

tlement. Lupin showed himself to be wonderfully disinterested. He was prepared to sign, the papers said, with his eyes closed, without knowing the figure of the dowry.

All these things drove the old duke crazy. His hatred of Lupin assumed morbid proportions. Much as it went against the grain, he called on the prefect of police, who advised him to be on his guard:

"We know the gentleman's ways; he is employing one of his favorite dodges. Forgive the expression, *monsieur le duc*, but he is 'nursing' you. Don't fall into the trap."

"What dodge? What trap?" asked the duke, anxiously.

"He is trying to make you lose your head and to lead you, by intimidation, into doing something that you would refuse to do in cold blood."

"Still, M. Arsène Lupin can hardly hope that I will offer him my daughter's hand!"

"No; but he hopes that you will commit, to put it mildly, a blunder."

"What blunder?"

"Exactly the blunder that he wants you to commit."

"Then you think, *monsieur le préfet*.....?"

"I think the best thing you can do, *monsieur le duc*, is to go home; or, if all this noise worries you, to go down to the country and stay there quietly, without upsetting yourself."

This conversation only increased the old duke's fears. Lupin appeared to him in the light of a terrible person, who employed diabolical methods and kept accomplices in every sphere of society. Prudence was the watchword.

And life from that moment became intolerable. The duke grew more crabbed and silent than ever and denied his door to all his old friends and even to Angélique's three suitors—her cousins de Mussy, d'Emboise and de Caorches, none of whom was on speaking terms with the others, in consequence of their rivalry, and who were in the habit of calling, turn and turn about, every week.

For no earthly reason, he dismissed his butler and his coachman. But he dared not fill their places, for fear of engaging creatures of Arsène Lupin; and his own man, Hyacinthe, in whom he had every confidence, having retained him in his service for more than forty years, had to take upon himself the laborious duties of the stables and the pantry.

"Come, father," said Angélique, trying to make him listen to commonsense, "I really do not see what you are afraid of. No one can force me into this ridiculous marriage."

"Well, of course, that's not what I'm afraid of."

"What then, father?"

"How can I tell? An abduction! A burglary! An act of violence! There is no doubt that the villain is scheming something; and there is, also, no doubt that we are surrounded by spies."

One afternoon, he received a newspaper in which the following paragraph was marked in red pencil:

The signing of the marriage-contract is fixed for this evening, at the Sarzeau-Vendôme town house. It will be quite a private ceremony, and only a few

privileged friends will be present to congratulate the happy pair. The witnesses to the contract on behalf of Mlle. de Sarzeau-Vendôme—the Prince de La Rochefoucauld-Limours and the Comte de Chartres—will be introduced by M. Arsène Lupin to the two gentlemen who have claimed the honor of acting as his groomsmen; namely, the prefect of police and the governor of the Santé Prison.

Ten minutes later, the duke sent his servant Hyacinthe to the postoffice with three express messages. At four o'clock, in Angélique's presence, he saw the



He went without a word, bowing very low as he passed

three cousins: Mussy, fat, heavy, pasty-faced; d'Emboise, slender, fresh-colored and shy; Caorches, short, thin and unhealthy-looking—all three, old bachelors by this time, lacking distinction in dress or appearance.

The meeting was a short one. The duke had worked out his whole plan of campaign, a defensive campaign, of which he set forth the first stage in explicit terms:

"Angélique and I will leave Paris tonight for our place in Brittany. I rely on you, my three nephews, to help us to get away. You, d'Emboise, will come and fetch us in your car, with the hood up. You, Mussy, will bring your big motor and kindly see to the luggage with Hyacinthe, my man. You, Caorches, will go to the Gare d'Orléans and book our berths in the sleeping-car for Vannes by the 10:40 train. Is that settled?"

The rest of the day passed without incident. The duke, in order to avoid any chance indiscretion, waited until after dinner to tell Hyacinthe to pack a trunk and a portmanteau. Hyacinthe, as well as Angélique's maid, was to accompany them.

At nine o'clock, all the other servants went to bed by their master's order. At ten minutes to ten, the duke, who was completing his preparations, heard the sound of a motor-horn. The porter opened the gates of the courtyard. The duke, standing at the window, recognized d'Emboise's landaulette.

