cap from his pocket and put it on."

"A cap?"

"Yes, a yellow leather cap, it seems."

"A yellow leather cap? Why, no, we've got it here!"

"That's true, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, but his is just like it."

The deputy sniggered:

"Very funny! Most amusing! There are two caps—One, the real one, which constituted our only piece of evidence, has gone off on the head of the sham flyman! The other, the false one, is in your hands. Oh, the fellow has had us nicely!"

"Catch him! Fetch him back!" cried M. Filleul. "Two of your men on horseback, Sergeant Quevillon, and at full speed!"

"He is far away by this time," said the deputy.

"He can be as far as he pleases, but still we must lay hold of him."

"I hope so; but I think, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, that

your efforts should be concentrated here above all. Would you mind reading this scrap of paper, which I have just found in the pocket of the coat?"

"Which coat?"

"The driver's."

And the deputy prosecutor handed M. Filleul a piece of paper, folded in four, containing these few words written in pencil, in a more or less common hand:

"Woe betide the young lady, if she has killed the governor!"

The incident caused a certain stir.

"A word to the wise!" muttered the deputy. "We are now forewarned."

"Monsieur le Comte," said the examining magistrate, "I beg you not to be alarmed. Nor you either, mademoiselle. This threat is of no importance, as the police are on the spot. We shall take every precaution and I will answer for your safety. As for you, gentlemen. I rely on your discretion. You have been present at this inquiry, thanks to my excessive kindness toward the Press, and it would be making me an ill return—"

He interrupted himself, as though an idea had struck him, looked at the two young men, one after the other, and, going up to the first, asked:

"What paper do you represent, sir?"

"The Journal de Rouen."

"Have you your credentials?"

"Here."

The card was in order. There was no more to be said. M. Filleul turned to the other reporter:

"And you, sir?"

"I?"

"Yes, you: what paper do you belong to?"

"Why, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, I write for a number of papers—all over the place—"

"Your credentials?"

"I haven't any."

"Oh! How is that?"

"For a newspaper to give you a card, you have to be on its regular staff."

"Well?"

"Well, I am only an occasional contributor, a free-lance. I send articles to this newspaper and that. They are published or declined according to circumstances."

"In that case, what is your name? Where are your papers?"

"My name would tell you nothing. As for papers, I have none."

"You have no paper of any kind to prove your profession!"

"I have no profession."

"But look here, sir," cried the magistrate, with a certain asperity, "you can't expect to preserve your incognito after introducing yourself here by a trick and surprising the secrets of the police!"

"I beg to remark, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, that you asked me nothing when I came in, and that therefore I had

nothing to say. Besides, it never struck me that your inquiry was secret, when everybody was admitted—including even one of the criminals!"

He spoke softly, in a tone of infinite politeness. He was quite a young man, very tall, very slender and dressed without the least attempt at fashion, in a jacket and trousers both too small for him. He had a pink face like a girl's, a broad forehead topped with close-cropped hair, and a scrubby and ill-trimmed fair beard. His bright eyes gleamed with intelligence. He seemed not in the least embarrassed and wore a pleasant smile, free from any shade of banter.

M. Filleul looked at him with an aggressive air of distrust. The two gendarmes came forward. The young man exclaimed, gaily:

"Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, you clearly suspect me of being an accomplice. But, if that were so, would I not have slipped away at the right moment, following the example of my fellow-criminal?"

"You might have hoped—"

"Any hope would have been absurd. A moment's reflection, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, will make you agree with me that, logically speaking—"

M. Filleul looked him straight in the eyes and said, sharply:

"No more jokes! Your name?"

"Isidore Beautrelet."

"Your occupation?"

"Sixth-form pupil at the Lycee Janson-de-Sailly."

M. Filleul opened a pair of startled eyes.

"What are you talking about? Sixth-form pupil—"

"At the Lycee Janson, Rue de la Pompe, number—"

"Oh, look here," exclaimed M. Filleul, "you're trying to take me in! This won't do, you know; a joke can go too far!"

"I must say, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, that your astonishment surprises me. What is there to prevent my being a sixth-form pupil at the Lycee Janson? My beard, perhaps? Set your mind at ease: my beard is false!"

Isidore Beautrelet pulled off the few curls that adorned his chin, and his beardless face appeared still younger and pinker, a genuine schoolboy's face. And, with a laugh like a child's, revealing his white teeth:

"Are you convinced now?" he asked. "Do you want more proofs? Here, you can read the address on these letters from my father: 'To Monsieur Isidore Beautrelet, Indoor Pupil, Lycee Janson-de-Sailly.'"

Convinced or not, M. Filleul did not look as if he liked the story. He asked, gruffly:

"What are you doing here?"

"Why—I'm—I'm improving my mind."

"There are schools for that: yours, for instance."

"You forget, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, that this is the twenty-third of April and that we are in the middle of the Easter holidays."

"Well?"

"Well, I have every right to spend my holidays as I please."

"Your father—"

"My father lives at the other end of the country, in Savoy, and he himself advised me to take a little trip on the North Coast."

"With a false beard?"

"Oh, no! That's my own idea. At school, we talk a great deal about mysterious adventures; we read detective stories, in which people disguise themselves; we imagine any amount of terrible and intricate cases. So I thought I would amuse myself; and I put on this false beard. Besides, I enjoyed the advantage of being taken seriously and I pretended to be a Paris reporter. That is how, last night, after an uneventful period of more than a week, I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of my Rouen colleague; and, this morning, when he heard of the Ambrumesy murder, he very kindly suggested that I should come with him and that we should share the cost of a fly."

Isidore Beautrelet said all this with a frank and artless simplicity of which it was impossible not to feel the charm. M. Filleul himself, though maintaining a distrustful reserve, took a certain pleasure in listening to him. He asked him, in a less peevish tone:

"And are you satisfied with your expedition?"

"Delighted! All the more as I had never been present at a case of the sort and I find that this one is not lacking in interest."

"Nor in that mysterious intricacy which you prize so highly—"

"And which is so stimulating, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction!

I know nothing more exciting than to see all the facts coming up out of the shadow, clustering together, so to speak, and gradually forming the probable truth."

"The probable truth! You go pretty fast, young man! Do you suggest that you have your little solution of the riddle ready?"

"Oh, no!" replied Beautrelet, with a laugh.

"Only—it seems to me that there are certain points on which it is not impossible to form an opinion; and others, even, are so precise as to warrant—a conclusion."

"Oh, but this is becoming very curious and I shall get to know something at last! For I confess, to my great confusion, that I know nothing."

"That is because you have not had time to reflect, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction. The great thing is to reflect. Facts very seldom fail to carry their own explanation!"

"And, according to you, the facts which we have just ascertained carry their own explanation?"

"Don't you think so yourself? In any case, I have ascertained none besides those which are set down in the official report."

"Good! So that, if I were to ask you which were the objects stolen from this room—"

"I should answer that I know."

"Bravo! My gentleman knows more about it than the owner himself. M. de Gesvres has everything accounted for: M. Isidore Beautrelet has not. He misses a bookcase in three sections and a life-size statue which nobody ever noticed. And, if I asked you

the name of the murderer?"

"I should again answer that I know it."

