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*Arsène Lupin vs  
Sherlock Holmes*



# First Episode

THE BLONDE WOMAN





# 1

*Number 514 – Series 23*

ON 8TH OF DECEMBER LAST YEAR, M. Gerbois, a teacher of mathematics at the Versailles secondary school, discovered among the jumble of things in an old curiosity shop a small mahogany writing desk which he liked on account of its large number of drawers.

“That’s just what I need for Suzanne’s birthday,” he thought.

And as he did his best – as far as his modest means would allow – to please his daughter, he negotiated a price and paid the sum of sixty-five francs.

Just as he was giving his address, a young man with an elegant figure, and who was already rummaging around left and right, noticed the item of furniture and asked:

“How much?”

“It’s sold,” replied the shopkeeper.

“Ah!... to this gentleman, perhaps?”

M. Gerbois nodded and, all the happier to have acquired the piece of furniture now that one of his fellow men was coveting it, he left.



But he had not gone ten paces along the street before he was joined by the young man, who, with his hat in his hand and in an extremely courteous tone, said to him:

“I beg your pardon most humbly, sir... I wish to ask you an indiscreet question... Were you looking for that writing desk more particularly than any other item?”

“No, I was looking for a second-hand pair of scales for certain experiments in physics.”

“So, you don’t especially like it?”

“I just like it. That’s all.”

“Because it’s an antique, perhaps?”

“Because it’s a handy thing.”

“In that case, would you agree to exchange it for a writing desk that is just as handy but in a better condition?”

“This one is in a good condition, so there seems to me to be no point in exchanging it.”

“Yet—”

M. Gerbois was a man who was easily irritated and of a tetchy nature. He replied curtly:

“I must ask you, sir, not to insist.”

The stranger placed himself in front of him.

“I don’t know what price you paid for it, sir... I offer you double.

“No.”

“Treble?”

“Just stop right there,” exclaimed the teacher, irritated. “It belongs to me and it’s not for sale.”

The young man looked at him fixedly, in a manner which M. Gerbois was not to forget, and then, without a word, turned on his heels and went away.

An hour later the piece of furniture was brought to the small

house on the Viroflay road in which the teacher lived. He summoned his daughter.

“This is for you, Suzanne, if you find it suitable of course.”

Suzanne was a pretty creature, outgoing and of a happy disposition. She flung herself round her father’s neck and embraced him with as much joy as if he had offered her a gift fit for a queen.

The same evening, after having put it in her room with the help of the maid, Hortense, she cleaned the drawers and carefully arranged in them her papers, her boxes of letters, her correspondence, her collection of postcards and some secret mementoes of her cousin Philippe.

The next day, at half-past seven, M. Gerbois went to the secondary school. At ten o’clock, Suzanne, following her daily routine, was waiting for him at the exit, and it was a great pleasure for him to catch sight of her on the pavement opposite the gate, with her graceful figure and her childlike smile.

They went back home together.

“And how do you like your writing desk?”

“It’s absolutely marvellous! Hortense and I polished the brass fittings. You’d think they were made of gold.”

“So you’re pleased with it?”

“Yes, I’m pleased with it! I mean, I don’t know how I managed without it before.”

They went across the garden in front of the house.

M. Gerbois made a suggestion:

“How about going to look at it before dinner?”

“Oh, yes! That’s a good idea.”

She went up first, but as she reached the doorway of her room, she uttered a cry of alarm.

“What’s wrong?” mumbled M. Gerbois.

He followed her into the room. *The writing desk was no longer there.*

What amazed the examining magistrate was the admirable simplicity of the methods used. While Suzanne was out and the maid was doing her shopping, a delivery man, displaying his identity badge – which was seen by the neighbours – had stopped his cart in front of the garden and rung twice. The neighbours, unaware that the maid was out, were not at all suspicious, so that the individual could carry out his task completely undisturbed.

It should be pointed out here that no cabinet was broken open, and no clock disturbed. What is more, Suzanne's purse, which she had left on the marble top of the writing desk, was found on the nearby table with the few gold coins that it contained. The motive for the theft could therefore be clearly ascertained, which made the theft that much more inexplicable, for why so many risks for such a negligible gain?

The only clue which the teacher could provide was the incident of the previous day:

“When I refused, the young man immediately appeared extremely vexed, and I had the very distinct impression that he left me with an air of menace.

This was very vague. The shopkeeper was questioned. He did not know either of the two gentlemen. As for the object itself, he had bought it for forty francs in Chevreuse, in a post-mortem sale, and believed that he had sold it again at its true value. The inquiries that were conducted could discover nothing more.

But M. Gerbois remained convinced that he had endured a great wrong. A fortune must have been concealed in the false

bottom of a drawer, and that was the reason why the young man, who knew its hiding place, had acted in such a decisive way.

“Poor father, what would we have done with such a fortune?” Suzanne said to him several times.

“What do you mean? With such a dowry, you could aspire to a match of the highest order.”

Suzanne, who had been limiting her aspirations to her cousin Philippe, who was a pathetic match, sighed bitterly. And in the little house in Versailles, life continued, less cheerfully, less carefree, clouded with regret and disappointment.

