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TRACKING A CRIMINAL. OR Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

TO whose interest was it to kill Graham Forbes? Had his affianced any wish for his death? The faintest common sense was sufficient to discover that she could have no interest in his death.

So far from suspecting Margaret the police engaged in the case experienced, apart from their sense of duty, a desire to track down the assassin, if only to avenge her—a victim far more to be pitied than Graham, for his suffering lasted but a few moments, hers must exist for years.

Was the assassin a common thief—a burglar by profession? There was no proof of a forcible entry having been made into the apartments, and the money in the open drawers of the escritoire had not been touched, nor was any article of value missing from the rooms.

But there was one piece of evidence which did away with the theory that the assassination was the act of a robber. The victim would not have known the name of the assassin; and it was evident, on the contrary, that he was acquainted with his assailant; that, had life been spared to him but a mere moment longer, his name would have been found in the handwriting of the murdered.

Was the assassin a resident of the inn? perhaps of the very house itself, in which the murder had been done? For, it will be remembered, the inn-porter distinctly denied that anybody had rung at his lodge after the gate was shut, and asked for Mr. Forbes. Thus shaped itself the great question—was the miscreant a resident of the inn?

Finally, was the murderer the individual referred to by the porter as having visited the deceased during the evening previous to the day on which he was killed?—the gentleman of whom something was already known to the police, in consequence of the Stock Exchange difference between him and Graham Forbes.

Only about Austin Sivory did anything like tangible suspicions cluster. Against this gentleman's character the police had no actual black mark, but in that vast net-work of society we call London, there are many men who without having actually stood charged before a magistrate, are nevertheless watched by the detective force of the metropolis.

He was one of those men of fashion who came nobody knows whence, who lives nobody is quite aware how; who do no work, and yet live like gentleman; who apparently possess no income, and yet are never without money.

Sivory kept very good society as far as his masculine friends were concerned, and no one could say that he had been a defaulter on the turf, at his club, or in any way shown himself a man whom it was necessary to "cut."

Up to the time when Forbes created scandals against Sivory by his behavior in Capel Court, not a word had been said against that individual as an honorable man. However, it was known to the police, that at the time of Forbes' death, Sivory owed the dead man a large sum of money upon acceptances, and inasmuch as these acceptances were not to be found, it was evident that they had either been given up by Forbes himself, or stolen. But no sign of theft or search after any object had been found in the apartments occupied by Graham Forbes.

It was necessary, however, that the

police should make all proper inquiries based upon the supposition that Sivory did kill Graham Forbes.

Now, in the ordinary way of police work, when a man is suspected, a magistrate's warrant is issued, the police arrest the accused, take him to the police-station, and enter upon the charge sheet the charge made against him. Now, it is the law of England that when once a charge is made against a man upon the charge-sheet, the case must be settled before a magistrate, and in open court.—In other words, a charge once entered, the enquiry into that charge must be heard publicly; and therefore, reports appear in the papers, and the accused is, to a certain extent, publicly disgraced, even though the charge be not proved against him. For it is very evident that though a magistrate may say a man leaves the court without the faintest blot on his character, the man is not any the less received with a sort of awkwardness by his friends. Therefore, it can readily be understood that the police are particularly cautious before charging a man of apparently spotless, or almost spotless, character with a dreadful crime.

So it happens that more frequently than the public is aware of, a private inquiry is made, apart from the charge-sheet altogether out of court, and either in the magistrate's retiring-room in connection with the court, or at his own chambers or house.

In the first case, that of a solemn charge, after hearing evidence, the magistrate asks the prisoner if he has anything to say, warning him carefully that whatever he thinks fit to say will be taken down and used in evidence against him. Sometimes a magistrate will go out of his way guardedly to advise a prisoner that the less he says the better it will be for him.

But in the second case, where the magistrate considers himself justified in making an inquiry privately, the individual being in his presence, the justice still warns him to be careful, but at the same time invites him to make such explanations as may free him, the magistrate, from issuing a warrant to arrest him. In such a case as this no evidence is taken down, and whatever the prisoner says is looked upon as quite confidential.

By the time that a certain magistrate had decided that the aspect of things as against Austin Sivory did not justify him in having the man arrested, but did justify him in making a private inquiry—by this time, be it said, bets were numerous on the Stock Exchange, as to whether or not the assassin would be discovered.

Furthermore, some intimations of the suspicions brought against Sivory had got into the papers.

When the detective charged in chief with this affair called upon Mr. Sivory, that gentleman received him with perfect coolness, exhibited some natural astonishment at the officer's statement, and then at once offered to go down to the police-court with the officer and offer all the explanations of which he was capable.

The room in which the metropolitan magistrate was waiting the arrival of the suspected man was arranged like most rooms of a similar character. At one end a door opened upon the court, at the other was the door terminating the passage by which the magistrate reached his court upon leaving his carriage; while a couple of entrances on one side of the chamber led to small minor offices. The other side of the apartments gave it light through the medium of several large windows; and it was opposite these windows that a chair was placed for the suspected individual. The magistrate's chair was itself in shadow—a well arranged plan—so that he could at once see any change upon the defendant's face, while his, the magistrate's, own features remained, to a great extent concealed.