All present gave a start. The deputy and the journalist drew nearer. M. de Gesvres and the two girls, impressed by Beautrelet's tranquil assurance, listened attentively.

"You know the murderer's name?"

"Yes."

"And the place where he is concealed, perhaps?"

"Yes."

M. Filleul rubbed his hands.

"What a piece of luck! This capture will do honor to my career. And can you make me these startling revelations now?"

"Yes, now—or rather, if you do not mind, in an hour or two, when I shall have assisted at your inquiry to the end."

"No, no, young man, here and now, please." At that moment Raymonde de Saint-Veran, who had not taken her eyes from Isidore Beautrelet since the beginning of this scene, came up to M. Filleul:

"Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction—"

"Yes, mademoiselle?"

She hesitated for two or three seconds, with her eyes fixed on Beautrelet, and then, addressing M. Filleul:

"I should like you to ask monsieur the reason why he was walking yesterday in the sunk road which leads up to the little door."

It was an unexpected and dramatic stroke. Isidore Beautrelet

appeared nonplussed:

"I, mademoiselle? I? You saw me yesterday?"

Raymonde remained thoughtful, with her eyes upon Beautrelet, as though she were trying to settle her own conviction, and then said, in a steady voice:

"At four o'clock in the afternoon, as I was crossing the wood, I met in the sunk road a young man of monsieur's height, dressed like him and wearing a beard cut in the same way—and I received a very clear impression that he was trying to hide."

"And it was I?"

"I could not say that as an absolute certainty, for my recollection is a little vague. Still—still, I think so—if not, it would be an unusual resemblance—"

M. Filleul was perplexed. Already taken in by one of the confederates, was he now going to let himself be tricked by this self-styled schoolboy? Certainly, the young man's manner spoke in his favor; but one can never tell!

"What have you to say, sir?"

"That mademoiselle is mistaken, as I can easily show you with one word. Yesterday, at the time stated, I was at Veules."

"You will have to prove it, you will have to. In any case, the position is not what it was. Sergeant, one of your men will keep monsieur company."

Isidore Beautrelet's face denoted a keen vexation.

"Will it be for long?"

"Long enough to collect the necessary information."

"Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, I beseech you to collect it with all possible speed and discretion."

"Why?"

"My father is an old man. We are very much attached to each other—and I would not have him suffer on my account."

The more or less pathetic note in his voice made a bad impression on M. Filleul. It suggested a scene in a melodrama. Nevertheless, he promised:

"This evening—or to-morrow at latest, I shall know what to think."

The afternoon was wearing on. The examining magistrate returned to the ruins of the cloisters, after giving orders that no unauthorized persons were to be admitted, and patiently, methodically, dividing the ground into lots which were successively explored, himself directed the search. But at the end of the day he was no farther than at the start; and he declared, before an army of reporters who, during that time, had invaded the chateau:

"Gentlemen, everything leads us to suppose that the wounded man is here, within our reach; everything, that is, except the reality, the fact. Therefore, in our humble opinion, he must have escaped and we shall find him outside."

By way of precaution, however, he arranged, with the sergeant of gendarmes, for a complete watch to be kept over the park and, after making a fresh examination of the two drawing rooms, visiting the whole of the chateau and surrounding himself with

all the necessary information, he took the road back to Dieppe, accompanied by the deputy prosecutor.

Night fell. As the boudoir was to remain locked, Jean Daval's body had been moved to another room. Two women from the neighborhood sat up with it, assisted by Suzanne and Raymonde. Downstairs, young Isidore Beautrelet slept on the bench in the old oratory, under the watchful eye of the village policeman, who had been attached to his person. Outside, the gendarmes, the farmer and a dozen peasants had taken up their position among the ruins and along the walls.

All was still until eleven o'clock; but, at ten minutes past eleven, a shot echoed from the other side of the house.

"Attention!" roared the sergeant. "Two men remain here: you, Fossier—and you, Lecanu—The others at the double!"

They all rushed forward and ran round the house on the left. A figure was seen to make away in the dark. Then, suddenly, a second shot drew them farther on, almost to the borders of the farm. And, all at once, as they arrived, in a band, at the hedge which lines the orchard, a flame burst out, to the right of the farmhouse, and other names also rose in a thick column. It was a barn burning, stuffed to the ridge with straw.

"The scoundrels!" shouted the sergeant. "They've set fire to it. Have at them, lads! They can't be far away!"

But the wind was turning the flames toward the main building; and it became necessary, before all things, to ward off the danger. They all exerted themselves with the greater ardor inasmuch as

M. de Gesvres, hurrying to the scene of the disaster, encouraged them with the promise of a reward. By the time that they had mastered the flames, it was two o'clock in the morning. All pursuit would have been vain.

"We'll look into it by daylight," said the sergeant. "They are sure to have left traces: we shall find them."

"And I shall not be sorry," added M. de Gesvres, "to learn the reason of this attack. To set fire to trusses of straw strikes me as a very useless proceeding."

"Come with me, Monsieur le Comte: I may be able to tell you the reason."

Together they reached the ruins of the cloisters. The sergeant called out:

"Lecanu!—Fossier!"

The other gendarmes were already hunting for their comrades whom they had left standing sentry. They ended by finding them at a few paces from the little door. The two men were lying full length on the ground, bound and gagged, with bandages over their eyes.

"Monsieur le Comte," muttered the sergeant, while his men were being released; "Monsieur le Comte, we have been tricked like children."

"How so?"

"The shots—the attack on the barn—the fire—all so much humbug to get us down there—a diversion. During that time they were tying up our two men and the business was done."

"What business?"

"Carrying off the wounded man, of course!"

"You don't mean to say you think—?"

"Think? Why, it's as plain as a pikestaff! The idea came to me ten minutes ago—but I'm a fool not to have thought of it earlier. We should have nabbed them all." Quevillon stamped his foot on the ground, with a sudden attack of rage. "But where, confound it, where did they go through? Which way did they carry him off? For, dash it all, we beat the ground all day; and a man can't hide in a tuft of grass, especially when he's wounded! It's witchcraft, that's what it is!—"

Nor was this the last surprise awaiting Sergeant Quevillon. At dawn, when they entered the oratory which had been used as a cell for young Isidore Beautrelet, they realized that young Isidore Beautrelet had vanished.

On a chair slept the village policeman, bent in two. By his side stood a water-bottle and two tumblers. At the bottom of one of those tumblers a few grains of white powder.

On examination, it was proved, first, that young Isidore Beautrelet had administered a sleeping draught to the village policeman; secondly, that he could only have escaped by a window situated at a height of seven or eight feet in the wall; and lastly—a charming detail, this—that he could only have reached this window by using the back of his warder as a footstool.

CHAPTER TWO
ISIDORE BEAUTRELET, SIXTH-FORM SCHOOLBOY

From the Grand Journal.

LATEST NEWS

DOCTOR DELATTRE KIDNAPPED A MAD PIECE OF CRIMINAL DARING

At the moment of going to press, we have received an item of news which we dare not guarantee as authentic, because of its very improbable character. We print it, therefore, with all reserve.

