

# Other People's Money

By

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## Chapter I.1

There is not, perhaps, in all Paris, a quieter street than the Rue St. Gilles in the Marais, within a step of the Place Royale. No carriages there; never a crowd. Hardly is the silence broken by the regulation drums of the Minims Barracks near by, by the chimes of the Church of St. Louis, or by the joyous clamors of the pupils of the Massin School during the hours of recreation.

At night, long before ten o'clock, and when the Boulevard Beaumarchais is still full of life, activity, and noise, every thing begins to close. One by one the lights go out, and the great windows with diminutive panes become dark. And if, after midnight, some belated citizen passes on his way home, he quickens his step, feeling lonely and uneasy, and apprehensive of the reproaches of his concierge, who is likely to ask him whence he may be coming at so late an hour.

In such a street, every one knows each other: houses have no mystery; families, no secrets,--a small town, where idle curiosity has always a corner of the veil slyly raised, where gossip flourishes as rankly as the grass on the street.

Thus on the afternoon of the 27th of April, 1872 (a Saturday), a fact which anywhere else might have passed unnoticed was attracting particular attention.

A man some thirty years of age, wearing the working livery of servants of the upper class,--the long striped waistcoat with sleeves, and the white linen apron,--was going from door to door.

"Who can the man be looking for?" wondered the idle neighbors, closely watching his evolutions.

He was not looking for any one. To such as he spoke to, he stated that he had been sent by a cousin of his, an excellent cook, who, before taking a place in the neighborhood, was anxious to have all possible information on the subject of her

prospective masters. And then, "Do you know M. Vincent Favoral?" he would ask.

Concierges and shop-keepers knew no one better; for it was more than a quarter of a century before, that M. Vincent Favoral, the day after his wedding, had come to settle in the Rue St. Gilles; and there his two children were born,--his son M. Maxence, his daughter Mlle. Gilberte.

He occupied the second story of the house. No. 38,--one of those old-fashioned dwellings, such as they build no more, since ground is sold at twelve hundred francs the square metre; in which there is no stinting of space. The stairs, with wrought iron balusters, are wide and easy, and the ceilings twelve feet high.

"Of course, we know M. Favoral," answered every one to the servant's questions; "and, if there ever was an honest man, why, he is certainly the one. There is a man whom you could trust with your funds, if you had any, without fear of his ever running off to Belgium with them." And it was further explained, that M. Favoral was chief cashier, and probably, also, one of the principal stockholders, of the Mutual Credit Society, one of those admirable financial institutions which have sprung up with the second empire, and which had won at the bourse the first installment of their capital, the very day that the game of the Coup d'Etat was being played in the street.

"I know well enough the gentleman's business," remarked the servant; "but what sort of a man is he? That's what my cousin would like to know."

The wine-man at No. 43, the oldest shop-keeper in the street, could best answer. A couple of petits-verres politely offered soon started his tongue; and, whilst sipping his Cognac:

"M. Vincent Favoral," he began, "is a man some fifty-two or three years old, but who looks younger, not having a single gray hair. He is tall and thin, with neatly-trimmed whiskers, thin lips, and small yellow eyes; not talkative. It takes more

ceremony to get a word from his throat than a dollar from his pocket. 'Yes,' 'no,' 'good-morning,' 'good-evening;' that's about the extent of his conversation. Summer and winter, he wears gray pantaloons, a long frock-coat, laced shoes, and lisle-thread gloves. 'Pon my word, I should say that he is still wearing the very same clothes I saw upon his back for the first time in 1845, did I not know that he has two full suits made every year by the concierge at No. 29, who is also a tailor."

"Why, he must be an old miser," muttered the servant.

"He is above all peculiar," continued the shop-keeper, "like most men of figures, it seems. His own life is ruled and regulated like the pages of his ledger. In the neighborhood they call him Old Punctuality; and, when he passes through the Rue Turenne, the merchants set their watches by him. Rain or shine, every morning of the year, on the stroke of nine, he appears at the door on the way to his office. When he returns, you may be sure it is between twenty and twenty-five minutes past five. At six he dines; at seven he goes to play a game of dominoes at the Cafe Turc; at ten he comes home and goes to bed; and, at the first stroke of eleven at the Church of St. Louis, out goes his candle."

"Hem!" grumbled the servant with a look of contempt, "the question is, will my cousin be willing to live with a man who is a sort of walking clock?"

"It isn't always pleasant," remarked the wine-man; "and the best evidence is, that the son, M. Maxence, got tired of it."