Two months passed. And suddenly there occurred a succession of the most serious events, an unforeseen sequence of good luck and catastrophes!

On the 1st of February, at five thirty, M. Gerbois, who had just returned home, with the evening paper in his hand, sat down, put on his glasses and started to read. As he was not interested in politics, he turned over the page. His attention was immediately drawn to an article entitled : ‘Third Draw of the Press Association Lottery’.

The newspaper slipped from his fingers. The walls swayed before his eyes, and his heart stopped beating. Number 514 – series 23. That was his number! He had bought it by chance, as a favour to one of his friends, as he did not really believe in fate. And now he had won!

He quickly pulled out his notebook. There it was, clearly written down as a memo on the endpaper: number 514 – series 23. But where was the ticket?

He dashed off to his study to look for the box of envelopes among which he had slipped the precious ticket, and as soon as

he entered the room he stopped dead, feeling staggered again as his heart contracted: the box of envelopes was not there! And the terrifying thing was that he suddenly realized that it had not been there for several weeks. For weeks he had not seen it in front of him at those times when he was correcting his pupils' homework!

There was the sound of footsteps on the gravel in the garden. He called out: "Suzanne! Suzanne!" She came running and hurried upstairs. He stammered in a choked voice:

"Suzanne... the box... the box of envelopes?"

"Which one?"

"The one from the Louvre... which I brought once on a Thursday... and which was on the end of this table."

"But you remember, Father... we put them away together..."

"When?"

"In the evening... you know... the day before..."

"But where? Tell me... You'll be the death of me..."

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

"In the writing desk that was stolen?"

"Yes."

"In the writing desk that was stolen!"

He repeated the words in a very low voice in a kind of horror. Then he grasped her hand and in an even lower voice said:

"My dear daughter, it contained a million francs..."

"Oh, Father, why didn't you tell me?" she murmured naively.

"A million!" he continued. "It was the Press Association lottery ticket for the winning number."

The enormity of the disaster overwhelmed them, and for a long time they stood in silence, which they did not have the courage to break.

Finally Suzanne spoke:

“But Father, they’ll pay you out for it in any case.”

“Why would they? What proof do they have?”

“You need to have proof?”

“For God’s sake!”

“You don’t have any?”

“I have one piece of proof.”

“So?...”

“It’s in the box.”

“In the box that disappeared?”

“Yes. The other person will get it.”

“But that would be terrible! Look, Father, can’t you make some kind of complaint?”

“Who knows? Who knows? The man must be very powerful! He has such resources at his disposal!... Remember... that business with the piece of furniture...”

He got up with a sudden burst of energy, and stamping his foot, said:

“Right! No, no, he won’t get the million, he won’t get it! Why should he? After all, as clever as he is, even he can’t do anything about it. If he presents himself to cash it in, they’ll put him away. Oh yes, we shall see, my good man!”

“So, you have an idea, Father?”

“To defend our rights, all the way, whatever happens! And we will succeed!... The million francs is mine, and I’ll get it!”

A few minutes later he sent off the following dispatch:

To the Director of the Crédit Foncier, Rue Capucines, Paris.  
I am the owner of number 514 – series 23. I oppose by all legal means all outside claims. Gerbois.

Almost at the same time another telegram arrived at the Crédit Foncier:

Number 514 – series 23 is in my possession. Arsène Lupin.

Every time I undertake to relate one of the countless adventures which constitute the life of Arsène Lupin, I become really confused, because it seems to me so clear that the most commonplace of his adventures is known to all those people who will read my account. Indeed there is not one act performed by our “national thief”, as he has been so nicely called, that has not been reported in the most sensational way, not an exploit of his that has not been studied in all its aspects, not an action that has not been commented on in such an abundance of detail that is usually reserved for reports on the actions of heroes.

Who, for example, does not know this strange story of ‘The Blonde Woman’, with its strange episodes which the reporters entitled in large print: Number 514 – Series 23!... The Crime on Avenue Henri-Martin!... The Blue Diamond!... What a fuss there was about the intervention of the famous detective Herlock Sholmes!\* What a turmoil after each of the twists and turns which marked the conflict between these two great artistes. And what a racket there was on the boulevards on the day when the newspaper sellers were loudly proclaiming “The Arrest of Arsène Lupin”!

My excuse is that I am providing something new: I am providing the answer to the enigma. There is still some shadowy quality surrounding these adventures and I shall dissipate it. I shall reproduce articles which have been read and reread, and I shall make new copies of old interviews. But all of these I shall coordinate, classify and test for their validity. My collaborator

is Arsène Lupin, whose readiness to help me is inexhaustible. And it is also, in this case, the ineffable Wilson, the friend and confidant of Sholmes.

One remembers the tremendous burst of laughter which greeted the publication of the double telegram. The very name of Arsène Lupin is a guarantee of something unexpected, a promise of entertainment for the gallery. And the gallery in this case is the whole world.

From the investigations conducted immediately by the Crédit Foncier, it was concluded that number 514 – series 23 had been issued by the Crédit Lyonnais, at their Versailles branch, to the artillery major Bessy. Well, this major had died by falling off his horse. It was discovered from his comrades, to whom he had confided the fact, that he must have given his ticket to a friend.