Yesterday evening, Dr. Delattre, the well-known surgeon, was present, with his wife and daughter, at the performance of Hernani at the Comedie Francaise. At the commencement of the third act, that is to say, at about ten o'clock, the door of his box opened and a gentleman, accompanied by two others, leaned over to the doctor and said to him, in a low voice, but loud enough for Mme. Delattre to hear:

"Doctor, I have a very painful task to fulfil and I shall be very grateful to you if you will make it as easy for me as you can."

"Who are you, sir?"

"M. Thezard, commissary of police of the first district; and my instructions are to take you to M. Dudouis, at the prefecture."

"But—"

"Not a word, doctor, I entreat you, not a movement—There is some regrettable mistake; and that is why we must act in silence and not attract anybody's attention. You will be back, I have no doubt, before the end of the performance."

The doctor rose and went with the commissary. At the end of the performance, he had not returned. Mme. Delattre, greatly alarmed, drove to the office of the commissary of police. There she found the real M. Thezard and discovered, to her great terror, that the individual who had carried off her husband was an impostor.

Inquiries made so far have revealed the fact that the doctor stepped into a motor car and that the car drove off in the direction of the Concorde.

Readers will find further details of this incredible adventure in our second edition.

Incredible though it might be, the adventure was perfectly true. Besides, the issue was not long delayed and the Grand Journal, while confirming the story in its midday edition, described in a few lines the dramatic ending with which it concluded:

THE STORY ENDS
AND
GUESS-WORK BEGINS

Dr. Delattre was brought back to 78, Rue Duret, at nine

o'clock this morning, in a motor car which drove away immediately at full speed.

No. 78, Rue Duret, is the address of Dr. Delattre's clinical surgery, at which he arrives every morning at the same hour. When we sent in our card, the doctor, though closeted with the chief of the detective service, was good enough to consent to receive us.

"All that I can tell you," he said, in reply to our questions, "is that I was treated with the greatest consideration. My three companions were the most charming people I have ever met, exquisitely well-mannered and bright and witty talkers: a quality not to be despised, in view of the length of the journey."

"How long did it take?"

"About four hours and as long returning."

"And what was the object of the journey?"

"I was taken to see a patient whose condition rendered an immediate operation necessary."

"And was the operation successful?"

"Yes, but the consequences may be dangerous. I would answer for the patient here. Down there—under his present conditions —"

"Bad conditions?"

"Execrable!—A room in an inn—and the practically absolute impossibility of being attended to."

"Then what can save him?"

"A miracle—and his constitution, which is an exceptionally

strong one."

"And can you say nothing more about this strange patient?"

"No. In the first place, I have taken an oath; and, secondly, I have received a present of ten thousand francs for my free surgery. If I do not keep silence, this sum will be taken from me."

"You are joking! Do you believe that?"

"Indeed I do. The men all struck me as being very much in earnest."

This is the statement made to us by Dr. Delattre. And we know, on the other hand, that the head of the detective service, in spite of all his insisting, has not yet succeeded in extracting any more precise particulars from him as to the operation which he performed, the patient whom he attended or the district traversed by the car. It is difficult, therefore, to arrive at the truth.

This truth, which the writer of the interview confessed himself unable to discover, was guessed by the more or less clear-sighted minds that perceived a connection with the facts which had occurred the day before at the Chateau d'Ambrumesy, and which were reported, down to the smallest detail, in all the newspapers of that day. There was evidently a coincidence to be reckoned with in the disappearance of a wounded burglar and the kidnapping of a famous surgeon.

The judicial inquiry, moreover, proved the correctness of the hypothesis. By following the track of the sham flyman, who had fled on a bicycle, they were able to show that he had reached

the forest of Arques, at some ten miles' distance, and that from there, after throwing his bicycle into a ditch, he had gone to the village of Saint-Nicolas, whence he had dispatched the following telegram:

> A. L. N., Post-office 45, Paris.
> Situation desperate. Operation urgently necessary.
> Send celebrity by national road fourteen.

The evidence was undeniable. Once apprised the accomplices in Paris hastened to make their arrangements. At ten o'clock in the evening they sent their celebrity by National Road No. 14, which skirts the forest of Arques and ends at Dieppe. During this time, under cover of the fire which they themselves had caused, the gang of burglars carried off their leader and moved him to an inn, where the operation took place on the arrival of the surgeon, at two o'clock in the morning.

About that there was no doubt. At Pontoise, at Gournay, at Forges, Chief-inspector Ganimard, who was sent specially from Paris, with Inspector Folenfant, as his assistant, ascertained that a motor car had passed in the course of the previous night. The same on the road from Dieppe to Ambrumesy. And, though the traces of the car were lost at about a mile and a half from the chateau, at least a number of footmarks were seen between the little door in the park wall and the abbey ruins. Besides, Ganimard remarked that the lock of the little door had been forced.

So all was explained. It remained to decide which inn the

doctor had spoken of: an easy piece of work for a Ganimard, a professional ferret, a patient old stager of the police. The number of inns is limited and this one, given the condition of the wounded man, could only be one quite close to Ambrumesy. Ganimard and Sergeant Quevillon set to work. Within a circle of five hundred yards, of a thousand yards, of fifteen hundred yards, they visited and ransacked everything that could pass for an inn. But, against all expectation, the dying man persisted in remaining invisible.

Ganimard became more resolved than ever. He came back to sleep at the chateau, on the Saturday night, with the intention of making his personal inquiry on the Sunday. On Sunday morning, he learned that, during the night, a posse of gendarmes had seen a figure gliding along the sunk road, outside the wall. Was it an accomplice who had come back to investigate? Were they to suppose that the leader of the gang had not left the cloisters or the neighborhood of the cloisters?

That night, Ganimard openly sent the squad of gendarmes to the farm and posted himself and Folenfant outside the walls, near the little door.

A little before midnight, a person passed out of the wood, slipped between them, went through the door and entered the park. For three hours, they saw him wander from side to side across the ruins, stooping, climbing up the old pillars, sometimes remaining for long minutes without moving. Then he went back to the door and again passed between the two inspectors.

Ganimard caught him by the collar, while Folenfant seized him round the body. He made no resistance of any kind and, with the greatest docility, allowed them to bind his wrists and take him to the house. But, when they attempted to question him, he replied simply that he owed them no account of his doings and that he would wait for the arrival of the examining magistrate. Thereupon, they fastened him firmly to the foot of a bed, in one of the two adjoining rooms which they occupied.

At nine o'clock on Monday morning, as soon as M. Filleul had arrived, Ganimard announced the capture which he had made. The prisoner was brought downstairs. It was Isidore Beautrelet.

"M. Isidore Beautrelet!" exclaimed M. Filleul with an air of rapture, holding out both his hands to the newcomer. "What a delightful surprise! Our excellent amateur detective here! And at our disposal too! Why, it's a windfall!—M. Chief-inspector, allow me to introduce to you M. Isidore Beautrelet, a sixth-form pupil at the Lycee Janson-de-Sailly."

Ganimard seemed a little nonplussed. Isidore made him a very low bow, as though he were greeting a colleague whom he knew how to esteem at his true value, and, turning to M. Filleul:

"It appears, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, that you have received a satisfactory account of me?"

