

FILE NO. 113

—BY— Emile Gaboriau.

CHAPTER I.

The following item appeared in the evening journals of Paris, dated Tuesday, February 28, 18—, under the head of 'City News':

"There was great consternation this morning in the banking and financial centers, caused by a daring robbery at the house of one of our eminent money-ogers."

"The amount recorded had been abstracted from the bank safe, but not in the manner of a clerk, but by a person who had been found, and this theft remained to be explained. This is our task in the following pages."

CHAPTER II.

The Faurel bank, Rue de Provence, is an important institution, and, from its large staff, presents the appearance of a government office. In an old-fashioned way, the banker's dwelling is under the same roof, although he has a country residence in the modern taste. His private office is on the first floor over the offices, and leads into his apartments, which communicate directly with the bank by means of a narrow staircase, opening into the room occupied by the head cashier.

This cash-room is reckoned proof against all attacks, able to stand a siege, being sheathed in steel like an ironclad. A strong grate prevents a burglar coming down through the fire-place. Clamped to the wall is a formidable chest, calculated to fill with longing the man whose wealth may be comprised in one little wad.

This masterpiece of wrought-iron is six feet by four and a half, with five compartments. It is opened by a special key, but this cannot be inserted into the lock, or used, unless the five knobs, on which are the alphabetical letters, are turned to form a word in combination. This word is often changed, as usual in such cases. The banker and his chief teller alone know it, and they alone have a key in duplicate. But one danger impends, that both should forget the word.

On the morning of February 28th, the bank clerks were all busy in their departments, at about ten o'clock, when one named Cavillon suddenly raised the warning cry: "Here comes the cashier!"

Prosper Bertyon, the head cashier of the bank, was a tall, handsome man, of about thirty, with fair hair and large dark-blue eyes, scrupulously neat, and dressed in the fashion.

For he would be very prepossessing, but for a cold, reserved English-like manner and self-sufficiency which spoiled his naturally bright, open features.

"Ah, here you are!" cried Cavillon. "Someone has just been asking for you."

"Who? The iron manufacturer, was it not? Well, he will come back again. Knowing that I would come late this morning, I made all my arrangements yesterday."

Prosper had unlocked his office door, and, as he finished speaking, entered, and closed it behind him.

"Look!" exclaimed one of the clerks, "there is a man who sits up all night, and leads a fast life, and doesn't feel like going to work early in the morning. Did you notice how very pale he looked when he came in?"

very slowly said: "In other words, monsieur, I am the only person who could have taken this money."

"Unhappy wretch!" Prosper drew himself to his full height, and, looking M. Faurel square in the face, added: "Or you?"

The banker made a threatening gesture, and there is no knowing what would have happened if they had not been interrupted by loud, angry voices at the front door.

A man insisted upon entering, in spite of the janitor, and succeeded in forcing his way in. M. de Clamernan, the iron-founder, who did not appear to observe anything unusual. He advanced, and, without lifting his hat, said in a imperious tone: "It is after ten o'clock, gentlemen."

No one answered; and Clamernan was about to continue, when, turning around, he saw the clerk, and walking up to him, said: "Well, monsieur, I congratulate myself upon finding you in a safe place. I have been waiting for you since this morning, and now I am refused admittance, and am compelled to force my way in. Be so good as to tell me whether I can have my money."

M. Faurel's face turned pale with anger, as he listened to this insolence; yet he controlled himself.

"I would be obliged to you, monsieur, for a short delay."

"Yes, yesterday. But this morning, this very instant, I find I have been robbed of three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"Shall I have to wait long?"

"Long enough for me to send to the bank."

Then, turning his back, M. Faurel said to his cashier: "Write and send as quickly as possible to the bank an order for three hundred thousand francs. Let the messenger take a hack."

The cashier trembled, as if trying to shake off a terrible nightmare.

"It is useless to send, he said, in a murmured tone, 'we owe this gentleman three hundred thousand francs, and we have less than one hundred thousand at the bank.'"

Clamernan evidently expected this answer, for he muttered: "Of course."

dent, that, during the day, you will have found, if not the missing, at the greatest portion of it; and to-morrow neither you nor I will remember anything about this false alarm."

