

TRACKING A CRIMINAL, OR Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

AUSTIN SIVORY appeared to be deeply absorbed in the play upon the table before him. He was looking on, rattling the gold in his pocket. He seemed as though deliberating whether he should or should not play.

Suddenly he felt himself smartly touched upon the shoulder.

It was Webber, who had been greedily watching the man he already looked upon as his prey.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, in a half foreign accent, "but I see you are interested in this business, and yet are not playing. I am a stranger in London, and do not understand this game. Will you play for me—or rather, with me?"

"Yes, if you like," replied Sivory, speaking coldly.

"Many thanks. Then I will take a seat, and put myself entirely in your hands. I shall not look ridiculous, I hope?"

"No; you cannot look ridiculous while you have money.

The detective laughed stupidly, and said, "Is that so?"

"Yes; sit down."

"But," continued the detective, "I have a lady with me. May she join us? She is my sister."

"Where is she?"

"There, in the corner, seated on the sofa. She knows no one here, and is so timid she is almost afraid to speak."

For the first time in their lives, Margaret Mayter and Austin Sivory looked at each other.

She bore the glance he directed towards her with apparent calmness, albeit her emotion was very great.

Webber saw that it was necessary to compel Margaret to force herself to speak to Austin Sivory. He walked towards her, almost pulled her from her seat, and presented her—"My sister Margherita."

"We know nobody in London," he continued, looking at Sivory; "and Lady Pauline has been very kind to take us up, and recognize us in this fashion. If we had not come here, we should have been quite alone at our lodgings. We have come to England because my sister wishes to come out as a singer—not that she has any need to make a living. But perhaps I am troubling you, sir, with my talk, and you have promised to teach me this English game of loo. Margherita, will you play? No; you hesitate. But, at all events, you may see this gentleman explain how this game is played."

Austin Sivory smiled, and sitting down at a table near the sofa upon which Margaret had been seated, he took a pack of cards and explained the game.

"We want another player at this table."

The voice sounded scarcely feminine, so quick and loud was its tone.

"I really think I'll venture," said Webber, timidly.

"I advise you not to join them," said Austin.

"Why not? Thanks to you, I now thoroughly know the game."

"I'll try, at all events," said Webber, who saw that the opportunity had arrived to enable Margaret to sit face to face with the man she firmly believed had destroyed Graham and to seek after the secret.

Webber turned away, and moved towards a table, at which the players very readily made room for him—for as he moved, he pulled a heavy-looking purse from his pocket, and opened it. However, it should be added that this purse was part of Webber's disguise. There were bank notes in it; but when two or three small bundles of apparent bank-notes fell upon the table, in reality only the outside paper was a note—the inside was tissue-paper.

The sight of these falling notes produced its effect upon those who were seated at the table, especially the women gamblers. Webber saw the effect he had created, and he began playing—but only carefully, and never venturing more than two or three sovereigns.

Webber did not show that he was a master of the cards, as he was. He began to play as though he knew nothing of the game.

"There goes a sovereign, I suppose," he said, as he put it into the silver saucer in the centre of the table.

However, at the end of a quarter of an hour, so far from having lost, he had won twenty pounds.

While he was playing, almost the whole of his attention was directed to the business upon which he had entered the room.

Suddenly, and at a moment when he was taking up the whole of the pool, he felt some one leaning on the back of his chair.

"You are a clever pupil," said the person who had taken up this position,

"and I am not ashamed of you. You have made money by your play."

"Oh, not much," replied the detective.

"Not much! You have at least a hundred pounds before you."

"A hundred pounds; well, yes, perhaps there's a hundred pounds. But I look upon a hundred pounds as rather an insignificant sum."

"Very well, then, if you are so careless about winning, you will not be vexed that I come to interrupt you with a message from your sister."

"Ah, you have a message for me! What is it?"

The lady wishes to go home, and she requested me to let you know that she desires to leave at once."

Webber rose.

Whereupon there was a general cry of regret round the table, and all eyes followed the hands picking up the well-filled purse.

"Going?—Impossible! The evening has only just commenced. It is not yet three."

Such were the cries which greeted the detective from his new companions.

Making no answer, somebody said, "You have won so much that you have scarcely the right to leave."

Another laughingly said, "The gentleman is probably afraid to lose."

At this moment, Lady Pauline approached.

"Going, my dear Mr. Varli?" she cried. "I am so sorry to hear it. I hoped we should have your company all the evening."

Webber saw clearly that it would be an unwise movement at once to leave the house, and that he must not irritate these people, by mixing with whom he hoped to hunt down Austin Sivory.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in a pleasant voice, "I must see my sister home, for she has nobody but me to do her this service; but if you will allow me to leave my money on the table, to keep my place for me, I will be back as soon as I possibly can."

Nothing could be more just, and the detective received several smiles as he bowed, and then moved from the table.

