

Secret of the Plundered Safe

By EMILE GABORIAU

CHAPTER I.

The Faugel 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. His private office is on the first floor over the offices, and leads into his own 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 gate prevents a burglar coming down through the fireplace. Clamped to the wall is a formidable chest, calculated to fill with longing the man whose wealth may be comprised in one little wallet.

This masterpiece of wrought-iron is six feet by four and a half, with triple sides, and divided into separate fireproof 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.

On a certain morning in February 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 Bertomy, 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.

"Ah, here you are!" cried Cavillon. "Some one 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 doesn't feel like going to work early in the morning. Did you notice how very pale he looked when he came in?"

A moment later the cash-room door suddenly opened, and the teller appeared before them with tottering step and a haggard look on his sly face.

"Robbed!" he gasped, his horrified expression, hollow voice and trembling lips betraying such fearful suffering that the clerks jumped up from their desks and ran toward him. They gathered round and begged him to explain.

"All the cash in the safe has been taken," said Bertomy, as soon as he had recovered; "three packets each of one hundred thousand franc notes, and one of fifty thousand—all four done up in one paper wrapper, tied and sealed."

With the swiftness of lightning the news had spread, and the main room was crowded with the inquisitive. As Cavillon was about to run and tell the banker, he arrived, having already been notified. M. Andre Fauvel was a man of fifty, inclined to stoutness, medium in height, gray haired, and with a slight stoop like brain workers. The news had extremely agitated him, for his usually florid face was pale.

"What is this I hear has happened?" he said to the clerks, who respectfully stood aside when he entered the room.

"Monsieur," began the cashier, "having, as you know, a payment to make this morning, I yesterday drew from the Bank of France three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"Why yesterday, monsieur?" interrupted the banker. "I think I have a hundred times ordered you to wait until the pay day."

"I know it, monsieur, and did wrong to disobey you. But the evil is done. Yesterday evening I locked the money up; it has disappeared, and yet the safe has not been broken open."

"You must be mad!" exclaimed M. Fauvel; "speak! who do you pretend to say opened the safe? Answer me. No one but you and I know the secret word. No one but you and I have keys."

"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. Fauvel 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.

minutes returned, holding in his hand a letter and a bundle of securities.

"Here, quick, Courmier!" he said to one of his clerks, "take my carriage, waiting at the door, and go with this gentleman to Rothschild's. Hand him this letter and securities; in exchange you will receive three hundred thousand francs, which you will hand to this gentleman."

The ironmaster was visibly disappointed; he seemed desirous of apologizing for his impertinence.

"I assure you, monsieur, that I had no intention of giving offense. Our relations for some years have been such that I hope—"

"Enough, monsieur," interrupted the banker, "I desire no apologies. Follow my clerk; he will pay you;" and then turning to his clerks, who stood curiously looking on, he said: "Gentlemen, be good enough to resume your desks."

In an instant the room was cleared of everyone except the clerks belonging there, and they sat at their desks with their noses almost touching the paper before them, as if too absorbed in their work to think of anything else.

"We must have an explanation," said the banker to Prosper. "Let us go into your office."

The cashier mechanically obeyed without a word, and his chief followed him, taking no precaution to close the door after them.

"Now that we are alone, Prosper," he said. "Pray, confide in me; it is your only chance of salvation. I am your employer, it is true; but I am before all above all your friend—your best and truest friend. I cannot forget that in this very room, fifteen years ago, you were intrusted to me by your father; and ever since that day have I had cause to congratulate myself on possessing so faithful and efficient a clerk. Have I not always been like a father to you? From the first day my house has been open to you; you were treated as a member of my family. Madeline and my sons looked upon you as a brother. But you grew weary of this peaceful life. One day, a year ago, you suddenly began to shun us—Ah, do you think I am ignorant of the life you have been leading since you left my roof a year ago?"

The banker paused, as if hoping for a confession, which, however, did not come.

"Come, Prosper, have courage, be frank! I will go upstairs, while you will look again in the safe; I am sure that in your agitation you did not search thoroughly. This evening I will return; and I am confident that, during the day, you will have found, if not the missing sum, the greater portion of it; and tomorrow neither you nor I will remember anything about this false alarm."

"Your generosity is useless, monsieur," said Prosper, bitterly; "having taken nothing, I can restore nothing. I have searched carefully; the bank notes have been stolen, and by all that is sacred, not by me."

"Wretch! Do you mean to say that I took the money? Ah, then!" said M. Fauvel, unable to contain himself any longer, "between you and me, Bertomy, justice shall decide. I have sent for the commissary of police; he must be waiting in my rooms. Shall I call him down?"

