



THE HOLLOW NEEDLE

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The Englishman sneered:

"I have no right to touch her, I suppose? Come, come, enough of this humbug! Your name isn't Valmeras any more than it's Lupin: you stole the name just as you stole the name of Charmerace. And the woman whom you pass off as your mother is Victoire, your old accomplice, the one who brought you up—" ¹²

Shears made a mistake. Carried away by his longing for revenge, he glanced across at Raymonde, whom these revelations filled with horror. Lupin took advantage of his imprudence. With a sudden movement, he fired.

"Damnation!" bellowed Shears, whose arm, pierced by a bullet, fell to his side. And, addressing his men, "Shoot, you two! Shoot him down!"

But already Lupin was upon them: and not two seconds had elapsed before the one on the right was sprawling on the ground, with his chest smashed, while the other, with his jaw broken, fell back against the gate.

"Hurry up, Victoire. Tie them down. And now, Mr. Englishman, it's you and I."

He ducked with an oath:

"Ah, you scoundrel!"

Shears had picked up his revolver with his left hand and was taking aim at him.

A shot—a cry of distress—Raymonde had flung herself between the two men, facing the Englishman. She staggered back, brought her hand to her neck, drew herself up, spun round on her heels and fell at Lupin's feet.

"Raymonde!—Raymonde!"

He threw himself upon her, took her in his arms and pressed her to him.

"Dead—" he said.

There was a moment of stupefaction. Shears seemed confounded by his own act. Victoire stammered:

"My poor boy—my poor boy—"

Beautrelet went up to the young woman and stooped to examine her. Lupin repeated:

"Dead—dead—"

He said it in a reflective tone, as though he did not yet understand. But his face became hollow, suddenly transformed, ravaged by grief. And then he was seized

¹² Arsene Lupin, play in four acts, by Maurice Leblanc and Francis de Croisset