"Well miss?" asked the detective, as they were going down the staircase, arm in arm.

"I have met him, as you said I should," she replied, "but shall I see him again?"

"Beyond all doubt. If you were not to see him again, of what use would it be to see him once?"

"When am I to see him? I have no desire to meet again in this house, I do not like the people who come here."

"Nor need you come here again."

"Then what scheme will you put in operation?"

"I have none at present, but I shall find one; trust to me; I shall find one. May I ask," continued Webber, if your convictions in reference to Austin Sivory have been shaken by the conversation you have had with him?"

"They have not been shaken, certainly. But nothing has confirmed them."

By this time they had reached the door, where the carriage had been waiting for them more than an hour.

"I must return to the house," said Webber, as Margaret entered the vehicle.

"By all means; I can drive home alone."

"But are you not afraid? Let me attend you; the carriage will bring me back in a quarter of an hour."

"No thank you. I know how hard is the work before me, and at once I am ready to overcome so trifling a matter as driving home alone. I must familiarize myself to strange positions and stranger adventures."

"I shall do myself the honor of calling to-morrow, and submitting some new plans to you. Good night."

She echoed his words, he gave the coachman his orders, and while the carriage rolled down the street, Webber turned in at the open door, and ascended the staircase.

He had, however, looked after the carriage, as a strange expression came upon his face. He swept his hand over his features, chased that something away, and entered the house.

"The first step is taken," he thought, as the house-door closed behind him; "but what of the second? If, this very night, I do not manage somehow to link myself and this Sivory together, he will escape me. What can I invent that will not put him on his guard? I must find some means by which I can see him again, daily and hourly."

Half-way up the stair-case, he started, said something half-aloud, and then continued lightly up the remainder of the stairs he had to mount. "Eureka! I have found it. Fortune will not abandon me."

"I have come back," he said, as he entered. "My sister has gone home alone in the carriage. I see you have kept my seat."

He was welcomed as though he had been an old friend.

It was now about half-past three in the

morning. During Webber's short absence, Austin Sivory had joined the players, choosing Webber's table, and already fortune had favored him, there being quite a heap of notes and gold under his hands.

The people at this table were now playing at unlimited vingt-et-un.

"I know something of this game," said Webber. "Is it limited?"

"No," replied Sivory, who held the cards; "but any player can put upon his cards up to twenty pounds, and finish the board at once by challenging the dealer."

"Twenty pounds," said Webber, calmly putting the money near the card whose face he had not seen.

"Game closed!" cried Sivory, (the leader) flinging another card to Webber, and taking one himself.

Webber looked at his cards.

"Enough!" he said.

"Enough!" Sivory repeated.

The cards were flung down.

"Twenty," said Sivory.

"Twenty-one," replied Webber.

Sivory winced. His was the best number but one. The next best, twenty-one doubled the loss. In a moment he had lost forty pounds.

He paid over the money very quietly, while Webber said not a word.

"Stake—stake," said Sivory, dealing one card to each person.

"I will not stake this time," replied Webber calmly getting up and taking a cup of tea.

Now it is one of the peculiarities of vingt-et-un that if the dealer has moderately good cards he must win, for all "ties" pay him; therefore, the greater number of players, the greater his chances of making money.

Three hands of vingt-et-un were then played, and Austin won perhaps ten pounds.

Webber now approached, and laying twenty pounds down, challenged the game. Sivory, with certain marks of impatience, cried, "Game closed," flung down a card to his opponent, one to himself, and waited.

"Enough," said Webber, though he had only two cards.

The dealer looked at his two, now laid upon the table. The pips counted fifteen. He must take another card. He did so. It was a seven, and that, added to the fifteen made twenty-two, one over the vingt-et-un, or twenty-one, and he had to pay the ten pounds to Webber.

"Why, you are only fifteen, sir; if I had not drawn, you would have had to pay the tie."

"I should have had to pay you the tie," said Webber, in a grave voice.

The people began to look at the stranger with admiration.

"I throw up the deal," said Sivory.

Sivory had lost fifty pounds in less than as many seconds to the strange, quiet, Italian gentleman who spoke English with so odd an accent.

"I will take it if you like," said Webber.

The place was at once conceded to him, and he placed before him about two hundred pounds in notes and gold.

Now in gambling, a cool head and large capital are sure in the long run to make head-way. Webber's was a cool head, and certainly he had enough capital before him to justify his hopes of success.

At the end of five minutes he had largely increased his gains.

As Webber won, Sivory lost; and as he played without prudence and with a sort of rage, it soon resulted that he was quite deprived of money. Then happened what frequently occurs at gambling parties that Sivory played upon trust—upon his word.

