

TRACKING A CRIMINAL.

OR

Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

SHE became still more pale, and Webber heard her murmur these words: "I will not speak; no, I will not say a word. I won't have him hanged."

"'Tis strange how you and Langley differ in opinion," said the detective. "You say, 'I do wish to know he is in prison, but I do not wish to know that he is hanged,' while it is not half an hour ago he remarked to me, 'I do not wish to know that she is in prison, but I do wish that she was dead.'"

"Ah! did he say that? He would like to know I was dead, would he?"

"And to be quite sure of it by killing you himself?"

"How could he kill me? He is in prison."

"Nothing can be simpler; and I don't mind admitting that, at this very moment, you are in great danger from him."

"Why should he take away my life? What have I done to him?"

"What have you done? Well, for one thing, you have betrayed him to the police."

"He doesn't know I did."

"Oh, yes, he does, I told him."

"You told him?"

"Yes, it was my only way of quieting him."

"Shame—shame on you!" she cried. "The inspector promised that if I told where he was to be found, he should never know who gave the information."

"And the inspector has kept his promise. But I had made no promises of the kind, and I said to him what it suited me to say."

"Then I am a dead woman if he again escapes."

"Prevent him from escaping, by sending him for trial on a charge of murder. He has got such a character, that, once prove murder against him, and he will not escape the gallows, be sure."

"But they might acquit him?"

"Impossible. There is no mercy shown to a twice-escaped convict, who spills blood, especially when he has such a reputation as Langley's."

"True," she said—"quite true."

"Then speak; confess all, if you would live."

"Certainly, I wish to live, officer; but how will you save me? He is taken—'is in prison—and yet you yourself say that I run the risk of being killed by him!"

"You want to know how much you are to have for betraying him. Now; is not that what you want to say?"

"Of course, officer, I ought to have a reward for Queen's evidence against a murderer."

"Now just you listen to me. After hearing who it was that betrayed him, Langley still hesitated about coming with me, as you can well understand. So, in order to decide him, I gave the man my word of honor that you and your husband should meet face to face before to-day's sun went down."

"Face to face with him!" she shrieked. "And you know that he means to kill me!"

"Certainly. Why should I have had any consideration for you? When I gave the promise, I had not even seen you."

She reflected for an instant, and then she said, "Will you keep your word to him if I give the information you want?"

"I cannot possibly break my word, because I have already given it. But if you afford the information I want, instead of letting him come here into your cell, you shall see him in the visiting-room, with stout iron bars between you. He will be able to say to you all he likes, insult you at his ease, but he will not be able to touch a hair of your head."

Webber having prepared his victim, now set to work in earnest. His very first question showed the whole drift of his interview. He began, and the woman listened with the closest attention.

"One night in October, a young man was assassinated in Taggart's Inn, which is near Clare Market, where you and Langley were then living. What can you tell me about this murder, which so far, has not been found out?"

"But how does it happen—"

She had spoken thus far, when Webber continued, "That I am asking you anything about the matter? It is very simple. This morning Langley, in a moment of drunkenness and excitement, admitted his crime."

"Then, if he has done that—"

"It is not enough," replied the detective. "Justice demands evidence, proof; and I come to you for the evidence and for the proof."

"Ask me what questions you like," said the woman. "I will answer what you choose."

"How long had you known the person killed by Langley?"

"I didn't know him."

"Had you seen him often?"

"Only the day before, and that was the first time. I was going along the Strand, when, he touched me on the arm. He said he knew me, and would get me work if I wanted it. I said I did, because I had then thought of giving Langley up to the police. He said if I would give him my address he would let me know when I could have it. I asked him was he a foreman of a wholesale house in the City, and he said yes. I then gave him the address."

"And next day he came?"

"No, next night. Langley was out and I asked him in."

"Did he speak about work?"

"No, he began praising my good looks; and—"

"Well, what did you say?"

"I told him to go away, but he would not, and he sat down."

"Well?"

"After a quarter of an hour, during which he kept talking, and I answered never a word, but continued my work, he got up, and went away. As he went out, he kissed his hand to me, and said that he would call in the evening of next day, and take me to a theatre."

"Did you reply?"

"No, I was afraid to say anything, for fear one of the lodgers might tell Langley. My husband was watching, and—you know the rest, since he told you what happened."

