

TRACKING A CRIMINAL, OR Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

"A MAN who is young always has secrets. But as for you—cautious to a degree with friends, I can see already. Why not take example of me? Am I not candid myself? You know every chapter of my life. I have told you not only every great, but every small secret of my existence. But all this has nothing to do with the business in hand. Since that dinner at the Crystal Palace, what have we done? Nothing, positively nothing. We ought to have seen all London by this time, and I have not even been up the Monument. I dare not at least go back to Rome, and say that I have not even been up the Monument."

"Of course not," replied Austin, laughing.

"You are bantering me now. Certainly, of course not. Of course you can easily understand that Margherita will not go inside a theatre, owing to her recent loss, for she loved that friend very dearly. But we may see the sights of London. When shall we go to St. Paul's, Windsor, St. James' Palace, the National Gallery, the Museum, and the other places—Newgate, for instance, and the Old Bailey, where they try the murderers—especially the Old Bailey?"

"Nonsense!" replied Austin; "you would certainly not care to see the Old Bailey."

"That is just the way with you Londoners. You see so many things, and all the novelties, that you get spoilt. You will scarcely glance at all your wonders. There, I will venture to lay a wager that you yourself, Austin, never once thought of visiting a jail."

"By Jove! I never once thought of visiting a jail. I was forced to enter one!"

"You? Why was that?"

"It would be too long to tell you all about it. I had to go, and there is an end to the matter."

"How lucky you were! Can you get me into a common jail? I should so like to see the interior of a prison. Shall we go to one together?"

"I don't care about the treat," replied Sivory.

"Then you are not at all serious about such matters?"

"I find it quite sufficient to have visited such a place once."

"Then get me an order to view a prison, and I will go alone."

"Very well. I will see what can be done."

"And get an order for Woolwich Arsenal, which I am longing to see; and the Blind School; and—and, in fact, for every place we have not seen, or we shall never have done London."

"You would do much better not to commence it."

"I will see all London. Why, I have not even been to the Temple, and the other inns of court, where all the lawyers live. By the way, is Taggart's Inn, about which there has been so much said in the papers of late, one of the inns of court?"

"No."

"Why haven't we been to see Taggart's Inn? It is now celebrated. Why haven't you taken me that way?"

"It never struck me that you would like to see the place. Why should you?"

"You know where it is?"

"Perfectly."

"When shall we go together and look at it?"

"When you like."

"Shall we say to-day?"

"To-day be it."

This was one of the daily arrangements made which were never carried out. Once the comedy of trying to catch Sivory into some admission of his connection with the Taggart's Inn mystery played out, and the detective abandoned his keen hunt until another occasion rose.

For still carrying out his determination to compromise Margaret as little as possible, he was disinclined to allow her to appear in the streets walking, upon his arm. He knew that if she was recognized, her character would suffer, and it has been already said that his fear of injuring her reputation was excessive.

Webber would propose these excursions, and then say no more about them; while Austin himself never referred to them, because he found it infinitely more agreeable to pass the day in Margherita's company than in driving about from one London wonder to another.

Every day about three, and after lunch, Sivory and Webber walked or drove to Margaret's lodgings overlooking the Park on one side and Park street on the other.

It is needless to say the Austin was always taken to the street door. He knew nothing of the garden entrance from Bird-cage Walk, of the arrange-

ment of reaching the hall from the balcony and conservatory attached to the back drawing-room—of the gate key, which Webber always carried with him.

Reaching Margaret's rooms, the three sat about the fire chatting, while sometimes, though rarely, Webber ordered a carriage, and they drove in the Park. They generally dined together late in the evening, and a little more conversation concluded the strange day's work.

Strange, indeed! A few weeks before, neither of these three had seen the others, and now they were seated daily at the same table, and, to the occupiers of the house, appeared to be a very pleasant and well-conducted family party. Who could have thought that the beautiful woman, dressed in black, was an agent in the hands of a police-constable, who together were endeavoring to hunt their companion to the scaffold?

About Austin Sivory, the detective had woven an inextricable net of watchfulness. This espionage was the most complete imaginable. He watched his victim from morn until midnight, and he not only watched the man himself, but his least gestures, his faintest words, or parts of words; his looks, his very thoughts, were open to the detective's unceasing work.

And the detective's work was the more marvelous that it was not the police officer who daily sought out the victim himself; it was this latter who placed himself day after day in the grasp of the detective. Without any trouble on his part, and with his feet comfortably warming at his own fireside at Westminster, or at Margaret's, he continued his duty perseveringly. Always watching; always ready to analyze each word, to find in his victim actual and moral proofs of that guilt which Webber still firmly believed Austin Sivory would sooner or later demonstrate.