This was exactly what Webber wanted; and at once he accepted the proposal. And now something very singular occurred. Sivory was a clever man, but upon this particular night he lost his money, simply because he played rashly. No sooner was he brought to a sense of the danger he was in, in consequence of having to play upon credit, than all his caution and ability were with him, and in a few minutes he had won nearly fifty pounds. These rapid gains induced him to believe that his good fortune had returned. He continued to play, and he lost all he had won in less time than it took him to amass it, for he played unscientifically. He had no chance; for he was fighting against a man who was cool, knew his business, and who now had his large winnings to back him.

Gradually Webber maddened him. The detective's pleasant voice and cool behavior grated upon his senses. The man's very politeness seemed an insult. He knew nothing of the officer's real intentions—could not possibly guess at them; firmly he believed that he had just arrived from Rome, and that he was only partially English; but nevertheless, his conscience would persist in whispering to him, "Beware—beware! He is an enemy!"

But when he persuaded himself that the way to take his revenge upon this enemy was by the road of winning his money, he was upon a wrong track.

Webber was too cool a hand to lose money at cards.

Gradually also that peculiar drunkenness of play—the most dangerous of all the shapes of intoxication—took possession of Sivory's remaining senses. The cards were before his eyes—no longer cards, but weapons with which he was attacking the unknown enemy. But the other side knew quite as much about these weapons as did Sivory himself; and, as we have said, he was perfectly cool.

At five o'clock that morning, Webber held Sivory's I O U's for £274.

He had allowed the other players at the table to regain their losses—against Sivory he was implacable.

The entertainment was over. These people, after their eager night's play, looked terribly worn, aged and weary.

"Good morning, Mr. Varli," said Sivory, bowing slightly as they moved towards the door. May I ask where I shall call to pay you the money I owe you?"

"See; here is my temporary address," giving him a card. "But do not worry yourself about the money. Pay it quite at your leisure, my dear sir. My sister and myself will be glad to see you whenever you think fit to call upon us. Good morning."

They parted at Lady Pauline's door, and went different ways.

Sivory asked himself, "Why do I hate that man?"

Webber going his way, said, "I hold him if he is guilty; he cannot now escape."

CHAPTER VIII.

Webber did not take a cab. He felt a desire to walk free and alone in the early morning air, hugging himself with the idea of the clever way in which he had trapped the suspected man into his confidence. Nevertheless he was fearfully fatigued; his head was heavy, his eyes were burning, and all his limbs ached.

Strange it was that, though Webber was completely exhausted with the long night's watch he had maintained over his victim, he experienced no desire for sleep. He was thinking to himself, "Sivory is at my mercy—as certainly my prisoner as though I had got a warrant against him, and the handcuffs were on. He shall betray himself—he shall speak. With the money I have won, and backed by my lord's promises to help me if I want more money, I can live his life—partake of his pleasures—follow him step by step—and sit opposite him at an hotel-table. And I can hire a brougham, too; for if I can win money one night I can do another."

The air had already done him good, and he went forward lightly and springily, like a man anticipating pleasure.

He knew Margaret was waiting to see him; she knew that Webber would come direct to her when he left Lady Pauline's.

She had not been to bed, but she had changed her evening-dress for the gown in which she was habitually clothed.

She looked terribly pale and worn.

As he came in, Webber nodded, and then, both sitting down, he made Margaret acquainted, even to the faintest particulars, with all that occurred after her departure, up to the moment when Webber took his eyes off Austin Sivory.

These particulars were uttered in a very rapid voice. Suddenly the words came slowly and carefully; he was detailing, not what had been accomplished but what was to be done.

"Once agree to meet Sivory as often as I can bring you together; and then of course, I need not tell you that you must take fresh lodgings. Will you authorize me to find you rooms?"

"Yes."

"What part of London would you like?"

"It matters very little. All you have to do is take the rooms, and let me know the address."

"You shall have it this evening."

Leaving Margaret, Webber, careful even of the smallest details when prosecuting his business as a detective, went to a second-hand uniform shop near St. Mary's Strand, and bought a couple of traveling trunks, which still bore the railway tickets of half the capitals in Europe, and which had evidently belonged to a person of some consequence. These he filled with whatever he found in the shop that would be useful—a dressing case, with a crest on the lid, one or two expensive walking sticks, some exquisitely fine linen, and some very fine and scarcely worn clothes. He felt that these portmanteaus would serve his purpose well, showing that he had recently been traveling. Calling a cab, he drove to the Charing Cross Terminus, had his boxes carried to the waiting room, and then, a quarter of an hour being passed he declared to the luggage-room porter that he had changed his mind and would remain in London. Whereupon, another cab was called, the driver of which, if asked any questions, would naturally say that he had taken up his passenger at the Charing Cross Terminus, where people coming from abroad mostly end their

journey, and then he drove to the Westminster Palace Hotel, where, no doubt, questions were put to the cabman. However, in a quarter of an hour, he was established in a suite of rooms on the second floor, and entered in the hotel books as Mr. Varli, from Rome. Continued next week.

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