

THE TIMES.
An Independent Family Newspaper,
PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY BY
F. MORTIMER & CO.

TERMS:
INVARIABLY IN ADVANCE.
\$1.50 PER YEAR, POSTAGE FREE.
50 CTS. FOR 6 MONTHS.

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TRACKING A CRIMINAL,

OR

Paul Webber, The Detective.

CHAPTER I.

ON the 27th of October, 1886, the night mail from the north arrived in London, at six o'clock in the morning. Very few passengers stepped from the carriages to the platform, but amongst those few were two who alighted from the same carriage. At a glance it might have been seen that they were ladies in the truest sense of the word.

She who was first to leave the carriage, however, was evidently the superior of the other. Better dressed, and certainly more beautiful; there was that air of self-consciousness about her which always betokens a sense of position and standing in society.

Her companion was distinguished by an air of self-suppression and sense of subordination which equally could not be mistaken.

They were very far removed cousins; the older of the couple being Margaret Mayter, the younger, Ellen Fotheringay.

The former of the two looked rapidly about for some moments, and then, with a puzzled air, she questioned her companion with a glance. She then went to the edge of the platform, looked up and down the roadway, and again turning to her companion, she said, "He is positively not here."

"Wait a little, Margaret, he will be sure to come. Shall we go into the waiting room?"

"Wait—wait! And I have not seen him for two whole months! Ha! there's a cab turned in at the gate. It is he!—I'm sure it is he!"

She ran forward to meet the vehicle, then suddenly stopped, for it was as bad as empty from her point of view.

"No," she said, "it is not Graham."

"Are you quite sure he received your letter, Margaret?"

"Why not? I put it myself into the post, and it must have been delivered either yesterday morning or last night. What is to be done?" she added, excitedly.

"Take a cab, and drive home."

"But suppose he should cross us on the road?"

"We shall see him; and if not, the porter will tell him that we have gone, and he will come on after us."

"You are right," said Margaret Mayter. But, nevertheless she cast a last very slow look around her.

The cab, which had set down its passengers, was being turned round as Ellen Fotheringay called to the driver. But when the two ladies entered, and were about to be driven off, Ellen heard her cousin sigh.

"Why Margaret, what is the matter?"

"I—I think I was anticipating meeting him with too much eagerness. I suppose I have been fancying it would be so very kind of him if he came and met me, and we went back together, for in three weeks we shall be married."

"But you will see him, dear Margaret, in a quarter of an hour's time; it will not take us longer to reach his home."

"I seem to have a presentiment of evil, Ellen."

"Of evil—that he is ill? Nonsense! It is only two days since you had a letter, telling you all was well."

"Still, a something does seem to weigh upon me," Margaret replied.

It was one of those exquisite and equally rare October mornings when, for an hour or two, all the glories of the summer appear to have returned. In

fact, it was one of those days which tell us upon how little our happiness depends—for instance, a bright day, and a bit of blue sky.

Even the less patient of the two young ladies could not be insensible to the beauty of the weather, and gradually, as she looked from the window of the cab, her face cleared, and she half forgot the disappointment she had experienced in not seeing her intended husband on the platform. Every moment the cab drew nearer its destination and every moment the thought of surprising her lover increasingly overcame the vexation which she had borne with so little patience.

"He did not get my letter," she said, at last. "He does not expect me. How happy he will be when I break in upon him!"

The vehicle had now reached Drury Lane, whence it diverged into some curious, tortuous streets, and finally, came out near the Strand, and stopped before the gate of one of those curious old squares, or inns, which are being so rapidly swept out of London.

Margaret had leaped from the cab almost before it stopped, and at once ran to the porter's lodge—for these strange old inns are all guarded by a porter, who is a kind of civilized spy upon those who live in the place, and upon all that goes on within its boundaries. These inns being closed by a gate, it is necessary to ring the porter up in order to enter during the night.

Margaret rang a second time before the porter could answer; and, upon his appearance, she reproached him with his sloth as she ran past, leaving Ellen and the porter to see to the cabman and the luggage.

She ran up the staircase, and reaching the first floor, loudly used the knocker on the outside of the door on the landing.

No answer was given.

Again she knocked, but no reply was given.

She could hear no sound coming from the chambers.

"As I thought," she said to herself. "He has gone to meet me, and we have crossed each other on the road."

She turned, went down stairs, and at once questioned the porter.

"Has Mr. Forbes gone out?" she asked.

"Not, miss, that I know of; I haven't seen him this morning."

"Perhaps you didn't open the gate. Did he leave any message on quitting the inn?"

"But, miss, he has not left the inn at all."

"Then, why did he not answer my knock?"

"Perhaps you didn't knock loud enough. Shall I try, miss?"

"Certainly."

The two ladies and the porter now together ascended to the floor occupied by Mr. Forbes. Margaret herself knocked. There could be no doubt about the loudness of the summons. But no answer was given.

"It's very odd," said the porter, "for I know Mr. Forbes was expecting you, miss."

"Ha! then he did get my letter?"