What had been his aim in introducing Margaret and Austin? What had he said to her? These questions: "Sivory has never fallen in love, and you are beautiful. Once attract him—once make him devoted to you, and all his secrets are yours. This is the only means we have of ascertaining whether he did or did not kill Graham Forbes."

And when Margaret, for a moment, flinched from the proposal, he added, "He does not know you, he never saw you before the murder, and therefore he cannot mistrust you. You will creep into his life, you will learn his past, and sooner or later, you will unmask him. Be the Deliah of this new Sampson, and let us together bind him and give him over to the Phillistines."

Finally she consented, as our readers have already learned. She, Margaret, it was who played the principal character in this ghastly drama—she, and not Webber. He simply enacted the part of confidant, and had only to bring the chief characters together, and wait, wait until he was wanted.

His better sense told him that he would do wisely to leave Austin to Margaret's watchfulness alone, but that a mysterious something (the knowledge and strength of which so far he had, not measured) induced him to save her reputation as much as possible,—that unknown power which caused him to awake in the black night to find tears upon his face, drew him constantly towards her, and gradually he found himself as eagerly listening to what she said to Austin, as watching Sivory.

Had Margaret herself asked the detective to be present as frequently as possible? Did she fear to be near Sivory without a third being close at hand? Did she fear that, if left to herself, she should fall in the part she had to play; that she might betray herself; that upon some terrible occasion, unable to hide the hate and indignation she experienced toward a man she still persisted in believing Graham Forbes' murderer, she should suddenly overwhelm him with reproaches?

But this was certain—that she dared not prolong this daily association with this man beyond the time necessary either to prove him guilty, or be assured he was innocent. This end reached, he and she were to part, never to meet again in this world.

And yet, day after day, week after week progressed, and nothing was done, no discovery made, no innocence proved. This want of despatch, this weary watchfulness, this daily torture, was due to Webber himself. He was not wanted at the interviews between Austin and Margaret—he impeded the climax by his presence; and yet, though he knew this evident fact, he was never absent. Finally, he who had fostered and manipulated the attack upon Austin was preventing it from arriving at victory or defeat.

Was Austin's heart imprisoned? Did Sivory love Margaret Mayer?

And as Austin Sivory is, perhaps, the hero of this narrative, it is well that the reader should know something about him.

His father, who was rich, was past forty when he married. Therefore,

when it is said that he married a young and very pretty woman, it may be inferred that she married for position. It is to be feared she never truly loved him; and when, about five years being past, he died, leaving her with one child, Austin, and mistress of a large fortune, probably, after the first shock, of his death was passed, she experienced a sense of relief. Certain it was that she abandoned her mourning at as early a period as possible, and once more appeared in society.

When Austin was twenty-four, she died, very suddenly, of apoplexy, leaving him at the head of a house magnificently furnished, well stocked with wines and servants—and with not five thousand pounds beyond this property.

That he might have been a useful member of society, is very evident from the mode in which he met his new position. At once he put down the establishment, sent the servants about their business, sold off the furniture and wines, disposed of the carriages and horses in the best market; and, within a month of Mrs. Sivory's death, the house in which she died was empty, and to be let.

There were a number of creditors to pay; and when all was settled, Austin found himself the possessor of about four thousand pounds, and, so far, a respectable character.

What was he to do? He had been so indurated to luxury and society, that he was utterly unfitted to go through the hard work, which the acquirement of any profession would have demanded. But the native energy of the man—inherited, probably, from the father—told him that he must take to some means of replenishing his means; so he adopted as a profession the three ways of making money in "Society"—betting upon races, billiards and cards. These practices had been his amusements, to which he had served a very long and handsome apprenticeship; and they became his handicraft—one to which he added a little stock-jobbing when he had large funds in hand, and he had no immediate call for them.

Thus commenced, and was continued through four or five years, a strange, and exciting life. Beginning with those few thousand pounds, and with all the appearance of being a rich man—few knew to the contrary—he lived like a wealthy person; and was, indeed, sometimes comparatively wealthy. Sometimes he was worth thousands, at others worth nothing. It has been seen how, at the commencement of this story, Austin had reached one of his bad seasons, and had been unable to meet Graham Forbes upon a certain settling-day; how he had accepted bills for the amount; and how, his good fortune waiting for him at the German gaming tables, he had won sufficient money to pay the acceptances held against him by the dead man; and how, finally, he had cleared his character before the magistrate, though he had not cleared it before Margaret herself, and Webber.

At this point he was brought into Margaret's pure presence. He had admired—he had never loved; and what woman was more likely to inspire him with the master passion than this lovely, retired, and unassuming woman? A month passed, and, in his heart, Austin Sivory lived but for Margaret. In his heart he was at her feet. But he had no power to tell her this. Never did he see her but the detective was present—never were his cold, dead eyes taken off the couple while they were together; and Austin, battling with the great passion, which is all the more terrible an enemy when it faces us for the first time when we are no longer very young—Austin almost prayed that Varli might die; for instinct told him the man was his great enemy.