The magistrate who made the following inquiry has already quitted this world. During his life he never hesitated at bringing home a prisoner's guilt; equally, he never flinched in trying to save an accused whom, in his own mind, he knew to be innocent.

It is a week since the discovery of the crime, about three in the afternoon, and Mr. Caellem, the magistrate in question, is standing near the fire, talking gravely

with a lady in deep mourning—a lady whom he had seen more than once since the awful death of Graham Forbes.

"So, Miss Mayer," he says, "nothing has happened since yesterday?"

"Nothing, sir." "Do not hesitate to acquaint me with the faintest particulars bearing upon this painful case, and which you might think too unimportant to be reported. We magistrates know how that it will often happen that justice will suddenly obtain a light upon a given subject in consequence of some trifling proof looked upon up to a certain moment as quite valueless. I understood you to say that you are courageous enough to reside at the place where the murder was committed."

"Yes, sir," replied Margaret. "You know, of course, that a will has been found which makes me Mr. Forbes' heiress?"

Since the day when she arrived in London by the night mail, Margaret's face had quite lengthened through grief; but she was so young, her features were so exquisitely regular, and, despite the pallor, so much of health and life were to be seen in her countenance, that the terrible alteration in her appearance, so far from destroying her beauty, had simply changed it, the result being that she became really more beautiful than she had ever been.

The magistrate was unable to resist a look of mingled interest and pity as she rose from her seat. He waited until she was once more comparatively calm, and then he said, "I am truly sorry, dear lady, to increase your suffering—to open the deep wounds of your love; but I must do so, in order to assure you that you are able to aid justice in her determined search after the assassin. Will you help us?"

"Oh, indeed, yes!" she cried, raising her head. "And you will track him, will you? You—we—will avenge my dear Graham!"

"I hope to do so," replied Mr. Caellem; "but it is only right I should at once admit, that, in the whole course of my experience—and it is of a very long date—I have not encountered a more troublesome affair than this which we are both prosecuting. The mystery is perfect. I gather up what I think are the threads of the case, and no sooner do I try to knot them, than they snap. I am now advancing, as it were, in the dark, cautiously, with my hands spread out before me; for if an honest magistrate unceasingly reproaches himself should he let a culprit slip through his hands; on the other hand, he knows it is a terrible thing to suspect falsely—to treat an innocent man as though he were guilty."

But if the assassin is not found, my dear Graham will lie in his grave unavenged. This must not be. He commanded me, in his last breath, to avenge him; and avenged he must be!"

"I will help you, as far as all my power lies," replied the magistrate; "but you must feel that I cannot treat a man as guilty until he is proved so. At this moment, I fear I can give you no hope that we are on the track of the criminal."

"Nevertheless, I read yesterday in the papers that the police were narrowing their suspicions, and concentrating them upon a certain individual. Is he, whoever he is, arrested?"

"The papers are not always to be trusted. In the struggle for ascendancy—in the endeavor to give the latest news,—it frequently happens that their editors rather exaggerate. The police are not concentrating their suspicions upon one man, nevertheless, an individual is suspected, but the evidence is so weak against him that, conscientiously, I could not issue a warrant for his arrest. However, I have desired him to call and see me here in my private room. Certain circumstances tell against him, but they are built upon a very weak foundation, and which, perhaps, the person in question can very effectually break down. So far, he has shown no sign of guilt. Upon learning that I wished to see him, he betrayed much surprise, but no fear whatever. If he is playing us false, he is a very clever comedian, and has completely deceived one of the most experienced and acute officers in the detective force. I granted

a search-warrant, and the premises of this suspected person have been very minutely searched, with this result—that although the search has not been altogether negative; at the same time it offers little ground for strong suspicion. He should be here; this is the hour appointed. After I have spoken with him, I shall know whether or not it is necessary to arrest him. My own impression is that he is perfectly innocent. As I said before, my dear young lady, I expect him every moment."

Margaret comprehended that the magistrate, in the repetition formed by his last words, requested that she would retire. But she ventured to say, "Sir, may I ask you the name of the person whom you are about to see and speak with?"

"Yes, I ought not to inform you, but I have so much confidence in you, and am so certain you will accept my decision in all that relates to this gentleman as true and decisive, that I do not hesitate to tell you he is a Mr. Austin Sivory. Do you know the name?"

"No." "That is a great pity; for had you known him, you might, perhaps, have given me some particulars about him which I require to know, and of which I am totally ignorant."

"No," Margaret repeated, after a long, slow instant of searching thought in her brain, to recall, if possible, the name. "No, I am certain that I never heard Mr. Forbes refer to this person. Yet, when the name passed your lips, I trembled, as though I possessed a sort of unconscious consciousness that I was terribly interested in the name itself. I was moved, and yet I cannot tell wherefore."