"Yesterday."

"He must be at the station," said Miss Fotheringay. "Shall I drive back and see?"

"Do."

A minute afterwards, Ellen had found a phenomenon—a London night-cab, with a horse in it that was capable of galloping.

Margaret tried to be patient, but she refused to take a seat in the porter's lodge. She began walking round the enclosure made by the four lines of houses which were the boundaries of the inn, every moment turning her head to look at the blind-looking windows of the chambers in which her lover, soon to be her husband, resided.

Suddenly, she could endure patiently no longer, she turned upon the porter's lodge, called the man out, and ordered him to break open the door of Mr. Forbes' chambers.

"There's a locksmith near, miss; shall I go for him? If we break open the door, we shall make so much noise that the whole inn will be woke up."

"Yes, go directly."

by the porter. She was only startled from this fixedness of purpose by hearing the rattle of wheels coming towards her. It was not Mr. Forbes, but Ellen, returning from the London and North-Western terminus.

"Well?" Margaret asked.

The cousin shook her head.

At this moment, the porter appeared with the lock-smith, who evidently had been found a-bed. He was scarcely awake.

"I'm afraid, lock-smith," said the porter, "that you will find this a troublesome job, for Mr. Forbes had a Chubb's double-tumbler lock and a bolt put on not a month since."

To the great astonishment of the porter, the door was opened with perfect ease. The box of the lock gave way at the lock-smith's second blow, and the door flew open.

The chambers consisted of five rooms—an ante-chamber, a sitting-room, a bed-room, a library, both opening by different doors from the sitting-room, and a kitchen, opening from the small and very dark hall.

Margaret sees that the hall and the sitting-room are in their usual order, and that the door leading to the bed-room is half-open. Hastily she ran over the threshold of this door, all foolish thought of the proprieties abandoning her.

The next moment, Ellen heard a terrible cry.

She ran forward. The first thing she saw was Margaret lying insensible in the centre of the room.

Near the bed, half upon the floor, half against the bedstead itself, lay a man, bathed in blood.

Before the body, and upon the leaf of a note-book, such as you may see carried by stock-brokers and City men for making entries, was to be read these words, actually written in blood:—

"MARGARET—AVENGE—IT WAS—"

Death had frozen the hand of the victim as it began to trace the name of his murderer.

It was left to justice to write in the name of the assassin.

The police appeared upon the scene of this tragedy, at once certain preliminary investigations were made. Amongst other proceedings the unhappy lady whose husband the hapless man was so soon to have been, put the terrible investigation into the hands of a lawyer recommended to her by the police-inspector, and immediate means were taken to bring the perpetrator to justice.

The criminal lawyer and the police were not long in piecing together the following particulars of the murdered man's life:—

Graham Forbes was born at Newark, and was at the time of his death thirty-two years of age. He had lived in London since his twentieth year. Between that time and his death, owing to ability, intelligence, and exceedingly hard work, he had not only made a good income, but had amassed a very considerable sum of money.

He was upon the Stock Exchange.

Arriving in London as a clerk upon trial in the office of a broker, it took him very little time to obtain an insight into the mysteries of broking, and before he came of age he had completed several transactions on his own account. By the time he was thirty, he had mastered his future, and was quite easy upon that score; but this end had been achieved as the result of unceasing industry and activity, conjoined to a business-like capability not to be met with at every street-turning in the City of London.

Graham Forbes had even found enough tact and strength to remain a man of the world, and, to some extent, a man about town, even while working as hard as any man in the City at building up a fortune.

His strength and health was enormous. He appeared to be a man incapable of fatigue—a long-headed man, who knew the world in which he lived.

Now it so happened at the time of his death that he was about to marry a very lovely woman, whose only dowry was little more than composed of her beauty, added to a character beyond reproach.

Margaret and her cousin had been away for a time in the country; he was to meet her upon the return of herself and cousin; and we know the result.

It appeared that the one old servant kept by Graham Forbes had left about two days previously to Margaret's start;

and the cousins quitting London together, it resulted that Graham Forbes was alone in his chambers.

It was as though destiny had been at work; for he had refused to have the servant replaced until Margaret's return. He said he should prefer a laundress, who would see to his rooms daily; and that he would breakfast and dine out.

This life he had led for two months, to the morning of the 27th of October, when Margaret, returning to town, found him dead.

The police came to the conclusion almost immediately, that the crime was the result of vengeance, and not of theft.

What enemies had he, and why were these his enemies? These were the questions which the police were asked.

The conclusion finally arrived at by the police was this: that although, apparently, theft had not been the motive for the murder, still robbery might have been the aim; the real aim being disguised, that the officers might be thrown off the true track.

Had a robbery been committed? This was now the first question to be decided.

CHAPTER II.

THE POLICE AT WORK.

After the usual formula of "From information received on the 28th October, 1886, we went to the house in Taggart's Inn," the police report went on to state:—

"Reaching the landing on the first floor, we proceeded to the room in which the crime was committed. The public, and all those not belonging to the house, were excluded, and the outer door closed.