“That friend was me,” confirmed M. Gerbois.

“Then prove it!” objected the director of the Crédit Foncier.

“You want me to prove it? That’s quite easy. There are at least twenty people who will tell you that I had a steady acquaintanceship with the major and that we used to meet in the café on the Place d’Armes. That’s where, one day, to oblige him when he was momentarily embarrassed, I took possession of his ticket for the sum of twenty francs.”

“Do you have witnesses to this exchange?”

“No.”

“In that case, on what do you base your claim?”

“On the letter he wrote to me on this matter.”

“Which letter?”

“A letter that was pinned to the ticket.”

“Show it to me.”

“But it was in the stolen writing desk!”

“Then find it!”



It was Arsène Lupin himself who made the announcement. A message was put in *L'Écho de France* – which has the honour of being his official organ and of which he is, it seems, one of the principal shareholders. The message announced that he was putting into the hands of Maître Detinan, his legal advisor, the letter which Major Bessy had written to him personally.

There was an outburst of merriment: Arsène Lupin was consulting a lawyer! Arsène Lupin, playing by the established rules, had designated a member of the bar to represent him!

All the journalists rushed to see Maître Detinan, who was an influential radical deputy, a man of high integrity, who at the same time had a fine mind and was something of a sceptic and inclined to be paradoxical.

Maître Detinan had never had the pleasure of meeting Arsène Lupin – and he regretted it deeply – but he had indeed just received his instructions and, very touched at the honour of being thus chosen, he intended to defend the rights of his client vigorously. He opened the newly created file and, straight away, showed the major's letter. It certainly proved the transfer of the ticket, but did not mention the name of the receiver. It simply said, "My Dear Friend..."

"'My Dear Friend' – that's me," added Arsène Lupin in a note attached to the major's letter. "And the best proof is that I possess the letter."

The horde of reporters swooped down immediately on M. Gerbois, who could only repeat:

"'My Dear Friend' is no one else but me. Arsène Lupin stole the major's letter together with the lottery ticket."

"Let him prove it!" retorted Lupin to the journalists.

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

And Lupin retorted:

“Let him prove it!”

And this public duel between the two owners of number 514 – series 23 was a delightfully fantastic sight, as were the comings and goings of the reporters and the calmness of Arsène Lupin in the face of M. Gerbois’s panic.

The poor man! The press was full of his lamentations! He revealed his misfortune with a touching innocence:

“You see, gentlemen, it’s Suzanne’s dowry that this scoundrel is robbing me of. For myself, personally, I couldn’t care less, but for Suzanne! Just think, one million! Ten times a hundred thousand francs! Oh, I knew very well that the writing desk contained treasure.”

It was in vain that people objected that, when his opponent took away the piece of furniture, he was unaware of the presence of the lottery ticket and could not in any case have foreseen that the ticket would win the big prize. He moaned:

“Come now, he knew!... Otherwise why would he have bothered to take that wretched-looking piece of furniture?”

“For unknown reasons, but certainly not to acquire a scrap of paper which after all was only worth the modest sum of twenty francs.”

“The sum of one million! He knew... he knows everything! Oh, you don’t know him, that crook!... He hasn’t cheated you out of a million!”

This dialogue could have gone on for a long time, but on the twelfth day M. Gerbois received a communication from Arsène Dubois with a note marking it “confidential” attached. He read it with growing anxiety:



## 2

### *The Blue Diamond*

ON THE EVENING OF 27TH MARCH, in the little house at 134 Avenue Henri-Martin, which his brother had left to him six months previously, the old general Baron d'Hautrec, ambassador to Berlin in the Second Empire, was sleeping in the depths of a comfortable armchair, while his female companion was reading to him, and Sister Auguste was warming his bed and preparing the night light.

At eleven o'clock the nun, who exceptionally that night had to go back to her community's convent and spend the night with the mother superior, informed the female companion:

"Mademoiselle Antoinette, my work is finished and I'm going."

"Very well, Sister."

"And above all don't forget that the cook is on leave and that you are alone in the house with the servant."

"Don't worry about the Baron. I shall be sleeping in the next room as agreed, and I'll leave my door open."



### 3

#### *Herlock Sholmes Opens Hostilities*

“WHAT WOULD the gentlemen like?”  
“Whatever you like,” replied Arsène Lupin, as a man to whom such culinary details were of little interest. “Whatever you like, but no meat or alcohol.”

The waiter went away in disdain.

I exclaimed, “What, you’re still a vegetarian?”

“More and more,” asserted Lupin.

“For reasons of taste, belief, or just out of habit?”

“For health reasons.”

“And you never break the rule?”

“Oh, yes! When I am in society... so as not to draw attention to myself.”

We were dining together near the Gare du Nord, at the back of a small restaurant where Arsène Lupin had asked me to meet him. He liked from time to time to arrange a meeting with me by telephone in this way in some corner of Paris. He always proved to be inexhaustibly eloquent, full of the joys of life, unaffected and easy-going, and he always came out

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