"What time was it when Langley came in?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Did he say, as he entered 'I have killed your lover?'"

"Yes, something like that."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing; I was too frightened to speak. He seemed to be mad, I never saw him look so terrible."

"Was there any blood on his hands?"

"No, and I remember I looked for some."

"Since then have you ever thrown this murder in his teeth?"

"No, I never dared to speak about it," she replied.

"Has he never mentioned it again?"

"Never."

"Can you tell me the exact date of this affair?"

"At the end of October or the beginning of November."

"I want the exact date."

"I don't know it sir."

"Did you ask the man his name?"

"No, I don't think I did. I fact, I'm sure I did not."

"Describe me this young man as near as you can."

"He was of middle height, as I think I have already said, darkish, with thin moustaches. That's all I can remember."

"Of course you could not tell what he had about him? He took nothing from his pockets, that you can remember?"

"Yes, he took his purse out, and offered to advance me some money. I told him I did not want his money, and to go away."

"Can you describe this purse?"

"Well, it seemed more like a pocket-book than a purse—a pocket-book with an elastic round it."

"Do you remember what color it was?"

"Red."

"There can be no doubt about it," murmured the policeman; "the evidence may not be quite complete; but, as far as it goes, it admits of no doubt whatever."

"Are you satisfied with what I have said, officer?" she said, timidly, and coming closer to the detective.

"I satisfied?" he said, savagely; "not at all. I did not want to be certain that Langley was the man; but, being that man, why duty is duty, and I must do it."

He got up from his seat, and added, "Now pull yourself together to meet your husband. Before half an hour is over, you and he will be face to face. Don't go near the grating."

The words fell upon her like ice. She shrank, and shivered.

"The iron bars are strong!" she cried. "Swear to me that the iron bars are strong!"

"Well, if it will afford you any satisfaction, I'll swear they are. Good-bye!" "Good-bye!" she said, in a sad voice.

"Which door will she come in at?" he asked, suddenly. He had already seated himself upon one of the wooden seats fixed against the wall.

The young jailer pointed to a door on the other side of the double iron caging which was fixed along the center of the room.

The convict raised his head. He began to see that he had fallen into a trap.

"But if she comes in there," he said,—"and his voice was already less calm—"how can she reach me here?"

"But she will not be on this side of the grating," said the younger of the two jailers, injudiciously.

"Ha!—she will not be on this side of the grating? So, I'm sold!" he screamed. "She was to have been near me. No iron bars was to keep us apart. There wasn't a word said about them. What, do you think I would have given myself up, if I'd known how you meant to serve me?"

"You will see your wife, and say what you have to say to her through this iron grating. To tell you the truth, she herself bargained that it should be so."

"She did! Why?"

"I suppose because she is afraid to come near you."

"If she's afraid me, it's because she knows she has wronged me."

"Very likely; but that is no reason why she should wish to be killed."

"What if I promise not to harm a hair of her head?"

"You can't answer for yourself. A word, a look, is quite enough to put you in a boiling rage."

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Sunflower, shown the way by one of the female warders, entered the other side of the visitors' room, and, without glancing at her husband, she sat herself down on a chair, as far away from Langley as possible, and waited.

The female warder had left the apartment, and the terrible pair were alone, face to face.

As for the convict, the moment his eyes fell upon her, he rushed to the iron grating, and stretched his arms to their full length towards her. For a moment his appearance was terrible, then his face softened, and his eyes filled with tears. That mysterious something which surrounds and spreads from the woman or child we love, produced its effect upon Langley. His was but a boast that he would kill Sunflower. One kind look from her, and his angry, trembling hand would have been arrested high in the air.

For some moments he said nothing. It was enough that he could look upon her. As for the woman, prepared for reproaches, insults, she was simply amazed, stupefied, by his silence. Her dominant thought became the fear that he was meditating her some injury. She narrowly scanned the iron grating to see that the bars were secure, when, as he leaned against them, and they showed no signs of yielding, she smiled.

"You are not afraid of me, are you, Sunflower?" he asked.

"Well, it wouldn't be wonderful if I was. There hasn't been a day since I was your wife that you haven't ill-used me."

"Don't turn on me now I'm down," he replied sadly. "I know I was hasty and jealous, but it was all because I loved you so much."

