

# The CONFIDENCES OF ARSÈNE LUPIN

EDITH SWAN-NECK

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ARSÈNE LUPIN, what's your real opinion of Inspector Ganimard?"

"A very high one, my dear fellow."

"A very high one? Then, why do you never miss a chance of turning him into ridicule?"

"It's a bad habit; and I'm sorry for it. Here's a decent detective; here's a whole heap of decent men, who stand for law and order, who protect us against the *apaches*, who risk their lives for honest people like you and me; and we have nothing to give them in return but flouts and gibes. It's a shame."

"Bravo, Lupin; you're talking like a respectable ratepayer!"

"What else am I? I may have peculiar views about other people's property; but I assure you that it's very different when my own's at stake. Then, I'm out for blood. I have the soul of a conservative, my dear fellow, the instincts of a retired tradesman and a due respect for every sort of tradition and authority. And that is why Ganimard inspires me with no little gratitude and esteem."

"But not much admiration."

"Plenty of admiration, too. Over and above the dauntless courage which comes naturally to every member of the force at the Criminal Investigation Department, Ganimard possesses sterling qualities; decision, insight and judgment. I have watched him at work. He's somebody, when all's said. Do you know the Edith Swan-Neck story, as it was called?"

"I know as much as everybody knows."

"That means that you don't know it at all. Well, that job was, I dare say, the one which I thought out most cleverly, the one which I shrouded in the greatest darkness and mystery, the one which it took the biggest generalship to carry through. And yet, Ganimard ended by unraveling the knot. Thanks to him, they know the truth today at headquarters."

"May I hope to hear the story?"

"Certainly . . . one of these days . . . when I have time . . . But the Brunelli is dancing at the Opera to-night; and, if she were not to see me in my stall . . .!"

I do not meet Lupin often. He confesses only when it suits him. It was gradually, by snatches, by odds and ends of confidences, that I was able to obtain the different incidents and to piece the story together in all its details.

The main features are well known and I will merely mention the facts.

**THREE YEARS** ago, when the train from Brest arrived at Rennes, the door of one of the baggage vans was found to be smashed in. This van had been booked by Colonel Sparminto, a rich Brazilian, who was traveling with his wife in the same train. It contained a complete set of tapestry-hangings. The case in which one of these was packed had been broken open, and the tapestry had disappeared.

Colonel Sparminto started proceedings against the railroad company, claiming heavy damages, not only for the stolen tapestry, but also for the loss in value that the whole collection suffered in consequence of the theft.

The police instituted inquiries. The company offered a large reward. A fortnight later, a letter was intercepted by the authorities, which revealed the fact that the theft had been carried out under the direction of Arsène Lupin and that a package was to leave next day for the United States. That same evening, the tapestry was discovered in a trunk deposited in the cloak-room at the railroad depot.

So, the scheme had miscarried. Lupin felt the disappointment so much that he vented his ill-

humor in a communication to Colonel Sparminto, ending with the following words, which were clear enough for any one:

"It was very considerate of me to take only one. Next time, I shall take the whole twelve. *Verbum sap.*" "A. L."

Colonel Sparminto had been living for some months in a house standing at the end of a small garden at the corner of the *Rue de la Faisanderie* and the *Rue Dufresnoy*. He was a rather thickset, broad-shouldered man with black hair and a swarthy skin, always well and quietly dressed. He was married to an extremely pretty, but delicate Englishwoman, who was much upset by the business of the tapestries. From the first, she implored her husband to sell them for what they would fetch. The colonel had much too forcible and dogged a nature to yield to what he had every right to describe as a woman's fancies. He sold nothing; but he adopted every measure to protect himself against an attempt at burglary.

To begin with, so that he might confine his watch to the garden-front, he walled up all the windows on the ground floor and the first floor, overlooking the *Rue Dufresnoy*. Next, he enlisted the services of a firm that made a specialty of protecting private houses against robberies of all sorts. Every window of the gallery in which the tapestries were hung was fitted with invisible burglar-alarms, the position of which was known to none but himself.

hated Lupin like poison. As for the servants, the colonel had known them for years and was ready to vouch for them.

After taking all these steps and organizing the defence of the house as if it were a fortress, the colonel gave a great housewarming, a sort of private view, to which he invited the members of both his clubs, as well as a limited number of ladies, journalists, art-patrons and critics.

They felt, as they passed through the garden gate, much as if they were walking into a prison. The three private detectives, posted at the foot of the stairs, asked for each visitor's invitation card and eyed him up and down suspiciously, making him feel as if they were going to search his pockets or take his finger-prints.

**THE** colonel, who received his guests on the first floor, made laughing apologies and seemed delighted at the opportunity of explaining the arrangements which he had invented to secure the safety of his hangings. His wife stood by him, looking charmingly young and pretty, fair-haired, pale and sinuous, with a sad and gentle expression, the expression of resignation often worn by those who are threatened by fate.

When all the guests had come, the garden gates and the hall doors were closed. Then, everybody filed into the middle gallery, which was reached through two steel doors, while its windows, with their huge shutters, were protected by iron bars. This was where the twelve tapestries were kept.

They were matchless works of art and, taking their inspiration from the famous Bayeux Tapestry,



The guests were lost in enthusiasm over the beauty of this tapestry

These, at the least touch, switched on all the electric lights and set a whole system of bells and gongs ringing.

In addition to this, the insurance companies to which he applied refused to grant policies to any considerable amount unless he consented to let three men, supplied by the companies but paid by himself, occupy the ground floor of his house every night. They selected for the purpose three ex-detectives, tried and trustworthy men, all of whom

attributed to Queen Matilda, they represented the story of the Norman Conquest. They had been ordered in the fourteenth century by the descendant of a man-at-arms in William the Conqueror's train; were executed by Jehan Gosset, a famous Arras weaver; and were discovered, five hundred years later, in an old Breton manor-house. On hearing of this, the colonel had struck a bargain for fifty thousand francs. They were worth ten times the money.