"Perfectly satisfactory! To begin with, you were really at Veules-les-Roses at the time when Mlle. de Saint-Veran thought she saw you in the sunk road. I dare say we shall discover the identity of your double. In the second place, you are in very

deed Isidore Beautrelet, a sixth-form pupil and, what is more, an excellent pupil, industrious at your work and of exemplary behavior. As your father lives in the country, you go out once a month to his correspondent, M. Bernod, who is lavish in his praises of you."

"So that—"

"So that you are free, M. Isidore Beautrelet."

"Absolutely free?"

"Absolutely. Oh, I must make just one little condition, all the same. You can understand that I can't release a gentleman who administers sleeping-draughts, who escapes by the window and who is afterward caught in the act of trespassing upon private property. I can't release him without a compensation of some kind."

"I await your pleasure."

"Well, we will resume our interrupted conversation and you shall tell me how far you have advanced with your investigations. In two days of liberty, you must have carried them pretty far?" And, as Ganimard was preparing to go, with an affectation of contempt for that sort of practice, the magistrate cried, "Not at all, M. Inspector, your place is here—I assure you that M. Isidore Beautrelet is worth listening to. M. Isidore Beautrelet, according to my information, has made a great reputation at the Lycee Janson-de-Sailly as an observer whom nothing escapes; and his schoolfellows, I hear, look upon him as your competitor and a rival of Holmlock Shears!"

"Indeed!" said Ganimard, ironically.

"Just so. One of them wrote to me, 'If Beautrelet declares that he knows, you must believe him; and, whatever he says, you may be sure that it is the exact expression of the truth.' M. Isidore Beautrelet, now or never is the time to vindicate the confidence of your friends. I beseech you, give us the exact expression of the truth."

Isidore listened with a smile and replied:

"Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, you are very cruel. You make fun of poor schoolboys who amuse themselves as best they can. You are quite right, however, and I will give you no further reason to laugh at me."

"The fact is that you know nothing, M. Isidore Beautrelet."

"Yes, I confess in all humility that I know nothing. For I do not call it 'knowing anything' that I happen to have hit upon two or three more precise points which, I am sure, cannot have escaped you."

"For instance?"

"For instance, the object of the theft."

"Ah, of course, you know the object of the theft?"

"As you do, I have no doubt. In fact, it was the first thing I studied, because the task struck me as easier."

"Easier, really?"

"Why, of course. At the most, it's a question of reasoning."

"Nothing more than that?"

"Nothing more."

"And what is your reasoning?"

"It is just this, stripped of all extraneous comment: on the one hand, THERE HAS BEEN A THEFT, because the two young ladies are agreed and because they really saw two men running away and carrying things with them."

"There has been a theft."

"On the other hand, NOTHING HAS DISAPPEARED, because M. de Gesvres says so and he is in a better position than anybody to know."

"Nothing has disappeared."

"From those two premises I arrive at this inevitable result: granted that there has been a theft and that nothing has disappeared, it is because the object carried off has been replaced by an exactly similar object. Let me hasten to add that possibly my argument may not be confirmed by the facts. But I maintain that it is the first argument that ought to occur to us and that we are not entitled to waive it until we have made a serious examination."

"That's true—that's true," muttered the magistrate, who was obviously interested.

"Now," continued Isidore, "what was there in this room that could arouse the covetousness of the burglars? Two things. The tapestry first. It can't have been that. Old tapestry cannot be imitated: the fraud would have been palpable at once. There remain the four Rubens pictures."

"What's that you say?"

"I say that the four Rubenses on that wall are false."

"Impossible!"

"They are false a priori, inevitably and without a doubt."

"I tell you, it's impossible."

"It is very nearly a year ago, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, since a young man, who gave his name as Charpenais, came to the Chateau d'Ambrumesy and asked permission to copy the Rubens pictures. M. de Gesvres gave him permission. Every day for five months Charpenais worked in this room from morning till dusk. The copies which he made, canvases and frames, have taken the place of the four original pictures bequeathed to M. de Gesvres by his uncle, the Marques de Bobadilla."

"Prove it!"

"I have no proof to give. A picture is false because it is false; and I consider that it is not even necessary to examine these four."

M. Filleul and Ganimard exchanged glances of unconcealed astonishment. The inspector no longer thought of withdrawing. At last, the magistrate muttered:

"We must have M. de Gesvres's opinion."

And Ganimard agreed:

"Yes, we must have his opinion."

And they sent to beg the count to come to the drawing room.

The young sixth-form pupil had won a real victory. To compel two experts, two professionals like M. Filleul and Ganimard to take account of his surmises implied a testimony of respect of which any other would have been proud. But Beautrelet seemed

not to feel those little satisfactions of self-conceit and, still smiling without the least trace of irony, he placidly waited.

M. de Gesvres entered the room.

"Monsieur le Comte," said the magistrate, "the result of our inquiry has brought us face to face with an utterly unexpected contingency, which we submit to you with all reserve. It is possible—I say that it is possible—that the burglars, when breaking into the house, had it as their object to steal your four pictures by Rubens—or, at least, to replace them by four copies—copies which are said to have been made last year by a painter called Charpenais. Would you be so good as to examine the pictures and to tell us if you recognize them as genuine?"

The count appeared to suppress a movement of annoyance, looked at Isidore Beautrelet and at M. Filleul and replied, without even troubling to go near the pictures:

"I hoped, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, that the truth might have remained unknown. As this is not so, I have no hesitation in declaring that the four pictures are false."

"You knew it, then?"

"From the beginning."

"Why didn't you say so?"

"The owner of a work is never in a hurry to declare that that work is not—or, rather, is no longer genuine."

"Still, it was the only means of recovering them."

"I consider that there was another and a better."

"Which was that?"

"Not to make the secret known, not to frighten my burglars and to offer to buy back the pictures, which they must find more or less difficult to dispose of."

"How would you communicate with them?"

As the count did not reply, Isidore answered for him:

"By means of an advertisement in the papers. The paragraph inserted in the agony column of the Journal, the Echo de Paris and the Matin runs, 'Am prepared to buy back the pictures.'"

The count agreed with a nod. Once again, the young man was teaching his elders. M. Filleul showed himself a good sportsman.

"There's no doubt about it, my dear sir," he exclaimed. "I'm beginning to think your school-fellows were not quite wrong. By Jove, what an eye! What intuition! If this goes on, there will be nothing left for M. Ganimard and me to do."

"Oh, none of this part was so very complicated!"

"You mean to say that the rest was more so I remember, in fact, that, when we first met you seemed to know all about it. Let me see, a far as I recollect, you said that you knew the name of the murderer."

"So I do."

"Well, then, who killed Jean Daval? Is the man alive? Where is he hiding?"

"There is a misunderstanding between us, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, or, rather, you have misunderstood the facts from the beginning The murderer and the runaway are two distinct persons."

"What's that?" exclaimed M. Filleul. "The man whom M. de Gesvres saw in the boudoir and struggled with, the man whom the young ladies saw in the drawing-room and whom Mlle. de Saint-Veran shot at, the man who fell in the park and whom we are looking for: do you suggest that he is not the man who killed Jean Daval?"

"I do."

"Have you discovered the traces of a third accomplice who disappeared before the arrival of the young ladies?"

"I have not."

"In that case, I don't understand.—Well, who is the murderer of Jean Daval?"