"Oh, I know all about your love," she said, in a bitter voice. "When a man says, 'I love you,' to a woman, he fancies that she ought to bear with any ill-usage. The more you beat her, the more you crush her, the better pleased she ought to be. Love! it's not love which makes a woman hate the life she is living!"

"Then you were never happy with me, Sunflower?" he asked, speaking in a softened tone.

"Happy with you? I tell you I never had a happy hour with you from the day I came to be your wife to this very morning—and I'm not afraid to say it!"

"You need not be afraid to say anything, Sunflower, for behind these railings I can't hurt you."

"All the better. This is about the first time I've ever dared to speak the truth to you without running the chance of losing my life."

"Go on; say what you like, Sunflower, I'll listen quiet enough."

She had no heart. She said what she liked, as he had told her to say. She opened before him all the old wounds; she cast into his face the memory of every cruelty to her of which he had been guilty. She paid him back in twenty minutes all the insults and ill-usage she had suffered through three long years. She was implacable, merciless, without even the shadow of pity in her heart.

He heard what she had to say, never uttering a word. At last, when she stopped, he said, "Then you never cared for me at all?"

"Never!" she said. "If I said I loved you, it was because I stood in danger of my life if I told the truth."

His head sank, and it was only after a

long silence that he said, "If I break jail again, will you take me back—will you give me one more chance?"

"Never!" she replied, bitterly. "Every thing between us is at an end. I'll live no more as I have lived. I'll tremble no more for my life, and I will be free in a new land and with a new name."

Every word ground upon his heart, but he only said, "I had a good deal to say to you, but I don't know where to find the words."

"Words!" she said; "if you wanted to help me to blows, you would not be much troubled to find them."

"But I can suffer myself, I tell you, Sunflower."

His habitual dark complexion was now very pale. Sunflower drew back and trembled. She knew what that change upon his face presaged. However, he said in the quiet tone in which he had spoken throughout their interview, "So, if I get away, and come to you again—"

She interrupted him, and said, "You will never know what has become of me."

"Then I'm seeing you for the very last time?"

"The very last."

"In a few days you will be free; while as for me, I shall be at Portland. Chaps at Portland do sometimes see their wives. Won't you ever come and shake me by the hand?"

"Never—never once."

"Still, it has been your fault that I am what I am—a convict. If I had never fallen in love with you, I should never have been sent to jail, and I should not now be going back to Portland."

"Then you should never have fallen in love with me."

He continued in his quiet voice, "And if, instead of being sent to Portland, I am sent to the gallows for killing him who was your lover, would you come and say a last good-bye?"

"No," she said.

"Wretch!" he cried, and leaping at the bars, he seized and shook them—but without bending the iron.

The woman's first movement was toward the door. But when she saw how all his efforts made no impression on the railing, she stopped, came up to the second line of ironwork, and fairly laughed at him in a whirl of scorn.

"Ha! how you would break me up like a toy if you could get at me!" she said, in a cruel voice. "But I am out of your reach. I am no longer your plaything. Don't worry yourself, Samson, because you can't worry me. Ah, roar, but you can't get at me; your in a safe cage at last."

This last taunt gave, no doubt, to Langley a force almost superhuman. He seized one of the bars with both hands, and gave it a wrench with savage suddenness—it yielded, and bent towards him.

In a moment her fear predominated. She uttered shriek upon shriek.

Another jerk, and the bar would have given way. A moment, and she noted that the second line of bars were much weaker than the first.

The wild beast might get at its prey, after all.

But the force of human nature has its limits. Langley had suffered so much during some hours—five, at least—that even his strength gave way. His blood, violently shooting along his veins and arteries, flooded his quivering brain, and he, staggering, let go the bar, and fell heavily, senseless, to the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

And what has happened to Margaret and Austin Sivory while the exigencies of this narrative have led us away to scenes with which apparently at first they had little or nothing to do?

The day after the dinner, at which Webber put in force that terrible test of the knife with which Forbes had been slain—the day after, about three in the afternoon, Austin Sivory was once more in Park street, and knocking at the door of the house under the roof of which was now to be found all that made life endurable.

"My cousin is really ill," said Ellen Fotheringay, who received him, "she can see nobody."

It was in vain that Austin pleaded for only a moment's interview. All entreaty was in vain, and he left the house in a state almost of desperation. He went at once to the Westminster Palace Hotel, that he might talk about her if he could not see her.