"He does not live with his parents any more?"

"He dines with them; but he has his own lodgings on the Boulevard du Temple. The falling-out made talk enough at the time; and some people do say that M. Maxence is a worthless scamp, who leads a very dissipated life; but I say that his

father kept him too close. The boy is twenty-five, quite good looking, and has a very stylish mistress: I have seen her. . . . I would have done just as he did."

"And what about the daughter, Mlle. Gilberte?"

"She is not married yet, although she is past twenty, and pretty as a rosebud. After the war, her father tried to make her marry a stock-broker, a stylish man who always came in a two-horse carriage; but she refused him outright. I should not be a bit surprised to hear that she has some love-affair of her own. I have noticed lately a young gentleman about here who looks up quite suspiciously when he goes by No. 38." The servant did not seem to find these particulars very interesting.

"It's the lady," he said, "that my cousin would like to know most about."

"Naturally. Well, you can safely tell her that she never will have had a better mistress. Poor Madame Favoral! She must have had a sweet time of it with her maniac of a husband! But she is not young any more; and people get accustomed to every thing, you know. The days when the weather is fine, I see her going by with her daughter to the Place Royale for a walk. That's about their only amusement."

"The mischief!" said the servant, laughing. "If that is all, she won't ruin her husband, will she?"

"That is all," continued the shop-keeper, "or rather, excuse me, no: every Saturday, for many years, M. and Mme. Favoral receive a few of their friends: M. and Mme. Desclavettes, retired dealers in bronzes, Rue Turenne; M. Chapelain, the old lawyer from the Rue St. Antoine, whose daughter is Mlle. Gilberte's particular friend; M. Desormeaux, head clerk in the Department of Justice; and three or four others; and as this just happens to be Saturday--"

But here he stopped short, and pointing towards the street:

"Quick," said he, "look! Speaking of the--you know--It is twenty minutes past five, there is M. Favoral coming home."

It was, in fact, the cashier of the Mutual Credit Society, looking very much indeed as the shop-keeper had described him. Walking with his head down, he seemed to be seeking upon the pavement the very spot upon which he had set his foot in the morning, that he might set it back again there in the evening.

With the same methodical step, he reached his house, walked up the two pairs of stairs, and, taking out his pass-key, opened the door of his apartment.

The dwelling was fit for the man; and every thing from the very hall, betrayed his peculiarities. There, evidently, every piece of furniture must have its invariable place, every object its irrevocable shelf or hook. All around were evidences, if not exactly of poverty, at least of small means, and of the artifices of a respectable economy. Cleanliness was carried to its utmost limits: every thing shone. Not a detail but betrayed the industrious hand of the housekeeper, struggling to defend her furniture against the ravages of time. The velvet on the chairs was darned at the angles as with the needle of a fairy. Stitches of new worsted showed through the faded designs on the hearth-rugs. The curtains had been turned so as to display their least worn side.

All the guests enumerated by the shop-keeper, and a few others besides, were in the parlor when M. Favoral came in. But, instead of returning their greeting:

"Where is Maxence?" he inquired.

"I am expecting him, my dear," said Mme. Favoral gently.

"Always behind time," he scolded. "It is too trifling."

His daughter, Mlle. Gilberte, interrupted him:

"Where is my bouquet, father?" she asked.

M. Favoral stopped short, struck his forehead, and with the accent of a man who reveals something incredible, prodigious, unheard of,

"Forgotten," he answered, scanning the syllables: "I have for-got-ten it."

It was a fact. Every Saturday, on his way home, he was in the habit of stopping at the old woman's shop in front of the Church of St. Louis, and buying a bouquet for Mlle. Gilberte. And to-day . . .

"Ah! I catch you this time, father!" exclaimed the girl.

Meantime, Mme. Favoral, whispering to Mme. Desclavettes:

"Positively," she said in a troubled voice, "something serious must have happened to--my husband. He to forget! He to fail in one of his habits! It is the first time in twenty-six years."

The appearance of Maxence at this moment prevented her from going on. M. Favoral was about to administer a sound reprimand to his son, when dinner was announced.

"Come," exclaimed M. Chapelain, the old lawyer, the conciliating man par excellence,--"come, let us to the table."

They sat down. But Mme. Favoral had scarcely helped the soup, when the bell rang violently. Almost at the same moment the servant appeared, and announced:

"The Baron de Thaller!"

More pale than his napkin, the cashier stood up. "The manager," he stammered, "the director of the Mutual Credit Society."

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