"Jean Daval was killed by—"

Beautrelet interrupted himself, thought for a moment and continued:

"But I must first show you the road which I followed to arrive at the certainty and the very reasons of the murder—without which my accusation would seem monstrous to you.—And it is not—no, it is not monstrous at all.—There is one detail which has passed unobserved and which, nevertheless, is of the greatest importance; and that is that Jean Daval, at the moment when he was stabbed, had all his clothes on, including his walking boots, was dressed, in short, as a man is dressed in the middle of the day, with a waistcoat, collar, tie and braces. Now the crime was committed at four o'clock in the morning."

"I reflected on that strange fact," said the magistrate, "and M.

de Gesvres replied that Jean Daval spent a part of his nights in working."

"The servants say, on the contrary, that he went to bed regularly at a very early hour. But, admitting that he was up, why did he disarrange his bedclothes, to make believe that he had gone to bed? And, if he was in bed, why, when he heard a noise, did he take the trouble to dress himself from head to foot, instead of slipping on anything that came to hand? I went to his room on the first day, while you were at lunch: his slippers were at the foot of the bed. What prevented him from putting them on rather than his heavy nailed boots?"

"So far, I do not see—"

"So far, in fact, you cannot see anything, except anomalies. They appeared much more suspicious to me, however, when I learned that Charpenais the painter, the man who copied the Rubens pictures, had been introduced and recommended to the Comte de Gesvres by Jean Daval himself."

"Well?"

"Well, from that to the conclusion that Jean Daval and Charpenais were accomplices required but a step. I took that step at the time of our conversation."

"A little quickly, I think."

"As a matter of fact, a material proof was wanted. Now I had discovered in Daval's room, on one of the sheets of the blotting-pad on which he used to write, this address: 'Monsieur A.L.N., Post-office 45, Paris.' You will find it there still, traced

the reverse way on the blotting-paper. The next day, it was discovered that the telegram sent by the sham flyman from Saint-Nicolas bore the same address: 'A.L.N., Post-office 45.' The material proof existed: Jean Daval was in correspondence with the gang which arranged the robbery of the pictures."

M. Filleul raised no objection.

"Agreed. The complicity is established. And what conclusion do you draw?"

"This, first of all, that it was not the runaway who killed Jean Daval, because Jean Daval was his accomplice."

"And after that?"

"Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, I will ask you to remember the first sentence uttered by Monsieur le Comte when he recovered from fainting. The sentence forms part of Mlle. de Gesvres' evidence and is in the official report: 'I am not wounded. —Daval?—Is he alive?—The knife?' And I will ask you to compare it with that part of his story, also in the report, in which Monsieur le Comte describes the assault: 'The man leaped at me and felled me with a blow on the temple!' How could M. de Gesvres, who had fainted, know, on waking, that Daval had been stabbed with a knife?"

Isidore Beautrelet did not wait for an answer to his question. It seemed as though he were in a hurry to give the answer himself and to avoid all comment. He continued straightway:

"Therefore it was Jean Daval who brought the three burglars to the drawing room. While he was there with the one whom they

call their chief, a noise was heard in the boudoir. Daval opened the door. Recognizing M. de Gesvres, he rushed at him, armed with the knife. M. de Gesvres succeeded in snatching the knife from him, struck him with it and himself fell, on receiving a blow from the man whom the two girls were to see a few minutes after."

Once again, M. Filleul and the inspector exchanged glances. Ganimard tossed his head in a disconcerted way. The magistrate said:

"Monsieur le Comte, am I to believe that this version is correct?"

M. de Gesvres made no answer.

"Come, Monsieur le Comte, your silence would allow us to suppose—I beg you to speak."

Replying in a very clear voice, M. de Gesvres said:

"The version is correct in every particular."

The magistrate gave a start.

"Then I cannot understand why you misled the police. Why conceal an act which you were lawfully entitled to commit in defense of your life?"

"For twenty years," said M. de Gesvres, "Daval worked by my side. I trusted him. If he betrayed me, as the result of some temptation or other, I was, at least, unwilling, for the sake of the past, that his treachery should become known."

"You were unwilling, I agree, but you had no right to be."

"I am not of your opinion, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction.

As long as no innocent person was accused of the crime, I was absolutely entitled to refrain from accusing the man who was at the same time the culprit and the victim. He is dead. I consider death a sufficient punishment."

"But now, Monsieur le Comte, now that the truth is known, you can speak."

"Yes. Here are two rough drafts of letters written by him to his accomplices. I took them from his pocket-book, a few minutes after his death."

"And the motive of his theft?"

"Go to 18, Rue de la Barre, at Dieppe, which is the address of a certain Mme. Verdier. It was for this woman, whom he got to know two years ago, and to supply her constant need of money that Daval turned thief."

So everything was cleared up. The tragedy rose out of the darkness and gradually appeared in its true light.

"Let us go on," said M. Filluel after the count had withdrawn.

"Upon my word," said Beautrelet, gaily, "I have said almost all that I had to say."

"But the runaway, the wounded man?"

"As to that, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, you know as much as I do. You have followed his tracks in the grass by the cloisters —you have—"

"Yes, yes, I know. But, since then, his friends have removed him and what I want is a clue or two as regards that inn—"

Isidore Beautrelet burst out laughing:

"The inn! The inn does not exist! It's an invention, a trick to put the police on the wrong scent, an ingenious trick, too, for it seems to have succeeded."

"But Dr. Delattre declares—"

"Ah, that's just it!" cried Beautrelet, in a tone of conviction. "It is just because Dr. Delattre declares that we mustn't believe him. Why, Dr. Delattre refused to give any but the vaguest details concerning his adventure! He refused to say anything that might compromise his patient's safety!—And suddenly he calls attention to an inn!—You may be sure that he talked about that inn because he was told to. You may be sure that the whole story which he dished up to us was dictated to him under the threat of terrible reprisals. The doctor has a wife. The doctor has a daughter. He is too fond of them to disobey people of whose formidable power he has seen proofs. And that is why he has assisted your efforts by supplying the most precise clues."

"So precise that the inn is nowhere to be found."

"So precise that you have never ceased looking for it, in the face of all probability, and that your eyes have been turned away from the only spot where the man can be, the mysterious spot which he has not left, which he has been unable to leave ever since the moment when, wounded by Mlle. de Saint-Veran, he succeeded in dragging himself to it, like a beast to its lair."

"But where, confound it all?—In what corner of Hades—?"

"In the ruins of the old abbey."

"But there are no ruins left!—A few bits of wall!—A few

broken columns!"

"That's where he's gone to earth. Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction!" shouted Beautrelet. "That's where you will have to look for him! It's there and nowhere else that you will find Arsene Lupin!"

"Arsene Lupin!" yelled M. Filleul, springing to his feet.

There was a rather solemn pause, amid which the syllables of the famous name seemed to prolong their sound. Was it possible that the vanquished and yet invisible adversary, whom they had been hunting in vain for several days, could really be Arsene Lupin? Arsene Lupin, caught in a trap, arrested, meant immediate promotion, fortune, glory to any examining magistrate!

Ganimard had not moved a limb. Isidore said to him:

"You agree with me, do you not, M. Inspector?"