"Do 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 II.

The commissary soon made his appearance. He was followed by a short man dressed in black, slightly relieved by a crumpled collar. The banker, scarcely bowing, said:

"Monsieur, monsieur, you have been apprised of the painful circumstance which compels me to have recourse to your assistance. An infamous and mysterious robbery has been committed in this office, from the safe you see open, the key and the word."

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

The commissary at once drew his own conclusions. These two men accused each other. From their own statements, one or the other was guilty.

"Well," he said, "a robbery has been perpetrated, but by whom? Did the robber enter from without? Did the robber enter from without?"

"I am certain he did not," said Prosper.

"However," said the commissary, "we must make sure of it," and turning toward his companion, he said: "M. Fanferlot, see if you cannot discover traces that escaped the attention of these gentlemen."

M. Fanferlot, nicknamed "The Squirrel," was indebted to his prodigious agility for this title, of which he was not a little proud. Already, before the commissary spoke to him, he had ferreted everywhere; studied the doors, sounded the partitions, examined the wicket, and stirred up the ashes in the fireplace.

"I cannot imagine," said he, "how an outsider could have effected an entry here." He opened the door of the private staircase. "Where do these stairs lead to?" he asked.

"To my private office," replied M. Fauvel. "Follow me, gentlemen. And you come, too, Prosper."

M. Fauvel's office consisted of two rooms; the waiting room, sumptuously furnished and beautifully decorated, and the study where he transacted business. These two rooms had only three doors; one opened on the private stairway, another into the banker's bedroom, and the third into the main vestibule. It was through this last door that the banker's clients and visitors were admitted. M. Fanferlot examined the study at a glance. He seemed puzzled like a man who had flattered himself with the hope of discovering some clew and had found nothing.

"Let us see the adjoining room," he said, and passed into the waiting room, followed by the banker and the commissary.

Prosper remained alone in the study. He was sitting near the fireplace, absorbed in the most gloomy forebodings,

when the banker's chamber door suddenly opened and a beautiful girl appeared upon the threshold. 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, and answered bitterly:

"Yes, this 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."

"Good 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. Your uncle is in the adjoining room, with the commissary of police and a detective. They will soon return. I entreat you to retire that they may not find you here."

As he spoke he gently pushed her through the door and closed it upon her. It was time, for the next moment the commissary and M. Fauvel entered. They had visited the main entrance and waiting room, and had heard nothing of what had passed in the study. But Fanferlot had heard for them.

"I understand the case now," said he, to himself. "This young man loves the young lady, who is really very pretty; and, as he is handsome, I suppose his love is reciprocated. This love affair vexes the banker, who, not knowing how to get rid of the importunate lover by fair means, has to resort to foul ones and plans this imaginary robbery, which is very ingenious."

Meanwhile, the search upstairs completed, M. Fauvel and the commissary returned to where Prosper was waiting. The commissary, so calm when he first came, now looked grave and perplexed.

"You see, gentlemen," he began, "our search has only confirmed our first suspicion. What do you think, M. Fanferlot?"

Fanferlot did not answer. Occupied in studying the safe lock, he manifested signs of surprise. Evidently he had just made an important discovery. M. Fauvel, Prosper and the commissary arose, and surrounded him.

"Have you discovered any clew?" said the banker, eagerly.

"I have merely convinced myself that this safe has been recently opened or shut, I know not which, with great violence and haste. Look 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 Fanferlot. "It is of no importance."

Fanferlot said this, but it was not his real opinion. This scratch, undeniably fresh, had for him a significance that escaped the others. He said to himself:

"This confirms my suspicions. If the cashier had stolen millions there was no occasion for his being in a hurry; whereas, the banker creeping down in the dead of the night, for fear of awakening the porter in the anteroom, in order to rob his own safe, had every reason to tremble, to hastily withdraw the key, which, slipping along the lock, scratched off the varnish."

Resolved alone to unravel the tangled thread of this mystery, the detective determined to keep his conjectures to himself, for the same reason he was silent as to the interview between Madeline and Prosper. He hastened to divert attention from the scratch upon the lock.

"To conclude," he said, addressing the commissary, "I am convinced that no one outside of the bank could have obtained access to this room. Those who opened the safe knew the word and possessed the key."

"That being the case," said the commissary, "I must request a few moments' conversation with M. Fauvel."

(To be continued.)

New Feats in Medicine.