"We now directed our attention to the rooms belonging to the murdered man. Crossing the ante-chamber, the sitting-room, and a sort of drawing-room—in not one of which we could remark the least confusion, or any evidence of anything having been moved from its ordinary place—we reached a sort of library.

"Here we found two women, both so overwhelmed with grief, that they did not perceive our entrance.

"One of them appeared to be the companion of the other. This one was kneeling before the second, had her arms clasped about her friend, and we heard her murmur, 'Bear up, dear Margaret—bear up! You must be brave and fight against your grief, if only to avenge him.'

"Thereupon, she who had been called Margaret, leaped up and cried, 'Oh, yes; I will surely avenge you, Graham. I swear it!'

"Meanwhile, we were examining the apartment in which we were standing, very carefully.

"The companion, Miss Fotheringay, declared that nothing in this room had been touched by her or Miss Mayter since their return, and that it was exactly as they found it upon entering about half an hour previously.

"Knowing the necessity of ascertaining whether or not a robbery had been effected after the murder, we examined all the drawers of the escritoire.

"They were all but one locked, and showed no signs of any attempt to force them. The exceptional drawer was half open, a key (one of a bunch) in the lock, and at once we could see that the drawer in question contained a score and more of sovereigns.

"There were also papers in this drawer, which we closed and locked, retaining the keys until the law has decided to whom they belong.

"Throughout the apartments we could find no other piece of furniture which could have served as a strong-box, or as a receptacle for money or valuable papers.

"As we were about to enter the bed-chamber, the young lady whom the companion had prevailed upon so far to keep quiet, rushed toward us, and insisted upon entering the room.

"We begged her not to follow us; adding that her presence would only interfere with the proper execution of our duty.

"She heard us with more tranquillity and calmness than I could have expected, and, without making any answer she returned to her seat.

"This woman appears to be possessed of great energy; and, as a detective, I am of opinion that, so far from impeding

the course of justice, she will help us well and cleverly.

"On the left as we entered, we discovered a small rose-wood cheffonier which had neither been moved or touched. A couple of steps from this was an easy-chair covered with damask, and this was spotted with blood. There were also spots of blood upon the carpet just before this chair. No doubt at this point the deceased was struck, but it could not have been a mortal blow, though it must have brought him to the ground, upon which he had dragged himself a few paces forward, probably with the idea of seeking help. In fact, the stains show that he tried to reach the window; and did reach it no doubt with the intention of calling to any one who might be in the enclosure.

"Reaching this said window, he grasped a curtain with one hand, and evidently endeavored to pull himself up—without success, however. Then, as it is evident from the marks upon the window, he tried with his closed hand to break a pane of glass. He had not sufficient strength left to accomplish this.

"No doubt he then comprehended that he was dying, and that help would be of no avail. His desire must then have been to leave a message of vengeance. He must then have sought for writing materials, when perceiving his note-book lying on the table near the bed, he must have dragged himself towards it. The traces of blood over the floor are between the window and the table—about two and a-half yards apart.

"He must have raised himself by the legs of this table, in order to reach the note-book in question.

"He no doubt had written by the light of a chamber-lamp, still burning when the investigation here reported was made. But his sight was failing him, and, therefore, he thought the pencil made no marks. It must have been at this point that, as a last resource, he dipped the pencil in the blood flowing from his wound, and wrote the words, 'Margaret—avenge—it was—'

"Here his hand let go the pencil and note-book.

"The end had come; the half-raised body fell upon the side of the bed, partly upon the ground, and so remained when we found the body."

The evidence given at the inquest by the medical man was that death had taken place almost twelve hours before he saw the body. He first examined it about eight A. M. The murder would, therefore, have been committed about eight in the evening.

The following is a portion of the evidence of the gate-porter at Taggart's Inn:—"On the day before the murder, about five in the evening, a gentleman that I had never before seen, called, and asked for Mr. Forbes; and as I knew that Mr. Forbes had not come in, I said so. The gentleman was a tallish, fair man, very well dressed, and very good-looking. He appeared as though tired. When he heard that Mr. Forbes was not at home, he seemed vexed and said he would call again."

"Did he call again?"

"No, he did not."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure. I told Mr. Forbes a gentleman had called, who had left no name, and I described him. Mr. Forbes said he did not require to see any one who did not leave his name."

"Are you quite certain that this same person did not return later in the evening?"

"I did not see him either pass into the inn, or pass out; and I can hardly see how I should miss him twice, especially if he came late. We shut the gate at nine, and then everybody who comes in or is let out, must pass me."

"Would you remember this individual if you saw him?"

"In a moment. Of that I am quite certain."

"Have you examined the poniard with which the deed was committed?"

"Yes sir; it was I who first saw it under the chair in the room where Mr. Forbes usually writes his letters."

"Of course, this poniard had never been seen before by you."

"Oh, yer sir; I had seen it many a time, for Mr. Forbes always had it on his writing-table. He used it as a paper-knife."

"Pray be cautious in what you are