As the child plays with the viper until it turns and bites him, so Austin had dallied with a passion which could be only fatal. It had gripped his throat, and he was gasping at its mercy.

CHAPTER X.

Webber never once relaxed in his watchfulness, and appeared daily less and less desirous of leaving Austin and Margaret alone.

Had he also been conquered by the mighty passion, and, thus vanquished, had he forgotten that he was a mere police detective, set by his superiors to find out whether a certain man had, or had not committed a certain murder?

But the day came when Austin determined to see Margaret alone. As usual, he made an appointment to meet Webber at the "Westminster," and at the very time knocked at the door of the house in which she lived.

Ellen Fotheringay ran to Margaret, her face white, her lips trembling, and she said, "He has come alone, and he is in the back drawing-room, waiting to see you."

For a moment, Margaret hesitated, then she walked quickly to the room in question, and was, for the first time, alone with Austin Sivory.

"Mr. Sivory, what have you done with Mr. Varli?" she said.

"I thought I should find him here," he replied, in a low voice.

"I thought, however, that I heard you agree to call for him at the hotel this morning."

"You did, but I was so behindhand, that I thought, instead of waiting for me, in all probability he had come on. I trust I am not intruding, Miss Varli?"

"Intruding? Not at all!" she said, in a careless voice.

"I am very fortunate," he continued, "that I am able to see you alone—if only for an instant."

"Have you, then, anything to say to me?" she asked, candidly.

"Much; I have very much to say to you," he replied, in an eager voice.

"I am listening," she replied.

"Forgive me, Miss Varli—forgive me! I am nervous—agitated—feverish, this morning!"

"I have nothing to forgive you; had I, I would freely pardon. But pray inform me of the cause of your agitation?"

He came quickly to her side, seated himself near her, and said, "Are you quite ignorant of the cause of my emotion?"

"Quite," she replied.

"You must be aware that no man could live near you daily, through nearly two months, without being in danger. No man can see you daily, hear your voice, breathe the air that you breathe, and not—"

Here he stopped, for he had ventured to raise his eyes and look at her. The expression upon her face froze the words upon his lips. She was smiling, but how strange was the smile! With her natural courage, she had courted this moment; but she had presumed too largely upon her strength. At the first fervid words which passed his lips, all her self-respect, memory, and modesty, revolted at their sound.

She had not prepared herself against the horror of that moment, for she could never have measured its repulsiveness.

During many awful moments both were silent; he affrighted—she frozen, crushed, as it were.

Little by little, however, Margaret's face unclouded. She passed her hand quickly across her forehead, as though to chase away some persevering thought. She appeared to seize a strong determination, and, turning to Sivory, she looked him steadily in the face.

"So—you love me?"

He was not prepared for these strange words, judging by the shock his words appeared to have given her. He anticipated that she would command him to change the conversation—to hold his peace—to leave the house. But she had completed the sentence where he had broken it off as he saw the expression upon her face. She had come to his assistance, and put his very thoughts into the words he would have uttered.

But overcoming his amazement, he at once sought to profit by the occasion she herself offered, to urge on her the passion which had taken complete possession of his heart. If Margaret could determine upon an awful resolution, he, Sivory, the man of action, would not lose any chance thrown in his way. By a sudden movement, which she did not foresee, and could not have prevented, he caught her hands, and, looking at her with a return of all the eagerness of the glance she had bestowed upon him, drawing her towards him that she might surely hear every word he had to say, he cried, "Yes, I love you as I have never loved—as I never thought I could love. You are my first and only love. If you could but know with what truth I speak! If you could but comprehend how wretched I am when not near you—how my only happiness is in your presence! The first time I saw you I thought I had never seen any woman so truly beautiful, but I did not love you then. I have battled very hard with myself, Margaret. I have sworn not to see you again. I have tried to go away—to leave England. But I have had no power to do these things, and your brother has brought me to your side day after day, and I could not refuse because I am now his companion. He had almost ordered me to live in your presence. I have obeyed. But I knew what would happen if I waited. I knew that near you I should lose peace of mind—my very will, that I should grow to love you with a fatal, desperate love!"

The pressure of his hands upon her own, the fervor of his look overpowered her, destroyed her resolution to lead him on to his own destruction, if indeed he was Graham's assassin. And, released from this determination, she was the woman once again—not an avenger, but a creature abounding in pity and regret.

She withdrew her hands, and leaning for support against the mantelpiece she replied, in a low voice, "Have I ever encouraged your love?"

"No, never!" he cried—"neither by word nor look. And yet you have given me hope without knowing it. Your perfect silence, your coldness, have fevered me the more. I fought against myself first; I fought for myself afterwards; and I still fight, and I still hope."—Continued next week.

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