The first principle of learning about the progress of medicine and surgery is to accept with distrust all the information that the newspapers give. It is almost impossible to tell the tale of a surgeon's hopes or a physician's expectations so that it will convey to the lay mind the precise degree of information that is ready to be transmitted. When the surgeon or the physician talks to his mates, as at doctors' conventions, his facts are understood and his conjectures are sifted in the light of the experience of his fellows, but we laymen are apt to swallow whole the tales we read of medical discovery, and to be disappointed when the expectations we form are disappointed. The papers have begun to disclose, for example, that experiments are going on that look to the cure of Bright's disease by a surgical operation on the kidneys. Surgeons no longer stand on much ceremony with the kidneys, but deal with them as they would with eyes, or any of the duplex organs, taking one out when it is hopelessly disordered and making repairs on such as are repairable. They say one of the new operations for Bright's disease is to peel off the outcoats of the kidneys and leave them to work, as you may say, in airtight sleeves. At any rate, some of the surgeons do some kind of operation which is said to cure the patient, though the whole proceeding is still in the experimental stage, and there has not been time yet to determine whether the cure is permanent.—Harper's Weekly.

Artful Jane.

"Jane Summers is an artful mix." "What has she done now?" "Why, when that handsome Mr. Cobb called there the other night she had a piece of dried mistletoe twined into the top of that high ivory back comb of hers."

"Did she suppose he'd notice it?" "Yes. She found out somewhere that he was a botanist.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

He only is exempt from failures who makes no efforts.—Whately.

THE LIVING LANDMARK.

Of our swift passage through this scenery Of life and death, more durable than we. What landmark so congenial as a tree. Repeating its green legend every spring. Type of our brief but still-renewed mortality.

Men's monuments, grown old, forget their names Where shining souls have passed imbibed a grace Beyond mere earth; some sweetness of their fames Leaves in the soil its unextinguished trace.

That penetrates our lives and heightens them or shames. —James Russell Lowell.

THE LOTTERY TICKET.

JAMES LANNING was a mechanic, a young, honest man, whose highest ambition was to gain a comfortable home for himself and wife to be thought well of by his neighbors. He had built himself a house, and there still remained upon it a mortgage of five hundred dollars; but this sum he hoped to pay in a few years if he only had his health. He had calculated exactly how long it would take him to clear off this incubrance, and he went to work with his eyes open.

One evening James came home to his supper more thoughtful than usual. His young wife noticed his manner, and she inquired its cause.

"What is it, James?" she kindly asked. "Why, I never saw you look so sober before."

"Well, I'll tell you, Hannah," returned the young man, with a slight hesitation in his manner. "I have just been thinking that I would buy a lottery ticket."

Hannah Lanning did not answer immediately. She looked down and smoothed the silken hair of her babe, which was chirping like a robin in her arms, and the shades of her handsome features showed that she was taking time to think.

"How much will it cost?" she asked, at length, looking half timidly up into her husband's face.

"Twenty dollars," returned James, trying to assume a confidence which he did not feel.

"And have you made up your mind to buy it?"

"Well, I think I shall. What do you think about it?"

"If you should ask my advice, I should say not to buy it."

"But why so?"

"For many reasons," returned his wife, in a trembling tone. "She would not offend her husband, and she shrank from giving him advice which he might not follow."

"In the first place," she said, "I think the whole science of lotteries is a bad one; and then you have no money to risk."

"But just look at the prizes," said James, drawing a "scheme" from his pocket. "Here is one prize of twenty thousand dollars, another of ten thousand, another five thousand, and so on. Something tells me that if I buy a ticket I shall draw a large prize. And then just think, Hannah, how easily I could pay all up for my house, and perhaps have a good handsome sum left."

The young man spoke with such earnestness and assurance; but he saw that there was a cloud upon his wife's brow.

"It seems to me that the chance of drawing a prize is very doubtful," said Hannah, as she took the scheme. "Here are many thousand tickets to be sold."

The babe tried hard to snatch the paper, and Hannah laid it aside.

"I think I shall run the risk," resumed James, glancing once more over the paper, and resting with a nervous longing upon the figures which represented the higher prizes. "There's Barney; he drew about eight hundred dollars a year ago."

"Yes, I know it," said Hannah, with more warmth than she had before manifested. "and what has become of the money? You know he has squandered it all away. Ah, James, money is of no use unless we come honestly by it."

"Honestly?" repeated the young man. "Surely, there is nothing dishonest in drawing a prize in a lottery?"

"I think there is," kindly but emphatically replied the wife. "All games of hazard, where money is at stake, are dishonest. Were you to draw a prize of twenty thousand dollars, you would rob a thousand men of twenty dollars each; or, at least, you would take from them money for which you returned them no equivalent. Is it not gambling in every sense of the word?"