"What do you mean? Pray explain yourself."

"I am unable to do so. I only know, that when this name crossed your lips, my heart beat and I felt as though about to fall; and I may add, that I have been testing myself. I heard you use this name yesterday, and then I trembled. I was desirous of knowing whether hearing the name would again effect me in a similar manner; and it has—why, I cannot tell."

"The feeling is very natural. When you heard the name, for the first time, yesterday—though I had forgotten that I mentioned it—it was in connection with the fact that you had been told a few minutes previously that he had quarrelled with Mr. Forbes, and naturally the name created a disagreeable effect, to which you attach too much importance."

"Perhaps you are right; you will pardon my words."

"I thank you sincerely for your frankness: we magistrates see very little candor. Let me see you to the door. By the way, Miss Mayer, did you not say that you are besieged daily by people—amateur detectives, in fact, proffering their services?"

"That is most true, sir. I have received, and spoken with all these people, but they appear to me far from inviting. The greater part pretend that they belong to the police, and are empowered to make inquiries."

"Henceforth, only see people who come with a written line signed by me."

"Even this morning," continued Margaret, who was now upon the threshold of the magistrate's room,—"even this morning a man called, whom we found it very difficult to get rid of. He insisted upon seeing me; but my cousin, Miss Fotheringay, declared I was too ill to see anybody. However, he went away at last, upon condition that my cousin should be sure and give me his card, and when he called again I would see him."

"What was his name?" "One Paul Webber, if I remember rightly."

"Webber," said the magistrate, searching his memory to recall what he might know in connection with the man. Ha!—I remember! He's a clever man in his way, which is not a very pleasant one. By all means see him. He is intelligent, active, and very zealous; he may be of use to us. He was recommended personally to me only yesterday by a nobleman who is a friend of mine, and who takes considerable interest in this detective Webber."

"Your direction is positive. I will very gladly see this person."

The door had been almost involuntarily closed by Margaret as the Magistrate spoke. But now, being about to turn the handle, in order to quit the room, she found that another grasp, not hers, was upon the lock.

She drew back, the door opened, and an insignificant looking man, about fifty years of age, entered. He whispered a few words in one of the magistrate's ears, and then sat himself down at a corner of the long table which filled the centre of the room.

"He is come," said the magistrate; "and he is waiting in the hall. Leave here by the court door—"

"I must go, I dare not see him!"

Then suddenly starting, she said, "No, on the contrary, I must see this man, I will know the worst; and I shall know it when sight falls upon him."

The little man at the corner of the table looked up surprised at these words. The little man was the magistrate's clerk.

The magistrate himself regarded Margaret as though in doubt whether or not she had taken leave of her senses. He replied, "What you ask, Miss Mayer, is very extraordinary; but it might be managed, though I must admit that I feel I am doing wrong. Do you think you have sufficient courage to remain perfectly quiet during the interview?—that no cry, word, or movement shall betray your presence?"

"Oh, yes! I will be as though stone." "Even if he should confess that he kill Mr. Forbes?"

"Yes," was the firm reply.

The magistrate made a sign to his clerk, who silently showed the young lady into one of the small side offices, the doors of which were opposite the line of windows.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXAMINATION.

The door had scarcely closed upon the lady when the gentleman requested to appear before the magistrate came in, looked round, saw the magistrate, and saluted him with much ease and gentlemanly feeling.

"May I ask, sir," he said, in a tone cold, but at the same time perfectly courteous, "may I ask why you have invited me to come here to talk over with you what were my relations with the murdered man Forbes? And may I ask why the officer who brought me the information would not enlighten me upon the subject?"

"The man only did his duty, sir. He had to deliver a letter, not to talk of its contents. As to why I have invited you here, had you been courteous enough to wait until I had addressed you—the process usual with those I see in this room—you would have saved yourself inquiry."

"I am not acquainted with the rules and customs of police-courts; you will be good enough, therefore, to allow me to offer you all possible apologies."

"I accept them; and I felicitate you upon knowing nothing about police-offices; they are disagreeable places to know. Let me at once explain matters between us. I was applied to by the police to sign a warrant for your arrest."

"Arrest! For what?"

"A crime."

"What crime?"

"Of having assassinated Graham Forbes."

The light was full upon Sivory's face. It betrayed no emotion, but he turned his eyes upon the magistrate, and said: "I confess I was not prepared for so candid a statement on your part. Of course I knew my relations with Forbes would involve me in the inquiry touching his murder, but I was not at all prepared for playing so remarkable a part in the tragedy, as to be accused of having destroyed him." Continued next week.

Borrowing money is a bad habit; and borrowing trouble is no better.—Some people are always borrowing trouble, and in this way making not only themselves but every one around them uncomfortable. They have contracted the habit of taking a discouraging look at everything. What time they do not spend lamenting over the unalterable past, they devote to the apprehension of evils to come.