But Mr. Varli, who until that day had been so talkative, gracious, hospitable, had become cold, cautious, ceremonious. He now responded by the merest monosyllables, and became entirely silent when questioned concerning his sister.

Austin Sivory became thoroughly alarmed at the change in his newly-found friend. At the same time he searched eagerly for any cause that could have produced this change.

After much investigation and patient thinking, he persuaded himself that he had found the true cause.

"The fortnight's grace he gave me in which to find the money I owe him on that terrible night's card-playing has long since past, and he finds, no doubt, that I am taking the matter very coolly. He expects to be paid."

This conviction taking full possession of his understanding, his great anxiety was to find a means of discharging the debt of honor as soon as he possibly could; for he saw clearly that if the brother chose, he could prevent him from seeing Margaret.

What should he do? He could not very well go back to the German baths; and, again, the season was over, and he might have his journey for his pains.

The next day, and Webber positively refused to see him.

By this act Austin Sivory was reduced to despair. The contemplation of what was to become of him horrified the man. The only two persons with whom he had passed the last two months of his life suddenly abandoned him, apparently quite without justifiable motive.

"And yet," he pondered, "she heard me in silence—she almost encouraged me to speak. Had not Varli interfered, perhaps she would have answered. And she left me abruptly, without a word of explanation, at the very moment when my hopes were raising me to a heaven of happiness."

Like a soul in agony, he moved up and down the streets until he arrived before Margaret's residence. Then, raising his eyes to her windows as he passed them, he saw her half in the shadow of one of the curtains. Then, for a time, he was demented, and his old audacity came back to him.

He ran across the street, entered at the chance open door, ran up the stairs, pushed past Ellen Fotheringay, who endeavored to bar his passage, rushed into the back drawing-room, and found himself face to face with Margaret.

This was the day after the arrest of Langley by Webber, the detective.

As Austin Sivory ran forward, Margaret came quickly in advance, doubtless with a word upon her lips in reference to his daring to force his way into her apartments.

But he gave her no opportunity to speak. Seizing her hands, so that she could not release them, he poured into her ears a declaration of love, which was simply an avalanche of mental exaltation, entreaty, and despair.

After a time his words became more distinct, somewhat reasonable, and he said, "I live only when near you. If you were gone from the world I should kill myself. I have missed the good road in my journey through life. I have sinned, and I look upon myself with horror; yet have pity on me, for you can regenerate me. Even a kind look from you will make me a better man. Believe me, dear Margaret—give me credence, if only for pity's sake. I do swear that my words are but the portrait of my soul. Surely, a man who suffers as I now suffer—who weeps as here you see me weeping—surely he merits, at least, a little pity, though he can gain no love."

Here he stopped, for his flooding tears and sobs were suffocating him.

Margaret, meanwhile, experienced a strange feeling as she heard this language—one so new to her, that it was a revelation.

Graham Forbes had spoken kindly; but his utterance had never been moved by passion. Phrases of love she now heard for the first time in all her life.

Let the truth be spoken. She had hitherto only thought she loved; now, all unknown to her, the great passion was taking her life prisoner.

Austin continued.

"If you had determined to see so little of me—to refuse to receive me again, a few weeks being past,—why did you ever let me see you at all? Why did you welcome me? Did you not read in my eyes that I loved you? You knew that my heart and life were no more my own, but yours. I offered you both, and, silently, you took them! You took these—my life and my heart; and you have no right, for the mere sake of caprice, to play at football with them."

She answered, in a sweet, soft voice, "I have done you wrong."

The tone of voice gave Sivory hope, and he began again to plead his case as only such a man could. At this moment Ellen brought in a letter from the superintendent of the police which stated that all suspicions had now been removed from Austin Sivory. Having read this letter she came to his side and said:

"I have caused you much suffering—forgive me, and never ask me to explain the past, I have wrongs that I have done you to repair, and I will repair them."

Scarcely had she uttered these words, than she broke into a flood of tears.—Continued next week.

"I don't want that stuff."

Is what a lady of Boston said to her husband when he brought home some medicine to cure her of sick headache and neuralgia which had made her miserable for fourteen years. At the first attack hereafter, it was administered to her with such good results that she continued its use until cured, and was so enthusiastic in its praise, that she induced twenty-two of the best families in her circle to adopt it as their regular family medicine. That "stuff" is Hop Bitters.—Standard.