"Of course I do!"

"You have not doubted either, for a moment have you, that he managed this business?"

"Not for a second! The thing bears his signature. A move of Arsene Lupin's is as different from a move made by another man as one face is from another. You have only to open your eyes."

"Do you think so? Do you think so?" said M. Filleul.

"Think so!" cried the young man. "Look, here's one little fact: what are the initials under which those men correspond among themselves? 'A. L. N.,' that is to say, the first letter of the name Arsene and the first and last letters of the name Lupin."

"Ah," said Ganimard, "nothing escapes you! Upon my word, you're a fine fellow and old Ganimard lays down his arms before you!"

Beautrelet flushed with pleasure and pressed the hand which the chief-inspector held out to him. The three men had drawn near the balcony and their eyes now took in the extent of the ruins. M. Filleul muttered:

"So he ought to be there."

"HE IS THERE," said Beautrelet, in a hollow voice. "He has been there ever since the moment when he fell. Logically and practically, he could not escape without being seen by Mlle. de Saint-Veran and the two servants."

"What proof have you?"

"His accomplices have furnished the proof. On the very morning, one of them disguised himself as a flyman and drove you here—"

"To recover the cap, which would serve to identify him."

"Very well, but also and more particularly to examine the spot, find out and see for himself what had become of the 'governor.'"

"And did he find out?"

"I presume so, as he knew the hiding-place. And I presume that he became aware of the desperate condition of his chief, because, under the impulse of his alarm, he committed the imprudence to write that threat: 'Woe betide the young lady, if she has killed the governor!'"

"But his friends were able to take him away afterward?"

"When? Your men have never left the ruins. And where could they have moved him to? At most, a few hundred yards away, for one doesn't let a dying man travel—and then you would have found him. No, I tell you, he is there. His friends would never have removed him from the safest of hiding-places. It was there that they brought the doctor, while the gendarmes were running to the fire like children."

"But how is he living? How will he keep alive? To keep alive you need food and drink."

"I can't say. I don't know. But he is there, I will swear it. He is there, because he can't help being there. I am as sure of it as if I saw as if I touched him. He is there."

With his finger outstretched toward the ruins, he traced in the air a little circle which became smaller and smaller until it was only a point. And that point his two companions sought desperately, both leaning into space, both moved by the same faith in Beautrelet and quivering with the ardent conviction which he had forced upon them. Yes, Arsene Lupin was there. In theory and in fact, he was there: neither of them was now able to doubt it.

And there was something impressive and tragic in knowing that the famous adventurer was lying in some dark shelter, below the ground, helpless, feverish and exhausted.

"And if he dies?" asked M. Filleul, in a low voice.

"If he dies," said Beautrelet, "and if his accomplices are sure of it, then see to the safety of Mlle. de Saint-Veran. Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, for the vengeance will be terrible."

A few minutes later and in spite of the entreaties of M. Filleul, who would gladly have made further use of this fascinating auxiliary, Isidore Beautrelet, whose holidays ended that day, went off by the Dieppe Road. He stepped from the train in Paris at five o'clock and, at eight o'clock, returned to the Lycee Janson together with his schoolfellows.

Ganimard, after a minute, but utterly useless exploration of the ruins of Ambrumesy, returned to Paris by the fast night-train. On reaching his apartment in the Rue Pergolese, he found an express letter awaiting him:

> Monsieur l'Inspecteur Principal:
>
> Finding that I had a little time to spare at the end of the day, I have succeeded in collecting a few additional particulars which are sure to interest you.
>
> Arsene Lupin has been living in Paris for twelve months under the name of Etienne de Vaudreix. It is a name which you will often come across in the society notes or the sporting columns of the newspapers. He is a great traveler and is absent for long periods, during which, by his own account, he goes hunting tigers in Bengal or blue foxes in Siberia. He is supposed to be in business of some kind, although nobody is able to say for certain what his business is.
>
> His present address is 38, Rue Marbeuf; and I will call your attention to the fact that the Rue Marbeuf is close to Post-office Number 45. Since Thursday the twenty-third of

April, the day before the burglary at Ambrumesy, there has been no news at all of Etienne de Vaudreix.

With very many thanks for the kindness which you have shown me, believe me to be,

Monsieur l'Inspecteur Principal,

Yours sincerely,

ISIDORE BEAUTRELET.

P.S.—Please on no account think that it cost me any great trouble to obtain this information. On the very morning of the crime, while M. Filleul was pursuing his examination before a few privileged persons, I had the fortunate inspiration to glance at the runaway's cap, before the sham flyman came to change it. The hatter's name was enough, as you may imagine, to enable me to find the clue that led to the identification of the purchaser and his address.

The next morning, Ganimard called at 36, Rue Marbeuf. After questioning the concierge, he made him open the door of the ground-floor flat on the right, a very comfortable apartment, elegantly furnished, in which, however, he discovered nothing beyond some cinders in the fireplace. Two friends had come, four days earlier, to burn all compromising papers.

But, just as he was leaving, Ganimard passed the postman, who was bringing a letter for M. de Vaudreix. That afternoon, the public prosecutor was informed of the case and ordered the letter to be given up. It bore an American postmark and contained the following lines, in English:

DEAR SIR:

I write to confirm the answer which I gave your representative. As soon as you have M. de Gesvres's four pictures in your possession, you can forward them as arranged.

You may add the rest, if you are able to succeed, which I doubt.

An unexpected business requires my presence in Europe and I shall reach Paris at the same time as this letter. You will find me at the Grand Hotel.

Yours faithfully,

EPHRAIM B. HARLINGTON.

That same day, Ganimard applied for a warrant and took Mr. E. B. Harlington, an American citizen, to the police-station, on a charge of receiving and conspiracy.

Thus, within the space of twenty-four hours, all the threads of the plot had been unraveled, thanks to the really unforeseen clues supplied by a schoolboy of seventeen. In twenty-four hours, what had seemed inexplicable became simple and clear. In twenty-four hours, the scheme devised by the accomplices to save their leader was baffled; the capture of Arsene Lupin, wounded and dying, was no longer in doubt, his gang was disorganized, the address of his establishment in Paris and the name which he assumed were known and, for the first time, one of his cleverest and most carefully elaborated feats was seen through before he had been able to ensure its complete execution.

An immense clamor of astonishment, admiration and

curiosity arose among the public. Already, the Rouen journalist, in a very able article, had described the first examination of the sixth-form pupil, laying stress upon his personal charm, his simplicity of manner and his quiet assurance. The indiscretions of Ganimard and M. Filleul, indiscretions to which they yielded in spite of themselves, under an impulse that proved stronger than their professional pride, suddenly enlightened the public as to the part played by Isidore Beautrelet in recent events. He alone had done everything. To him alone the merit of the victory was due.

The excitement was intense. Isidore Beautrelet awoke to find himself a hero; and the crowd, suddenly infatuated, insisted upon the fullest information regarding its new favorite. The reporters were there to supply it. They rushed to the assault of the Lycee Janson-de-Sailly, waited for the day-boarders to come out after schoolhours and picked up all that related, however remotely, to Beautrelet. It was in this way that they learned the reputation which he enjoyed among his schoolfellows, who called him the rival of Holmlock Shears. Thanks to his powers of logical reasoning, with no further data than those which he was able to gather from the papers, he had, time after time, proclaimed the solution of very complicated cases long before they were cleared up by the police.