"Oh, no! You look upon the matter in too strong a light."

"Perhaps I do; but yet so it looks to me. What you may draw, some one else must lose; and perhaps it may be some one who can afford the loss no better than you can. I wouldn't buy the ticket, James. Let us live on the products of our honest gains, and we shall be happier."

James Lanning was uneasy. He had no answer for his wife's arguments; at least, no answer that could spring from his moral convictions, and he let the matter drop. But the young man could not drive the siren from his heart. All the next day his head was full of "prizes," and while he was at his work he kept muttering to himself, "Twenty thousand dollars," "Ten thousand dollars," "Five thousand dollars," and so on.

When he went home the next night he was almost unhappy with the nervous anxiety into which he had thrown himself. The tempter had grasped him firmly, and whenever he thought of the lottery he saw nothing but piles of gold and silver. In short, James Lanning had made up his mind that he would buy the ticket. He went to the little box where he had already one hundred and twenty dollars laid out toward paying off the mortgage from his house. The lock clicked with a startling sound, and when he threw back the cover he hesitated. He looked at his wife, and he saw that she was sad.

"Oh, I'm sure I shall draw a prize!" he said, with a faint, fading smile.

He took four half eagles from the box and put them in his pocket. His wife said nothing. She played with her baby to hide her sadness, for she did not wish to say more on the subject. She had seen that little pile of gold gradually accumulating, and both she and her husband had been happy in anticipating the day when the pretty cottage would be all their own. But when she saw those four pieces of gold taken away from the store, she felt a foreshadowing of evil. She might have spoken again against the movement, but she saw that her husband was sorely tender on the subject, and she let the affair go into the hands of fate.

A week elapsed from the time that James bought his ticket to the drawing of the lottery, and during that time the young man had not a moment of real enjoyment. He was alternating between hope and fear, and therefore his mind was constantly on the stretch.

At length the day arrived. James went to the office and found that the drawing had taken place, and the list of prizes had been made out. He seized the list and turned away, so that those who stood around should not see his face. He read the list through and through, but he searched for his number in vain! It was not there. He had drawn a blank! He left the office an unhappy man. Those twenty dollars which he had lost had been the savings of two months of hard labor, and he felt their loss most keenly.

When he returned home that night he told his wife that he had lost. She found no fault with him. She only kissed him, and told him that the lesson was a good one, even though it had been dearly bought.

But James Lanning was not satisfied. He brooded over his loss with a bitter spirit, and at length the thought came to him that he might yet draw a prize. He wished that he had not bought the first ticket, and he thought that if he could only get back his twenty dollars he would buy no more; but he could not rest under his loss. He was determined to make one more trial, and he did so. This time he purchased a ticket without his wife's knowledge. The result was the same as before. He drew a blank!

"Forty dollars!" was a sentence that dwelt fearfully upon the mechanic's lips.

"Oh, I must draw a prize!" he said to himself. "I must make up what I have lost. Let me once do that, and I'll buy no more tickets."

Another twenty dollars was taken from the little bank, another ticket was bought, another blank was drawn. At the end of three months the little bank was empty, and James Lanning had the last ticket in his pocket. Ah, how earnestly he prayed that that last ticket might draw a prize! He had become pale and careworn, and his wife—poor, confiding soul—thought he only repined because he had lost twenty dollars. When she would try and cheer him he would laugh, and try to make the matter light.

"James," said his wife to him one day—it was the day before that on which the lottery was to be drawn in which he held the sixth ticket—"Mr. Rowse has been here to-day after his semi-annual interest. I told him that you would see him to-morrow."

"Yes, I will," said James, in a faint voice. "Yes, to-morrow I shall see him."

Young Lanning thought of the lottery, and of the prize. This was his sixth trial, and he felt sure that he should draw.

The morrow came, and when James Lanning returned to his home at night he was penniless! All his golden visions had faded away, and he was left in darkness and misery.

"James, have you paid Mr. Rowse his interest yet?" asked Hannah.

The young man leaned his head upon his hands and groaned aloud.

"For heaven's sake, James, what has happened?" cried the startled wife, springing to the side of her husband and twining her arm about his neck.

The young man looked up with a wild, haggard expression. His lips were bloodless, and his features were all stricken with a death-hue.

"What is it? Oh, what?" murmured the wife.

"Go look in our box—our little bank!" groaned the poor man.

Hannah hastened away, and when she returned she bore an empty box in her hand.

"Robbed!" she gasped, and she sank tremblingly down by her husband's side.

"Yes, Hannah," whispered the husband, "I have robbed you."