M. Faurel had risen, and was about to leave the room, when Prosper arose, and seized him by the arm.

"Your generosity is useless, monsieur," said, bitterly, "having taken nothing I can restore nothing. I have searched carefully; the bank notes have been stolen."

"But by whom, madman? By whom?"

"By all that is sacred, not by me." The banker's face turned crimson.

"Wretch!" cried he, "do you mean to say that I took the money?"

Prosper bowed, and did not answer.

"Ah, then," said M. Faurel, unable to contain himself any longer, "you dare—Then between you and me, Bertyon, justice shall decide. Heaven is my witness that I have done all I could to save you. You will have yourself to thank for what follows: the cashier, he must be waiting in my room. Shall I call him down?"

Prosper, with fearful resignation, replied in a stifled voice: "As you will."

The banker was near the door, which he opened, and after giving the cashier a last searching look, said to an office boy: "Anselme, ask the commissary of police to come."

CHAPTER III. BLAME AND COUNTERBLAME.

The commissary soon made his appearance. It was with calm, if not perfect indifference, that he entered.

He was followed by a short man dressed in black, slightly relieved by a crumpled collar.

The banker, scarcely bowing, said: "Doubtless, monsieur, you have been apprised of the painful circumstance which compels me to have recourse to your assistance."

"It is about a robbery, I believe."

"Yes, an infamous and mysterious robbery committed in this office, from the safe of the head cashier, of which my cashier and myself alone possess the key and the word."

This declaration seemed to arouse the unfortunate cashier from his dull stupor.

"Excuse me, monsieur," he said to the commissary, in a low tone. "My chief also has the word and the key."

"Of course, that is understood."

The commissary at once drew his own conclusions from their behavior.

These two men accused each other. From their own statements, one or the other was guilty.

Never had he thought that his chief would carry out his threats; for, in a contest of this nature, M. Faurel would have as much to risk as his cashier, and more to lose.

He was sitting near the fire-place, absorbed in the most gloomy forebodings, when the banker's chamber door suddenly opened, and a beautiful girl appeared upon the threshold.

She was tall and slender; a loose morning-gown, confined at the waist by a simple black ribbon, betrayed to advantage the grace of her figure.

Seeing Prosper in the study, where probably she expected to find her uncle alone, she could not refrain from an exclamation of surprise: "You, Prosper—you?"

"These words broke the spell. The cashier dropped the white hand which he had caught, answered, bitterly: "Yes, it is Prosper, the companion of your childhood—suspected, accused of the most disgraceful theft; Prosper, whom your uncle has just delivered up to justice, and who, before the day is over, will be arrested, and thrown into prison."

Madeline, with a terrified gesture, cried in a tone of anguish: "Great Heaven! Prosper, what are you saying?"

"Alas, mademoiselle!" answered Prosper, "you will only too soon learn my misfortune and my disgrace; then, yes, then, you will applaud yourself for what you have done."

The commissary, so calm when he first came, now looked grave and perplexed. The instant for taking a decisive part had come, and it was evident that he hesitated.

"You see, gentlemen," he began, "our search has only confirmed our first suspicion. M. Faurel and Prosper bowed assentingly."

"And what do you think, M. Faurel?" continued the commissary.

"Faurel turned around with a vexed air. He reproached himself for not having concealed his impressions.

"Oh! no, he said, carelessly, 'I have discovered nothing of importance.'"

"But we should like to know," said Prosper.

"I have merely convinced myself that this safe has been recently opened, and that I know not which, with great violence and haste."

"Why so?" asked the commissary, becoming attentive.

"Oh, monsieur, at this scratch near the lock."

The commissary stooped down, and carefully examined the safe; he saw a slight scratch several inches long that had removed the outer coat of varnish.

"I see the scratch," said he; "but what does that prove?"

"Oh, nothing at all!" said Faurel. "I just now told you it was of no importance."

Faurel said this, but it was not his real opinion.

This scratch, undeniably fresh, had for him a significance that escaped the others.

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