It had become a game at the Lycee Janson to put difficult questions and intricate problems to Beautrelet; and it was astonishing to see with what unhesitating and analytical power and by means of what ingenious deductions he made his way

through the thickest darkness. Ten days before the arrest of Jorisse, the grocer, he showed what could be done with the famous umbrella. In the same way, he declared from the beginning, in the matter of the Saint-Cloud mystery, that the concierge was the only possible murderer.

But most curious of all was the pamphlet which was found circulating among the boys at the school, a typewritten pamphlet signed by Beautrelet and manifolded to the number of ten copies. It was entitled, ARSENE LUPIN AND HIS METHOD, SHOWING IN HOW FAR THE LATTER IS BASED UPON TRADITION AND IN HOW FAR ORIGINAL. FOLLOWED BY A COMPARISON BETWEEN ENGLISH HUMOR AND FRENCH IRONY.

It contained a profound study of each of the exploits of Arsene Lupin, throwing the illustrious burglar's operations into extraordinary relief, showing the very mechanism of his way of setting to work, his special tactics, his letters to the press, his threats, the announcement of his thefts, in short, the whole bag of tricks which he employed to bamboozle his selected victim and throw him into such a state of mind that the victim almost offered himself to the plot contrived against him and that everything took place, as it were, with his own consent.

And the work was so just, regarded as a piece of criticism, so penetrating, so lively and marked by a wit so clever and, at the same time, so cruel that the lawyers at once passed over to his side, that the sympathy of the crowd was summarily transferred

from Lupin to Beautrelet and that, in the struggle engaged upon between the two, the schoolboy's victory was loudly proclaimed in advance.

Be this as it may, both M. Filleul and the Paris public prosecutor seemed jealously to reserve the possibility of this victory for him. On the one hand, they failed to establish Mr. Harlington's identity or to furnish a definite proof of his connection with Lupin's gang. Confederate or not, he preserved an obstinate silence. Nay, more, after examining his handwriting, it was impossible to declare that he was the author of the intercepted letter. A Mr. Harlington, carrying a small portmanteau and a pocket-book stuffed with bank-notes, had taken up his abode at the Grand Hotel: that was all that could be stated with certainty.

On the other hand, at Dieppe, M. Filleul lay down on the positions which Beautrelet had won for him. He did not move a step forward. Around the individual whom Mlle. de Saint-Veran had taken for Beautrelet, on the eve of the crime, the same mystery reigned as heretofore. The same obscurity also surrounded everything connected with the removal of the four Rubens pictures. What had become of them? And what road had been taken by the motor car in which they were carried off during the night?

Evidence of its passing was obtained at Luneray at Yerville, at Yvetot and at Caudebec-en-Caux, where it must have crossed the Seine at daybreak in the steam-ferry. But, when the matter came

to be inquired into more thoroughly, it was stated that the motor car was an uncovered one and that it would have been impossible to pack four large pictures into it unobserved by the ferryman.

It was very probably the same car; but then the question cropped up again: what had become of the four Rubenses?

These were so many problems which M. Filleul unanswered. Every day, his subordinates searched the quadrilateral of the ruins. Almost every day, he came to direct the explorations. But between that and discovering the refuge in which Lupin lay dying —if it were true that Beautrelet's opinion was correct—there was a gulf fixed which the worthy magistrate did not seem likely to cross.

And so it was natural that they should turn once more to Isidore Beautrelet, as he alone had succeeded in dispelling shadows which, in his absence, gathered thicker and more impenetrable than ever. Why did he not go on with the case? Seeing how far he had carried it, he required but an effort to succeed.

The question was put to him by a member of the staff of the Grand Journal, who had obtained admission to the Lycee Janson by assuming the name of Bernod, the friend of Beautrelet's father. And Isidore very sensibly replied:

"My dear sir, there are other things besides Lupin in this world, other things besides stories about burglars and detectives. There is, for instance, the thing which is known as taking one's degree. Now I am going up for my examination in July. This is

May. And I don't want to be plucked. What would my worthy parent say?"

"But what would he say if you delivered Arsene Lupin into the hands of the police?"

"Tut! There's a time for everything. In the next holidays—"

"Whitsuntide?"

"Yes—I shall go down on Saturday the sixth of June by the first train."

"And, on the evening of that Saturday, Lupin will be taken."

"Will you give me until the Sunday?" asked Beautrelet, laughing.

"Why delay?" replied the journalist, quite seriously.

This inexplicable confidence, born of yesterday and already so strong, was felt with regard to the young man by one and all, even though, in reality, events had justified it only up to a certain point. No matter, people believed in him! Nothing seemed difficult to him. They expected from him what they were entitled to expect at most from some phenomenon of penetration and intuition, of experience and skill. That day of the sixth of June was made to sprawl over all the papers. On the sixth of June, Isidore Beautrelet would take the fast train to Dieppe: and Lupin would be arrested on the same evening.

"Unless he escapes between this and then," objected the last remaining partisans of the adventurer.

"Impossible! Every outlet is watched."

"Unless he has succumbed to his wounds, then," said the

partisans, who would have preferred their hero's death to his capture.

And the retort was immediate:

"Nonsense! If Lupin were dead, his confederates would know it by now, and Lupin would be revenged. Beautrelet said so!"

And the sixth of June came. Half a dozen journalists were looking out for Isidore at the Gare Saint-Lazare. Two of them wanted to accompany him on his journey. He begged them to refrain.

He started alone, therefore, in a compartment to himself. He was tired, thanks to a series of nights devoted to study, and soon fell asleep. He slept heavily. In his dreams, he had an impression that the train stopped at different stations and that people got in and out. When he awoke, within sight of Rouen, he was still alone. But, on the back of the opposite seat, was a large sheet of paper, fastened with a pin to the gray cloth. It bore these words:

> "Every man should mind his own business. Do you mind yours. If not, you must take the consequences."

"Capital!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands with delight. "Things are going badly in the adversary's camp. That threat is as stupid and vulgar as the sham flyman's. What a style! One can see that it wasn't composed by Lupin."

The train threaded the tunnel that precedes the old Norman city. On reaching the station, Isidore took a few turns on the platform to stretch his legs. He was about to re-enter

his compartment, when a cry escaped him. As he passed the bookstall, he had read, in an absent-minded way, the following lines on the front page of a special edition of the Journal de Rouen; and their alarming sense suddenly burst upon him:

STOP-PRESS NEWS

We hear by telephone from Dieppe that the Chateau d'Ambrumesy was broken into last night by criminals, who bound and gagged Mlle. de Gesvres and carried off Mlle. de Saint-Veran. Traces of blood have been seen at a distance of five hundred yards from the house and a scarf has been found close by, which is also stained with blood. There is every reason to fear that the poor young girl has been murdered.

Isidore Beautrelet completed his journey to Dieppe without moving a limb. Bent in two, with his elbows on his knees and his hands plastered against his face, he sat thinking.

At Dieppe, he took a fly. At the door of Ambrumesy, he met the examining magistrate, who confirmed the horrible news.