"Tell him I shall be down presently," he said to Hyacinthe, "and let *mademoiselle* know."

In a few minutes, as Hyacinthe did not return, he left his room. Instantly, he was attacked on the landing by two masked men, who gagged and bound him before he could utter a cry. And one of the men said to him, in a low voice:

"Take this as a first warning, *monsieur le duc*. If you persist in leaving Paris and refusing your consent, it will be a more serious matter."

And the same man said to his companion:

"Keep an eye on him. I shall see to the young lady."

By that time, two other confederates had overpowered the lady's maid; and Angélique, herself gagged, lay in a swoon on a couch in her boudoir.

She revived almost immediately, under the stimulus of a bottle of salts held to her nostrils; and, when she opened her eyes, she saw bending over her a young man, in evening clothes, with a smiling and friendly face, who said:

"I implore your forgiveness, *mademoiselle*. All these happenings are a trifle sudden, and this behavior rather out of the way. But circumstances often compel us to deeds of which our conscience does not approve. Pray pardon me."

He took her hand very gently and slipped a ring on the girl's finger, saying:

"There, now we are engaged! Never forget the man who gave you this ring. He entreats you not to run away from him . . . but to stay in Paris and to await the proofs of his devotion. Have faith in him."

He said all this in so serious and respectful a voice, with so much authority and deference, that she had not the strength to resist. Their eyes met. He whispered:

"The exquisite purity of your eyes! It would be heavenly to live with those eyes upon one. Now, close them. . ."

He withdrew. His accomplices followed suit. The car drove off; and the house in the Rue de Varennes remained still and silent until the moment when Angélique, regaining her complete consciousness, called out for the servants.

They found the duke, Hyacinthe, the lady's maid, and the porter and his wife all tightly bound. A few very valuable ornaments had disappeared, as well as the duke's pocket-book and all his jewelry: tie-pins, pearl studs, watch and so on.

The police were advised without delay. In the morning, it appeared that, the evening before, d'Emboise, when leaving his house in the motor-car, had been stabbed by his own chauffeur and thrown, half-dead, in a deserted street. Mussy and Caorches had received telephone messages purporting to come from the duke, countermanding their presence.

Next week, without troubling further about the police investigation, without obeying the summons of the examining-magistrate, without even reading Arsène Lupin's letters to the papers on "the Varennes Flight," the duke, his daughter and his valet stealthily took a slow train for Vannes and arrived one evening at the old feudal castle that towers over the headland of Sarzeau. The duke at once organized a defense with the aid of the Breton peasants, true medieval vassals every one of them. On the fourth day, Mussy arrived; on the fifth, Caorches; and, on the seventh, d'Emboise, whose wound was not as severe as had been feared.

The duke waited two days longer before communicating to those about him what he called, since his escape had succeeded in spite of Lupin, the second part of his plan. He expounded his views, in the presence of the three cousins, in accordance with a dictatorial order to Angélique, expressed in these peremptory terms:

"All this bother is upsetting me terribly. I have entered on a struggle with this man, whose daring you have seen for yourself; and the struggle is killing me. I want to end it at all costs. There is only one way of doing this, Angélique, and that is for you to release me from all my responsibility by accepting the hand of one of your cousins. Before a month is out, you must be the wife of Mussy, Caorches or d'Emboise. You have a free choice. Make your decision."

Angélique wept and entreated her father for four whole days; but in vain. She felt that he would be inflexible, and that she must end by submitting to his wishes. She accepted:

"Whichever you please, father. I do not love any of them. So, I may as well be unhappy with one as with another."

Thereupon, a fresh discussion ensued, as the duke wanted to compel her to make her own choice. She stood firm. Reluctantly and for financial reasons, he named d'Emboise.

The banns were published without delay.

From that moment, the watch in and around the castle was increased twofold, all the more inasmuch as Lupin's silence and the sudden cessation of the campaign that he had been conducting in the press could not but alarm the Duc de Sarzeau-Vendôme.

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"There, now we are engaged"