The stricken wife gazed upon her husband with a vacant look, for at first she did not comprehend; but she remembered his behavior for weeks back; she remembered how he had murmured in his sleep of lotteries and tickets, of blanks and prizes, and gradually the truth broke in upon her.

"I have done it all, Hannah," hoarsely whispered the condemned man,

when he saw that his wife had guessed the truth. "All, all has gone for lottery tickets. The demon tempter lured me; he held up glittering gold in his hand, but he gave me none of it. Oh, do not chide me! You know not what I have suffered—what hours of agony I have passed—and you know how cold is my heart now. Oh, my wife, would to God I had listened to you!"

"Ah!" calmly whispered the faithful wife, as she drew her hand across her husband's heated brow. "Mourn not for what is lost. I will not chide you. It is hard thus for you to lose your scanty earnings, but there might be many calamities worse than that. Courage, James; we will soon forget it."

"And Mr. Rowse will foreclose the mortgage. You will be homeless," murmured young Lanning in broken accents.

"No; I will see that all is safe in that quarter," added Hannah.

At that moment the baby awoke, and the gentle mother was called to care for it. On the next day, at noon, Hannah Lanning gave her husband a receipt for fifteen dollars from Mr. Rowse.

"Here," said she, "interest is paid. Now let us forget all that has passed, and commence again."

"But how—what has paid this?" asked James, gazing first upon the receipt, and then upon his wife.

"Never mind."

"Ah, but I must mind. Tell me, Hannah."

"Well, I have sold my gold watch."

"Sold it?"

"But I can buy it back again. The man will not part with it, if I want it. But I don't want it, James, till we are able. Perhaps I shall never want it. You must not chide me, for never did I derive one iota of the pleasure from its possession that I now feel in the result of its disposal."

James Lanning clasped his wife to his bosom, and he murmured a prayer, and in that prayer there was a pledge.

Two years passed away, and during that time James Lanning lost not a single day from his work. He was as punctual as the sun, and the result was as sure.

It was late on Saturday evening when he came home. After supper he drew a paper from his pocket, and laid it upon the table.

"There, Hannah," said he, while a noble pride beamed in every feature, "there is my mortgage. 'I've paid it—every cent. This house is ours; it is our own house. I've bought it with dollars, every one of which has been honestly earned by the sweat of my brow. I am happy now."

Hannah Lanning saw that her husband had opened his arms, and she sat down upon his knee and laid her head upon his shoulder.

"Oh, blessed moment!" she murmured.

"Yes, it is a blessed moment," responded her husband. "Do you remember, Hannah, the hour of bitterness that we saw two years ago?"

The wife shuddered, but made no reply.

"Ah," continued the young man, "I have never forgotten that bitter lesson; and even now I tremble when I think how fatally I was deceived by the tempter that has lured so many thousands to destruction."

"But its horror is lost in this happy moment," said Hannah, looking up with a smile.

"It's terror may be lost," resumed James, "but its lesson must never be forgotten. Ah, the luring lottery ticket has a dark side—a side which few see until they feel it."

"And are not all its sides dark?" softly asked the wife. "If there is any brightness about it, it is only the glare of the fatal ignis fatuus which can only lead the wayward traveler into danger and disaster."

"You are right, my dear wife. You were right at first. Ah," he continued, as he drew the faithful being more closely to his bosom, "if husbands would often obey the tender dictates of the loving wife, there would be far less misery in the world than there is now."—Waverley Magazine.

Japs Learn Western Ways.

Japanese journalism is developing on Western lines and with surprising rapidity. The events of the present war are responsible for extras which are sold on the street in the American fashion. The newsmen run barelegged with a sort of napkin around the head and a small bell at the belt, which rings as they go.

When the war news is lively the extras come out in a correspondingly lively manner, one after the other, and are liberally patronized. The sensational reporter has appeared there, as well as the female journalist, and things are "whooped up" more than they used to be. One consequence of this is that journalism here and there begins to pay, which formerly it had to be subsidized as a matter of patriotism and public spirit. There is an English column in all the papers and English is studied in all the schools.

The country has 600 newspapers in all, and several of them have respectively a circulation exceeding 100,000 copies. As guides and directors of public opinion they are perhaps not inferior to our own. Altogether Japanese journalism, in its infancy, has a bright future before it and will likely keep pace with the progress of the country it serves.

What He Took Comfort In.

The ark had just landed. "There is one comfort, anyway," remarked Noah, "there isn't any old sail left to tell me he was in a worse storm thirty years ago."

With a thankful sigh he proceeded to unlash his cargo.—New York Tribune.