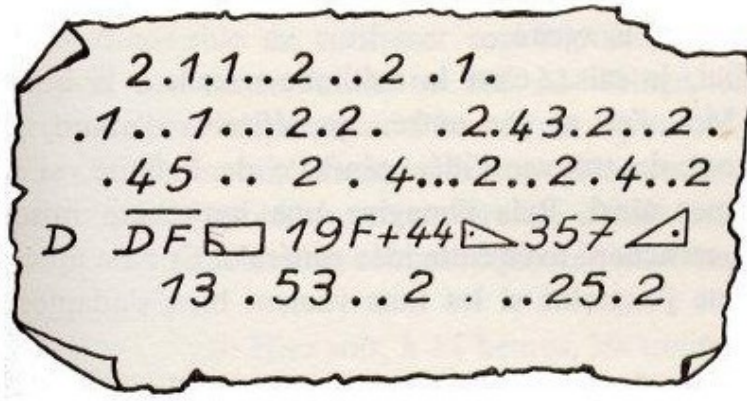
"You know nothing more?" asked Beautrelet.

"Nothing. I have only just arrived."

At that moment, the sergeant of gendarmes came up to M. Filleul and handed him a crumpled, torn and discolored piece of paper, which he had picked up not far from the place where the scarf was found. M. Filleul looked at it and gave it to Beautrelet, saying:

"I don't suppose this will help us much in our investigations."

Isidore turned the paper over and over. It was covered with figures, dots and signs and presented the exact appearance reproduced below:



CHAPTER THREE
THE CORPSE

At six o'clock in the evening, having finished all he had to do, M. Filluel, accompanied by M. Bredoux, his clerk, stood waiting for the carriage which was to take him back to Dieppe. He seemed restless, nervous. Twice over, he asked:

"You haven't seen anything of young Beautrelet, I suppose?"

"No, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, I can't say I have."

"Where on earth can he be? I haven't set eyes on him all day!"

Suddenly, he had an idea, handed his portfolio to Bredoux, ran round the chateau and made for the ruins. Isidore Beautrelet was lying near the cloisters, flat on his face, with one arm folded under his head, on the ground carpeted with pine-needles. He seemed drowsing.

"Hullo, young man, what are you doing here? Are you asleep?"

"I'm not asleep. I've been thinking."

"Ever since this morning?"

"Ever since this morning."

"It's not a question of thinking! One must see into things first, study facts, look for clues, establish connecting links. The time for thinking comes after, when one pieces all that together and discovers the truth."

"Yes, I know.—That's the usual way, the right one, I dare say.—Mine is different.—I think first, I try, above all, to get the general hang of the case, if I may so express myself. Then I imagine a reasonable and logical hypothesis, which fits in with the general idea. And then, and not before, I examine the facts to see if they agree with my hypothesis."

"That's a funny method and a terribly complicated one!"

"It's a sure method, M. Filleul, which is more than can be said of yours."

"Come, come! Facts are facts."

"With your ordinary sort of adversary, yes. But, given an enemy endowed with a certain amount of cunning, the facts are those which he happens to have selected. Take the famous clues upon which you base your inquiry: why, he was at liberty to arrange them as he liked. And you see where that can lead you, into what mistakes and absurdities, when you are dealing with a man like Arsene Lupin. Holmlock Shears himself fell into the trap."

"Arsene Lupin is dead."

"No matter. His gang remains and the pupils of such a master are masters themselves."

M. Filleul took Isidore by the arm and, leading him away:

"Words, young man, words. Here is something of more importance. Listen to me. Ganimard is otherwise engaged at this moment and will not be here for a few days. On the other hand, the Comte de Gesvres has telegraphed to Holmlock Shears, who

has promised his assistance next week. Now don't you think, young man, that it would be a feather in our cap if we were able to say to those two celebrities, on the day of their arrival, 'Awfully sorry, gentlemen, but we couldn't wait. The business is done'?"

It was impossible for M. Filleul to confess helplessness with greater candor. Beautrelet suppressed a smile and, pretending not to see through the worthy magistrate, replied:

"I confess. Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, that, if I was not present at your inquiry just now, it was because I hoped that you would consent to tell me the results. May I ask what you have learned?"

"Well, last night, at eleven o'clock, the three gendarmes whom Sergeant Quevillon had left on guard at the chateau received a note from the sergeant telling them to hasten with all speed to Ouville, where they are stationed. They at once rode off, and when they arrived at Ouville—"

"They discovered that they had been tricked, that the order was a forgery and that there was nothing for them to do but return to Ambrumesy."

"This they did, accompanied by Sergeant Quevillon. But they were away for an hour and a half and, during this time, the crime was committed."

"In what circumstances?"

"Very simple circumstances, indeed. A ladder was removed from the farm buildings and placed against the second story of the chateau. A pane of glass was cut out and a window opened.

Two men, carrying a dark lantern, entered Mlle. de Gesvres's room and gagged her before she could cry out. Then, after binding her with cords, they softly opened the door of the room in which Mlle. de Saint-Veran was sleeping. Mlle. de Gesvres heard a stifled moan, followed by the sound of a person struggling. A moment later, she saw two men carrying her cousin, who was also bound and gagged. They passed in front of her and went out through the window. Then Mlle. de Gesvres, terrified and exhausted, fainted."

"But what about the dogs? I thought M. de Gesvres had bought two almost wild sheep-dogs, which were let loose at night?"

"They were found dead, poisoned."

"By whom? Nobody could get near them."

"It's a mystery. The fact remains that the two men crossed the ruins without let or hindrance and went out by the little door which we have heard so much about. They passed through the copsewood, following the line of the disused quarries. It was not until they were nearly half a mile from the chateau, at the foot of the tree known as the Great Oak, that they stopped—and executed their purpose."

"If they came with the intention of killing Mlle. de Saint-Veran, why didn't they murder her in her room?"

"I don't know. Perhaps the incident that settled their determination only occurred after they had left the house. Perhaps the girl succeeded in releasing herself from her bonds. In my opinion, the scarf which was picked up was used to fasten

her wrists. In any case, the blow was struck at the foot of the Great Oak. I have collected indisputable proofs—"

"But the body?"

"The body has not been found, but there is nothing excessively surprising in that. As a matter of fact, the trail which I followed brought me to the church at Varengeville and the old cemetery perched on the top of the cliff. From there it is a sheer precipice, a fall of over three hundred feet to the rocks and the sea below. In a day or two, a stronger tide than usual will cast up the body on the beach."

"Obviously. This is all very simple."

"Yes, it is all very simple and doesn't trouble me in the least. Lupin is dead, his accomplices heard of it and, to revenge themselves, have killed Mlle. de Saint-Veran. These are facts which did not even require checking. But Lupin?"

"What about him?"

"What has become of him? In all probability, his confederates removed his corpse at the same time that they carried away the girl; but what proof have we? None at all. Any more than of his staying in the ruins, or of his death, or of his life. And that is the real mystery, M. Beautrelet. The murder of Mlle. Raymonde solves nothing. On the contrary, it only complicates matters. What has been happening during the past two months at the Chateau d'Ambrumesy? If we don't clear up the riddle, young man, others will give us the go-by."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.